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MEGALOPOLIS VS. THE MASSES: LEWIS MUMFORD AND THE POLITICS OF 20TH CENTURY ROMANTIC URBANISM

by

THOMAS SMITH

VOLUME I

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2000

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Abstract

MEGALOPOLIS VS. THE MASSES: LEWIS MUMFORD AND THE POLITICS OF 20TH CENTURY ROMANTIC URBANISM

By

Thomas Smith

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In "MEGALOPOLIS VS. THE MASSES: LEWIS MUMFORD AND THE POLITICS OF 20TH CENTURY ROMANTIC URBANISM," I consider Lewis Mumford's view that modern urban social arrangements must be planned democratically, with concern for the health and welfare of the citizens and the harmony of human society with nature, uppermost in mind. I show that Mumford's animus toward the modern, overly congested metropolitan/suburban complex, and his insistence that planning be regional in scope, grows out of these concerns.

In CHAPTER I, "INTRODUCTION," I sketch my concept of "romantic urbanism"—urbanism which aims to fulfill human needs and aspirations,

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including our aesthetic needs for access to nature as well as love, fulfilling work, and community--and introduce my belief that this is the essence of Mumford's thought. In CHAPTER II, "MUMFORD'S RADICAL MENTORS," I discuss Mumford's intellectual debt to various European and American political thinkers, including the European and American Romantics, the nineteenth century European urban novelists, utopian thinkers, socialists, and social scientists of the 20th century. " In CHAPTER III, THE STORY OF UTOPIAS," I discuss Mumford's first book (THE STORY OF UTOPIAS) in which he outlines his basic views on ideology and consciousness, for which he shows his indebtedness to Friedrich Nietzsche's and Randolph Bourne's concept of the "idol." In CHAPTER IV, "*THE CONTRADICTIONS OF MEGALOPOLIS*," I discuss Mumford's and other urban romantics' critique of the contradictions of the modern metropolitan urban form: its congestion, anomie, lack of decent housing, access to nature, etc. IN CHAPTER V, "GARDEN CITIES AND THE RESTORATION OF EXISTING CITIES," I discuss Ebenezer Howard's, Patrick Geddes', Lewis Mumford's, and other writers' scheme for a decentralized "garden city" as a resolution to the problems of Megalopolis. In CHAPTER VI: THE SPATIAL ARTICULATION OF URBAN FUNCTION," I discuss Mumford's concepts of how urban space ought to be selectively utilized to permit maximum enjoyment for the citizenry. In CHAPTER VII, "MUMFORD'S THEORY OF REGIONALISM," I discuss Mumford's theory of regionalism within the context of prior and contemporary regionalist thought. In CHAPTER

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VIII, "ELITE AND DEMOCRATIC PLANNING," I first discuss Mumford's critique of the Regional Plan Association, headed by Thomas Adams, as an example of poor, elitist planning which largely acquiesced in Megalopolitan trends, and then go on to outline Mumford's vision of what democratic socialist urban planning would involve. In CHAPTER IX, "A PREFACE TO ACTION," I discuss an unpublished Mss., found in Mumford's papers and written in 1931, which presents Mumford's critique of the existing political parties—fascists, agrarians, liberals, social democrats, and Stalinist "Communists," and then outlines Mumford's plan to create a "vanguard" leadership for bold, innovative, revolutionary social change, whose inspiration would be the bold Roman Stoic general, Scipio Africanus (the "Scipians"). In CHAPTER X, "BASES FOR TRANSITION TO THE NEW REGIME," I discuss Mumford's analysis of the social bases for change—the school, science, the "service state" (a concept I critique, with the help of Meyer Schapiro), and above all, the radical housing movement which his companion Catherine Bauer led in the 1930s. At length, I discuss Bauer's work, MODERN HOUSING, published in 1934. Finally, in CHAPTER XI, CONCLUSION, I discuss the relevance of Mumford's thought to today's social problems and movements.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> We may destroy our civilization, but we cannot escape it. . . . There is no turning back: our only way is a radical struggle for the City of the Just. . . . the phrase rings a little hollow right now, so far do we seem to be from it. Still, we shall create genuine cities, which means vital civilization, or we shall perish. We shall create a high culture, serious and gay, or we shall sink into a rocklike, mainline stupor.
>
> --Irving Howe, "The City in Literature" (1971)[1]

Romanticism vs. Realism

There is a saying that America, unlike Europe, never had any real intellectuals—merely journalists. This saying is certainly not true. It is rather the case that America, unlike Europe, ignores and then forgets the intellectuals, who have to who fight to develop their thought, "against the American grain," as Dwight Macdonald titled one of his works. I would like to argue here that Lewis Mumford especially proves the first saying wrong, the second statement, correct. Few people know who Lewis Mumford was today. But an examination of his thought will show that, like the American and European writers he admired — Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Balzac, Dickens, Hugo, Zola, Marx, Freud, John Dewey and Randolph Bourne—Mumford thought deeply about the potentials and

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[1] Irving Howe, "The City in Literature," *Commentary*, May 1971, p. 68. By the way, after this passage, in the same paragraph, Howe cites Lewis Mumford, "Perhaps the best definition of the city in its higher aspects is that it is a place designed to offer the widest facilities for significant conversation."

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the problems of his civilization for the betterment and self-development of the individuals who have to live in it. In his critique of the capacity of the rulers of modern civilization to manipulate culture in order to thwart the struggle for freedom, Mumford much resembled his contemporaries in Europe: Adorno, Fromm. Marcuse. and Horkheimer of the Frankfurt School. Mumford had many friends and admirers among contemporary modernists: intellectuals like his Scottish mentor. Patrick Geddes—architects—like the American Frank Lloyd Wright, the German Walter Curt Behrendt. the Dutch Henrik Wijdeveld. the Italian Bruno Zevi—artists—like the Mexican painter Jose Orozco, and the Belgian sculptor. Naum Gabo. [2] Mumford and his friends were critical rather than celebratory modernists. Like Mumford. for example, Behrendt sought a modernist architectural alternative to the anomie and ugliness of *die Grossstadt*.[3] Orozco's murals. featured in several of Mumford's works, attacked the contemporary idolatry of the Machine and of scientific specialization at the expense of human life and community.[4]

Pivotal to my exploration of Mumford will be the debate, in the modern era, between romantics, on the one hand, and "realists," on the other, over the trajectory that modern urban development has taken. Like Melville, about whom he wrote the first biography, Mumford was a romantic. He refused to be

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[2] Donald L. Miller, *Lewis Mumford, a Life:* pp. 182-90. 429-30, 459; and M. David Samson. "Unser Newyorker Mitarbeiter: Lewis Mumford, Walter Curt Behrendt, and the Modern Movement in Germany," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, vol. 55, no. 2 (June 1996), pp. 126-39.

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"realistic," to accept things as they are, or where they still threaten, so ominously, to end up. He dared to ask, and ask intelligently, like Aristotle, millennia ago, how human beings can attain the good life.

The century Lewis Mumford grew up in, our twentieth century, was the century in which great cities grew to incredible proportions. Mumford responded to this "mega-urban" development, along with many of his utopian associates—Catherine Bauer, Henry Wright, Clarence Stein in Mumford's Regional Planning Association of America; Paul and Percival Goodman, C. Wright Mills—critically, and romantically. Such utopian romanticism represents our only *practical* hope, I will argue here for a healthy urban life for the future.

Romanticism means to strive to realize one's own aspirations, ideals, and needs. Romantic urbanism critically evaluates present-day city life, and imagines alternative cities. As radical sociologist Bob Ross, supporter of the Students for a Democratic Society in the 1960's wrote at the time, what we need is "a political movement which speaks in terms of the intransigence of *its* needs"—i.e., *our* needs—"not the needs it thinks are 'realistically acceptable'."[5]

Urbanism today usually means a view of the world that I call "realism."[6] While urban romanticism is usually confined to the utopian Left, the "realists"

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[3] Samson, *ibid.*
[4] Miller, pp. 429-30.
[5] Bob Ross, "Notes on the Welfare State," in Steven Deutsch and John Howard, *Where It's At: Radical Perspectives in Sociology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 459, originally published in the journal *Liberation*, March 1966.
[6] I wish to differentiate here between "realism" in the field of urban social studies, and literary realism. I consider the urban "realist" opponents of Mumford, such as Morton and Lucia White,

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occupy a far broader, "mainstream" political spectrum. Realists can be conservative, liberal, even socialist; pro-suburban or anti-suburban, supportive of the liberal welfare state and of public housing projects, or vehemently opposed to any social spending which interferes with the workings of free market. This diversity of viewpoints among the mainstream is probably why their basic, shared, urban realist view has been accepted as common sense, even though, as I will argue in this dissertation, it is far from sensible.

As Chicago School sociologist Harvey Zorbaugh proclaimed in the 1920s, realists like him have no interest in the romantic urban "ideal." They are exclusively interested in the "real" city—i.e., the present-day city--and in accepting its basic contours, pretty much "as is." The realist asks how the existing "mega"-urban centers (cities with populations in the millions) might be made just a little bit better—without changing their basic structure. For, as Zorbaugh, along with his more famous Chicago School associate, Robert Park, and their intellectual descendants of the 1960s, Morton and Lucia White, agree, the mega-urban center is here to stay, it is "natural," an "objective reality," an unchangeable given.[7]

Jane Jacobs, Robert Moses, whom we will discuss at length here, to be apologists for the status quo. They either deny or ignore the fundamental problems of the modern capitalist mega-city. A literary realist such as Stephen Crane, however, does not abstain from such criticism. In the urban field, literary realists might, paradoxically, be called romantic. Their critical animus—that of Crane, Balzac, Zola, etc.--informed Mumford's work profoundly.

[7] Harvey Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929), p. 270, *et passim;* Robert Park, "Sociology, Community and Society," in William Gee, ed., Research in the Social Sciences (New York, 1929), pp. 196-98; Morton and Lucia White, *The*

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The "realist" message could be summarized by a twist upon an old saying: "You made your bed, now you must lie in it. The "realist" version of this would be, "Society made your Procrustean bed: now it's your job to adjust." In the story of Theseus, as discussed by Thomas Bullfinch in his *Myths of Greece and Rome,* mention is made of one "evildoer" named "Procrustus," or "the Stretcher," who "

> had an iron bedstead, on which he used to tie all travelers who fell into his hands. If they were shorter than the bed, he stretched their limbs to make them fit; if they were longer than the bed, he lopped off a portion.[8]

Our bourgeois society is, and always has been, a for-profit Procrustean bed, in its contemptuous attitude toward the fulfillment of basic human needs. Marx called it a culture of "utter, unnatural neglect," in his *Economic and Philosophical Mss.* of 1844. Mumford says in his *Culture of Cities* (1938) that it is a culture of "civic" and "natural . . . depletion."[9] Those who adopt a resigned attitude toward this "unnatural" condition ought to refer to themselves as "Procrusteans." Instead of challenging the basically unfair, toxic, exploitative structure of our society, they say, "get used to it, get real: it's your problem, not Society's. Change *your attitude;* learn to "Like us" (as the brutal Colonel Cathcart says to Yossarian in Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*): but don't presume to challenge *the sacrosanct System.*

Intellectual vs. the City (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), originally published 1962), p. 234.

[8] Thomas Bullfinch, *Myths of Greece and Rome* (New York: Penguin, 1979), p. 181

[9] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," *Marx-Engels Reader,* ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), pp. 66-125, and especially the section titled "The Meaning of Human Requirements," pp. 93-101. Quote is from p. 94. Lewis Mumford, *Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1938), pp. 249-253

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The romantic urbanist, however, such as architect Clarence Stein, would rather ask, in the first place, "Why the great city?"—i.e., why have we settled for *this*?! As Stein wrote further, in his 1925 landmark article, "Dinosaur Cities," "What are we putting into the great city, and what are we getting out of it?" For Stein, it was time to do a reality check. Were "the strains and difficulties that are peculiar to our large congested centers" even withstandable, let alone worth their alleged benefits? Were there really benefits to the metropolis, to begin with, or was this just a seductive trap?: "Is the great city still the goal of our legitimate desires, or is it a monstrosity, a bloated spider that lures us into its web only to devour us?"[10]

For the urban romantic, who is usually a radical, there is nothing "natural" about the modern mega-urban center, or for that matter, any existing social institution. Firstly, by nature, radicals have little patience with the idea that a given social institution is inevitable, that it must be accepted without question. Anything that has a social origin can be changed. As many of us learned during the 1960s, if not in the Depression-ridden 1930s, "existing institutions," in the modern world, are rarely benign. They are most often corrupt by elitist pursuit of profit, self-interest and arbitrary power. They are contradictory, and ultimately, crisis-bound and destructive towards human life and society. The last thing we should do, therefore, is to accept them without question, and if we have a compelling reason to change them, then we should.

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[10] Clarence Stein, "Dinosaur Cities," *Survey Graphic* 7 (May 1925), p. 135.

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Secondly, if we define "natural" alternatively as "healthy," then there is certainly nothing "natural" about the modern mega-urban center. The tremendous stress, noise, crowdedness, air pollution and rotten smells, ugly architecture, loss of contact with the natural environment in the countryside, loneliness and anomie, substandard housing, traffic jams, subway breakdowns, that we find in the big city, are hardly salutary.

Some realists, like Morton and Lucia White, never seem to notice that such problems even exist. The Whites seem to base their appraisal of urban problems on a paragraph-long survey of the works of Emerson, Jefferson, Kierkegaard, J. S. Mill, and Dewey. Armed with this evidence, they assert that the "great problem of the American city is to demonstrate" that it "can educate the millions of people who are entering its gates." It will then be able to "absorb the Negro and the Puerto Rican . . . into its economy and the democratic process." The other tasks for the mega-city, according to the Whites, are to "foster individuality" and "human communication" there. In other words, the Whites are only willing to recognize those problems with the big city that can be solved through liberal social spending programs, while leaving its basic structure, along with that of the corporate capitalist economy, intact. Any other criticism, any raising of the other, more serious problems with the big city, would seem to be, in the Whites' view un-"reasonable."[11]

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[11] Morton and Lucia White, p. 238. The title of this, final chapter is "Ideology, Prejudice, and Reasonable Criticism." White's father had been a Democratic Party politician in Manhattan. He

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Others realists admit, with greater or lesser willingness to go into the actual details, that "there are plenty of things that are wrong with our cities," as Robert Moses wrote in his 1962 article in *Atlantic Monthly*, "Are Cities Dead?" But they would argue that these problems could still be solved without changing the basic, gargantuan, sprawling nature of modern urban development.[12] Moses argued in this article that the suburbs offered an effective escape from these problems for those "rational" enough to take advantage of them (and, by implication, it is only the rational people who can afford a suburban escape.) Realists Norman Glazer and Jane Jacobs, as we shall discuss in Chapter 3, argued that the answer to the problems of mega-cities was greater commercial development and the replacement of public housing with rent subsidies to private landlords. But whatever their particular political stripe, the realists set the preservation of mega-urban civilization over and above their concern with the

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had been a Marxist in the 1930s. But then White (who still works at the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton as of this writing) became, (in the words of his friend Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. in a telephone interview with me) a "staunch liberal Democrat." Post-war liberals like the Whites, in general, assumed that minority poverty was only the result of poor education and racial discrimination among employers, which was allegedly irrational. These causes prevented the "absorption," as the Whites write, of the minority poor into an otherwise allegedly healthy economy. These causes were relatively minor problems, which could be addressed through liberal programs. As Michael Katz has written, the liberal approach denied the possibility that there were intractable economic problems with the corporate capitalist economy, problems which made the full employment of the World War II era difficult to sustain. They also ignored the possibility that racism might have "rational" advantages for the capitalists, who use it to weaken labor and socialist radicalism. See Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York: Pantheon, 1990).

[12] Robert Moses, "Are Cities Dead?" *Metropolis: Values in Conflict* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1964, pp. 51; originally published in *Atlantic Monthly* 209 (January 1962), pp. 55-58. While Moses does not go into any more details about the problems with modern metropolitan life than do the Whites, other realists did: such as Robert Park, in the 1920s, and Louis Wirth, in the 1930s. We will discuss their work, respectively, in Chapter 1 and Chapter 5.

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plight of the vast majority human beings who live in it or, trying to escape it, live around it, in the suburbs. This, I would argue, makes the realist insensitive to human needs, and hostile to the romantics who would put these needs first, and thus provide a rational albeit radical alternative to megalopolitanism.

In contrast to the realists' common insensitivity to human needs, what unites urban romantics like Mumford is *their* indifference to the pseudo-choice offered between the crowded mega-urban center and the stultifying suburb, between the traditional slum or the high-rise housing project, between bureaucratic planning and private real estate development. Neither "choice" really interests the romantic: for neither represents the romantic urban ideal. Rather, the romantic asks how we can enjoy the potential advantages of both city and suburban life, both urban culture and physical freedom and contact with nature, without the disadvantages of either that we experience today. And how can we comprehensively plan our neighborhoods in the old mega-urban centers and the envisioned garden cities, to permit everyone livable housing and community?

Other questions concern the romantic as well. Within their wealthy enclaves, a small, insulated elite of the mega-urban population disproportionately enjoys the advantages of urbanity today. The rest of us, though we might indeed sport T-shirts that say "I Luv New York!", have to deal with far more crowdedness and far less amenities. Can that be changed?

Despite these tremendous internal disparities, there's little wonder that many people do sport the "I Luv New York" slogan. No city beats New York City

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for the wealth of its culture: its cosmopolitan food, theater, etc. Only a few cities—San Francisco, for example—even remotely compare. But is that fair? Is there a way that the other, two hundred million plus inhabitants of the United States who live outside New York City, could, *in the regions where they live*, enjoy all the culture enjoyed now by New York City's inhabitants? What would a *romantic urban utopia* look like? And how do we get it?

At the heart of the debate between realists and romantics lies the issue of power, to make things better. Oftentimes, the realist was at one time a romantic. Morton White was a Marxist in the 1930s[13]. In 1968, Nathan Glazer described his earlier political position as one of "mild radicalism.[14] But at some point, as Randolph Bourne said about the generation of "progressives" who came to support World War I, the realist comes to accept what is, confuses "a stern and intelligent grappling with realities" with "a mere surrender to the actual." With the futile hope that they can change things from *within* the System, Bourne wrote, the realist makes a Faustian bargain with it. He becomes its most unabashed champion, its greatest defender against the romantic radical. The realist finds a "balm of consolation" in acquiescence to war (and, if we extend Bourne's

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[13] In the mid 30's, while he was a student at Columbia University, Morton White became a supporter of the "League for a Revolutionary Party" a short-lived offshoot, led by B. J. Field and Aristodimos Kaldis, of the Trotskyist "Communist League of America," later to become the better known Socialist Workers Party. See Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), p. 107. White became a steady contributor, along with Farrell and Schapiro, to the then Trotskyist-leaning *Partisan Review*. See Terry A. Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), p. 177.

[14] Nathan Glazer, "On Being Deradicalized." *Commentary*, October 1970, p. 80.

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critique, to capitalism, as well as to mega-urban poverty, congestion, pollution and environmental destruction). In response to criticism from his former fellows, "the ex-humanitarian . . . sneers at the snobbish neutrality, colossal conceit, crooked thinking, dazed sensibilities" he alleges exists among those who still oppose these evils. For they have not accepted *his* "realities."[15]

This is *precisely* what the Whites do in *Intellectual vs. the City*. Interminably, they lash out at all those intellectuals throughout American history who have ever had an unkind word for the modern metropolis as "ideological" or "prejudiced" snobs, and call upon present-day intellectuals to stick to "reasonable" criticism instead.[16] But if these evils, as Bourne asks the realist, are "too strong for you to prevent" from without, how are they "going to be weak enough for you to control and mould to your liberal purposes" from within?[17]

The romantic, however, if he does not eventually surrender to such (false) "realism," ends up committing himself to building a movement against these evils, from without. For, as Mumford insisted in the 1930s, this is the only way to do it. Victory never comes through timidity, surrender and co-optation; it comes through democratic leadership and popular struggle.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as Megalopolis grew and grew more chaotic, visionary intellectuals, socialists, populists, liberals,

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[15] Randolph Bourne, "The War and the Intellectuals," *The Radical Will: Selected Writings*, ed. Olaf Hansen (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), p. 316.
[16] Morton and Lucia White, *Intellectual vs. the City*, chapter 16, "Ideology, Prejudice, and Reasonable Criticism," pp. 231-42.

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Technocrats, radicals, union leaders, novelists, and their followers, in Europe as well as in the United States, have asked these radical questions. They have included architect Frederick Law Olmsted, the garden-city inventor Ebenezer Howard, the anarchist Petr Kropotkin, the populist Henry George and his United Labor Party, the visionary and Mumford's mentor, Patrick Geddes, the municipal socialist Frederick C. Howe, and the settlement worker Mary Simkhovitch. They also include Marx and Engels, and many other revolutionary socialist thinkers—Randolph Bourne, Jack London, and C. Wright Mills, to name just a few--novelists like Herman Melville, Balzac, Dickens, Henry Miller, and Delmore Schwartz. And last but certainly not least in this pantheon, come Lewis Mumford and his associates in the Regional Planning Associates of America. Mumford, the main topic of this dissertation, was perhaps the greatest theorist and advocate for this romantic urbanism.

Mumford's Weakness and Strength as a Political Thinker

Lewis Mumford is one of the most quoted American social and architectural thinkers of the twentieth century. But Mumford's reputation has suffered the fate, in general, of romantic ideals. Romantics are OK in their place—or so goes the contemporary logic. They're good for a little entertainment in our humanities classes, with their mystical pastoral poetry, their whimsical quest for self-expression, etc., before we get down to the nuts and bolts. For they

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[17] Bourne, "Twilight of the Idols." *Radical Will*, p. 339.

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are out of touch with "current realities." They like to whine about what's wrong with modern society: but they really have nothing practical to offer.

Fixated as he is upon what he considers to be "objective realities," the realist can conceive of the romantics only as similarly fixated. Allegedly, all romantics wallow purely in their own narcissistic *subjectivity*. Certainly, some Romantics had a tendency to engage in this. But that is not what romanticism is really all about. The best of romantic thought, as Rene Wellek argued, was always about *bridging the gap* between "subject and object, the self and the world, the conscious and the unconscious."[18] It was about reconstructing the "objective" world to suit us; to fulfill our needs and desires as much as is humanly possible.

Wellek's view well describes Lewis Mumford's own project. Mumford's realist opponents—Morton and Lucia White, for example—have portrayed him as egoistic, impractical, and elitist. Even supporter Leo Marx has written recently that

> Mumford's characteristic prescriptions for urban reform are initiated by elites—architects, planners, artists, and intellectuals—and effected from the top down. It almost never occurs to Mumford that the legitimate discontent and consequent mobilization of the citizenry might be a source of constructive political action.[19]

---

[18] R. Wellek, "The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History," *Comparative Literature* (1949), vol. III of *History of Modern Criticism* (London, 1957), and "Romanticism Re-examined," in *Concepts of Criticism*, ed. S.G. Nichols (New Haven, 1963). Cf. Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background, 1760-1830* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 7.

[19] Leo Marx, "Lewis Mumford: Prophet of Organicism," in Thomas and Agatha Hughes, ed., *Lewis Mumford: Prophet of Organicism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 179.

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It will be the major thesis of this dissertation to refute this interpretation: to real that the essence of Mumford's thought was as practical and as democratic as it was visionary and idealistic.

This is not to say that the attacks upon Mumford had absolutely no justification. As early as the 40's, the idealist, pessimistic streak in Mumford's thought became more prominent than his practical side. This is the Mumford that most people remember today. In his speech before the Ribicoff Committee on Governmental Expenditures in 1967, Mumford admits that he has given up his old optimism that the regional planning efforts in the 1920s and 30s, by themselves, might save Western civilization. "What was the result?" he asks resignedly: "those nightmares of urban anonymity and human desolation that dominate the skyline today: those high-rise housing developments in whose design only financial and mechanical calculations have played a part."

The problem goes deeper than mere planning can address, he says. He is right, in my opinion: the problem involves the conflict between the classes that Marx talked about. The power of the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois state distorted and destroyed the RPAA's planning efforts. Typically, Mumford hints at this, but does not draw out its implications for further planning efforts. As always, Mumford is careful to mention his regionalist program, which is worth introducing at this point:

> The new form of the city must be conceived on a regional scale: not subordinated to a single dominant center, but as a network of different forms and sizes, set in the midst of publicly protected open spaces permanently

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> dedicated to agriculture and recreation. In such a regional scheme the metropolis would be only *'primus inter pares,'* the first among equals.

But Mumford offers little hint of a strategy for creating such a regional pattern. Instead of class conflict, he ends up talking in terms of changing the allegedly universal "machine-centered" cultural consensus instead. Mumford talks vaguely about "the violence at the heart of our culture," and speaks even more vaguely about what he proposes as a solution to this allegedly cultural problem. His final advice to the subcommittee is, "Go slow! Experiment with small measures and small units, until you have time to prepare better plans and to organize new public agencies to carry out those plans." Which sounds like the very same timidity for which he once harshly criticized the Roosevelt Administration.[5]

In *The Intellectual vs. The City*, in reference to Mumford's second, 1962 work on the city, *The City in History*, Morton and Lucia White complain that "After devoting about a quarter of a million words of his *City in History* to about five thousand years of urban origins and transformations, he devotes only the remaining sixteen pages of his book to some of the city's favorable prospects."[20] In actuality, Mumford begins his forward-looking discussion of "planning for urban growth" on page 514: sixty-two rather than sixteen pages before the end of the work. But though it is a great work, as even the Whites seem to admit here, with this book, Mumford deepens his long-running tendency to idealize past eras,

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especially the medieval period, as a golden age. Thus the work does seem influenced by the pastoral tradition: a tradition whose ambiguous legacy for Mumford's thought we will discuss at a later point.

Yet the picture painted by the Whites is, on the whole, unfair, a cheap shot, intellectually speaking. After all, the book is a work of *history*; though it addresses contemporary issues, that was not its primary subject matter. To gain the complete picture, we must examine other works of Mumford's: in the same period, and also particularly in his formative period, the 1930's, when intellectual life was far more radical.

The 1930's, according to cultural historian Michael Denning, "marked the first time in the history of the United States that the left—the tradition of radical democratic movements for social transformation—had a central, indeed shaping, impact on American culture." The 30's was the time of the "Popular Front," an "insurgent social movement," according to Denning, "forged from the labor militancy of the fledgling CIO, the anti-fascist [international] solidarity [movement], and the political struggles on the left wing of the New Deal." This movement managed to shift the dominant ideals of American culture toward compassion and community and away from and against the more traditional American culture of capitalism and private individualism. To paraphrase Communist Party chairman, Earl Browder, in the 1930s, "Communism" really did

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[20] Morton and Lucia White, p. 206.

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become "20th century Americanism," albeit briefly—because American popular culture shifted remarkably toward Communism.[21]

Intellectuals were excited by the possibilities opened up by the Popular Front. "Planning" became a popular, albeit somewhat vague, concept for liberal as well as socialist intellectuals.[22] On the left wing of the New Deal and within the Popular Front, radical intellectuals sought to make social planning a tangible reality to many people, one, which would thus seem worth fighting a revolution for.[23] There was the aura of the Soviet "five-year plan," which impressed many intellectuals. On the margins of the Left, there were thinkers such as Wilhelm Reich, with his "sexual politics," Leon Trotsky, with his "Transitional Program,"[24] and Upton Sinclair, with his program to "End Poverty in California" (EPIC).[25] They sought new ways to connect the existential, concrete concerns of working people directly into an economic understanding of what was wrong with society and what could be put in its place, which would do a better job. It is in this context, I would like to argue in this dissertation, that the work of Lewis Mumford should be placed.

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[21] See Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), pp. 3-4, *et passim*; Page Smith, *Redeeming the Time: A People's History of the 1920s and the New Deal* (New York: Penguin, 1987).
[22] See Roy Talbert, Jr., *FDR's Utopian: Arthur Morgan of the TVA* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1987), pp. 128-33.
[23] See R. Allan Lawson, *The Failure of Independent Liberalism: 1930-1941* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971) pp. 156-58.
[24] Leon Trotsky, *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution* (Pathfinder Press, 1973).
[25] Upton Sinclair, *I, Candidate for Governor: And How I Got Licked* (Upton Sinclair, 1934, reprinted by the University of California Press, 1994).

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During this period, Mumford styled himself a (small-c) communist and supported the Popular Front during the 1930s (but never joined the Communist Party).[26] He formulated not only the practical solutions he offered all his life, but a revolutionary strategy for achieving them, a strategy which might surprise those who dismiss him as an impractical mystic today. The best example is from *Technics and Civilization* (1934):

> Until the worker emerges from a state of spiritless dependence there can be no large gain either in collective efficiency or in social direction. . . . Plainly, such [workers'] control [and] autonomy. . . will not be achieved without a struggle. . . In the long run, this struggle involves a fight not only against a sessile[27] administrative bureaucracy within the trade unions themselves; more importantly, it involves an outright battle with the guardians of capital.[28]

Even in the 1960's, however, the Whites' view of Mumford was unfair. The Whites did not really oppose Mumford because of his "organicism." That was just a straw man for their animus toward Mumford's social radicalism--an

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[26] Denning, pp. xviii, 446.

[27] Mumford derived the term "sessile" from botany. According to my *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1981 edition, the term's primary meaning applies to leaves that are "attached directly by the base: not raised upon a stalk or peduncle." The second meaning listed here is the one Mumford intends here: "Permanently attached or established: not free to move about," a meaning for which Webster's uses both "polyps" and "wealth" for examples of things that could be sessile.

It's interesting that even at his most Marxist-sounding, Mumford still revealed his affinity for biological language in describing social phenomena. This, as we will discuss in my first chapter, is a "vitalist" tendency in Mumford's thought, which had both positive and negative effects upon his ideas.

[28] Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich, 1934), pp. 418-19.

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animus that they and other "centrists" developed during and after World War II.[29] For Mumford was still writing some very salient essays, wherein he attempted to connect his more theoretical views to his practical urban concerns. The 1958 essay "The Highway and the City," for example, provides a far more concrete and reasonable explanation for the decline of the modern metropolis and its economy than do the Whites or Jane Jacobs. The Whites seem to blame it all on their "anti-urban," intellectual opponents. But Mumford discusses the tremendous sacrifice of federal and city fiscal dollars and urban space to the ever more congested freeway, the automobile, and the parking garage.[30] The Whites imply that Mumford and co., allegedly obsessed as they are with mystical organicism, ignore more concrete problems, such as race relations.[31] But many of Mumford's essays during this period are saturated with concern about the state of these very same relations, as well as about poverty, unemployment, housing, etc. In particular, the "Postscript" to Mumford's 1968 collection of essays, *The Urban Prospect,* deals with the problems of the crowded and deteriorating urban ghettos, and proposes an effective decentrist solution, which we will discuss at length in our conclusion.[32]

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[29] For a fuller discussion of the post-war liberals of the "*Vital Center*" (title of the 1949 work by leader Arthur Schlesinger Jr.) and their, rather loose, political position, see Chapter 1, the "Centrist Tradition" section.

[30] Mumford. "The Highway and the City," and "Postscript, the Choices Ahead," *The Urban Prospect*, pp. 92-107; 227-55.

[31] Morton and Lucia White, p. 239.

[32] See Mumford's "Home Remedies for Urban Cancer," "A Brief History of Urban Frustration," and "Postscript: The Choices Ahead," in *The Urban Prospect,* pp. 182-207, 208-226, 227-55. See

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Moreover, Mumford was certainly not the only intellectual in the late 1940's and 1950's to point out that America's cities were facing a crisis and to demand radical solutions. In his *Like a Conquered Province* (1967), Paul Goodman wrote that

> the cities [of the U.S.] already show signs of overpopulation. They do not provide adequate city services and probably cannot provide them; they are vulnerable to urban catastrophes that might destroy thousands; it is prohibitively costly to live decently in them; and in my opinion, though this is hard to prove, the crowding is already more than is permissible for mental health and normal growing up.[33]

With his brother Percival (an architect) in their *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Ways of Life* (1947), Goodman decried the lack of comprehensive town planning in America. "Typical American behavior," the brothers argue, sounding much like Mumford's critique in "The Highway and the City,"

> is to solve the problem of transit congestion by creating a parallel system that builds up new neighborhoods and redoubles the transit congestion: but no effort is made to analyze the kinds and conditions of work so that people commute less. With generous intent, Americans clear a slum area and rebuild with large projects that re-create the slum more densely, and, on the whole, sociologically[in terms of "class stratification"] worse. . . .

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also the essays in *From the Ground Up* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1956) and *The Highway and the City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1963).

[33] Paul Goodman, "Urbanization and Rural Reconstruction," *Like a Conquered Province: The Moral Ambiguity of America*, (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 78.

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And like Mumford, the Goodmans proposed decentralization and planned garden cities (see chapter 3) as their alternative.[34]

In his best-selling and still relevant book, *The Affluent Society*, John Kenneth Galbraith complained that cities were "badly paved, made hideous by litter blighted buildings, billboards and posts . . ." that the American "countryside has been rendered largely invisible by commercial art." Galbraith complained of "polluted stream[s]," of parks "which [are] a menace to public health and morals" and sullied by "the stench of decaying refuse."[35] Though she did not analyze the problem very deeply, Mary McCarthy complained of "the cramped apartments we live in, the noise, the traffic, the crowded subways and buses. American life, in large cities at any rate, is a perpetual assault on the . . . nerves. . . . a stupefaction of the soul and the senses."[36]

C. Wright Mills offered one of the most critical analyses of the modern metropolis. He called it "the horrible, beautiful, ugly, magnificent sprawl of the great city," and asserted, "a crisis now exists in connection with the big cities of the Western societies." Further, he stated, "We live in metropolitan areas that are not communities in any real sense of the word, but rather unplanned monstrosities

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[34] Paul and Percival Goodman, *Communitas: Ways of Living and Means of Life* (New York: Random House, 1947, 1960), pp. 6-7, 153-187.
[35] John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston, 1971), p. 223, and Richard Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age*, p. 169.
[36] Mary McCarthy, "America the Beautiful," *On the Contrary* (New York, 1962), pp. 11-12, and Richard Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age*, p. 189.

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in which we, as men and women, are segregated into narrow routines and limited *milieux*."[37]

If they shared Mumford's organicist outlook, neither Mills, nor Galbraith, nor McCarthy were explicit about it. But they certainly agreed with Mumford, that the problem with our cities was, as Mills wrote, one of "overdevelopment" and the "stupid and selfish [financial, real estate, and capitalist] interests" behind this overdevelopment.[38]

Like Mumford, these critics believed that the solution to the contemporary urban crisis had to involve a deep and popular discussion of aesthetics, the quality of modern life and the nature and proper direction of modern society. In another passage that could be lifted straight out of Mumford's *The Culture of Cities*, Mills wrote:

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[37] C. Wright Mills. "The Big City: Private Troubles and Public Issues," *People, Power, and Politics: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills*, ed. Irving Louis Horowitz (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 396-397. (Essay originally published in 1959.)

[38] Mills, *Ibid.* We will discuss the notions of "overdevelopment" and ecological and social "imbalance," so important to Mumford as well as Mills, in depth in Chapters 2 and 5, especially. The reader may be having some doubts, at this point, about the validity of such concepts. "How much development is 'overdevelopment'? What are the criteria needed to judge on this question?" are questions you may be asking yourself: especially if you have accepted the dominant Western notion that the sky should be the limit, and that any limitation upon consumption, especially mass consumption, along with population congestion, is usually part of some process by which ruling elites sanction their exploitation and subsequent deprivation of the masses. What I am going to argue here is that there are alternate reasons for accepting such limitations, reasons that have absolutely nothing to do with denying the poor their fair share of the surplus product. As Mumford, Mills, Marx and Engels, Mike Davis, and many others have pointed out, contrary to the basic, unconscious assumptions of the modern capitalist paradigm, the capacity of nature, human and environmental, to handle the pollution that comes with greater and greater levels of dirty and noisy industrial activity and mega-urban congestion is not infinite. Under the stress of such activity and congestion, biological systems tend to break down, resulting in personal neurosis, social disorder, personal and environmental biological deterioration and toxic disasters. We can certainly have a socialist society with abundance for all, these thinkers all would argue—but

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> The city is necessarily a collective product. . . . it is the major locale of man's art; the visual scene in which he lives. But increasingly it is an inhuman landscape. Accordingly, the city is *the* esthetic problem—but more than that, it is the problem of the politics of esthetics. And to solve this problem there must come about a truly wide and deep discussion of the esthetics of the urban area—which is to say, a discussion of the quality and meaning of human life in our time.[39]

In similar terms, radical historian Christopher Lasch later wrote,

> One of the major tasks confronting the left is to show how the urban crisis and the more general "environmental crisis" originate in capitalist production. Agitation around ecological issues, if these issues were properly explained, would help to create a common consciousness of deprivation among students, workers, and members of the "new middle class" by showing that the industrial system victimizes *everybody*—except the very rich, who can provide themselves with means of escape from the environmental devastation their own policies have brought about. Pollution, noise, congestion, violence, crime, the physical and moral destruction of the city in the interests of developers, the ravaging of the landscape, suburban sprawl, and the deterioration of the schools have created widespread fear, resentment, and anger in the working and middle classes. . . .[40]

Thus, it was neither the case that Mumford was exclusively focused on organicist metahistory at the expense of more practical concerns, nor that he and

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through far more rational, planned, communally oriented living patterns that do not tax the Earth's ecosystem's, nor our own personal biological systems', ability to cope.

[39] Mills, p. 400.

[40] Christopher Lasch, "Is Revolution Obsolete," in his *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 116. On the same page, Lasch writes further that such anger among workers is redirected by elites into *ressentiment* against minorities, liberal programs, and the Left. The Left ought to redirect this *ressentiment* in a rational direction, to lead such workers, with such an ecological, anti-capitalist program, to rebel against these elites. Instead, the Left mostly writes

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his "organicist" followers were alone in making a radical attack upon and demanding radical solutions for the megalopolitan crisis. In Mumford's own words, the only sin he was guilty of was the one in the story about the "Emperor's New Clothes": the revelation of truths officially denied by "planners, administrators, and social service workers" like the Whites. These "sought only to achieve such piecemeal urban improvements as were acceptable and feasible without any critical assessment and renovation of current institutions," and therefore "underrat[ed] the human costs of metropolitan congestion and disorganization as merely surface blemishes on the otherwise healthy face of urban life. . ." Mumford, pointed out, however, that such problems "could not be treated by purely temporizing local remedies, since they were symptomatic of deeper organic defects in our civilization." In response, they dismissed his views "as 'unrealistic' or 'pessimistic,' even 'apocalyptic'."[41]

Marxist Criticisms of Mumford before World War II

Morton White's criticisms of Mumford's "organicism" echoed those of two of his associates on the New York Intellectual Left before World War II. These were the first wave of Mumford's progressive critics: Meyer Schapiro and James Farrell, writing in the *Partisan Review* and the *Southern Review*.[42] Schapiro

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them off as inherently racist. This is an analysis that has certainly not lost its relevancy for our own "politically correct" era.

[41] Mumford, "Postscript: The Choices Ahead," *Urban Prospect*, p. 233.

[42]Meyer Schapiro, "Looking Forward to Looking Back," *Partisan Review* 5 (July 1938): p. 18; James T. Farrell, "The Faith of Lewis Mumford," *Southern Review* 6, (Winter 1941): 417-38. See

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and Farrell were angry with Mumford for going over to the movement among U.S. intellectuals in support of U.S. military intervention into WWII. Understandably, they went a bit overboard, and were unfair, in their desire to condemn the totality of Mumford's thought. They condemned Mumford for being "too" practical, at the expense of socialist principle. Farrell accused Mumford of the piecemeal reformism of the "settlement house"—a pejorative for Marxists ever since it was used in the early thirties (if not earlier) by the Communists as well as by Benjamin Stolberg (another admirer of Trotsky) and Warren Jay Vinton to attack the New Deal.[43] Schapiro and Farrell argued that Mumford's "organicism" was basically a cover for an incipient "reformism." They charged that he neglected such issues as class power and of what social agency could

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also the critiques by V. F. Calverton, "A Challenge to American Intellectuals," *Modern Quarterly* 5, (Winter 1930-31), pp. 407-21; Sidney Hook, "Metaphysics, War and Intellectuals," *Menorah Journal* 28 (August 1940), pp. 327-37. In the preface to the first edition of his *Social Thought in America: The Revolt Against Formalism* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1949), Morton White thanks Farrell and Schapiro, among others, for their "friendship and intellectual companionship." White probably began this friendship with Farrell and Schapiro at least a decade earlier: as a fellow member of the Trotskyist movement. In the mid 30's, while he was a student at Columbia University, Morton White became a supporter of the "League for a Revolutionary Party" a short-lived offshoot, led by B. J. Field and Aristodimos Kaldis, of the Trotskyist "Communist League of America," later to become the better known Socialist Workers Party. See Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), p. 107. White became a steady contributor, along with Farrell and Schapiro, to the then Trotskyist-leaning *Partisan Review* See Terry A. Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), p. 177. The trio seemed thus to have been fellow travelers for quite a few years. When he co-authored *The Intellectual vs. the City*, Morton White had to have been aware of his friends' earlier, "anti-organicist" criticisms of Mumford, and most certainly borrowed their vocabulary.

[43] Benjamin Stolberg and Warren Jay Vinton, *The Economic Consequences of the New Deal* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1933), p. 48. Cf. R. Allan Lawson, *The Failure of Independent Liberalism: 1930-1941* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), pp. 85, 282f. For information about Stolberg, see Alan Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, p. 135.

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change these relations of power to bring about the radical changes Mumford wanted.

This charge of vagueness was perhaps somewhat true, even as early in the thirties, and we shall have cause to examine Schapiro's and Farrell's critique in more detail later on. But more basically, both the nuts-and-bolts urbanists of the 60's and the Trotskyists of the 30's miss the mark, from both of their respective sides, however, when they attack Mumford for his "organicism." When Farrell lambasted Mumford in the 30's in the pages of the *Southern Review*, he faulted *Culture of Cities* precisely for what the Whites claimed was missing in Mumford's *oeuvre:* a sufficient ("settlement-house") concern for practical, immediate solutions. In truth, we can see that the kernel of Mumford's "organicism" is rational and useful. Mumford employed his "organicism" precisely to *span the distance* between "settlement house" and "ivory tower." He sought to transcend the barriers between the short-term, "melioristic and individualistic" strategies encouraged by the Realists, and the broad, revolutionary perspectives and the long-range solutions needed to truly solve the problems of megalopolis. For this, he was vilified in the sixties by his liberal opponents and in the thirties by his Leftist opponents.

In Mumford's early work on the American antebellum literary renaissance, *The Golden Day*, however, he attacked the ameliorism of the "muck-rakes" which preceded his own career: such writers as Frank Norris (who wrote *The Octopus*, about a Western grain monopoly), and Upton Sinclair (who wrote *The Jungle*,

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about the Chicago slaughterhouse and meat-packing industry). Mumford attacked what he considered to be these "muck-rakes"' lack of "imagination," their assumption that while "modern industrial society" is fundamentally flawed, yet, at the same time, it "possessed all the materials essential to a good social order. On this assumption," Mumford wrote, "all that was necessary was a change in power and control: [to bring about] the Social Commonwealth [we could] simply [afford to] diffuse and extend all the existing values." Marx had attacked Proudhon's "philosophy of poverty," because he wanted their cake and to eat it, too. So, too, Mumford argued that these Progressives wanted the good aspects of the "bourgeois order" without the bad. Nationalist progressives such as Herbert Croly and Edward Bellamy wanted to build a strong national government to regulate or replace the corporations. For Mumford, they "accepted the" centralization of power represented by the "trust"; they merely "wanted the principle of monopoly extended. . . ." Municipal socialists "accepted the bloated city"; they merely "wanted its subways and tenements socialized, as well as its waterworks. . ." And Progressives in general, Mumford argued, merely wanted the "the comforts and conveniences of the middle classes, without "its flipside: "the suffering, toil, anxiety, and frustration known to the unskilled worker.[44] Because they sought to be "realistic," they failed to truly be radical. This malady was shared by "'scientific' socialists," as well, Mumford wrote. They, too, "distrusted utopias, and so made a utopia of the existing order. . . They were

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[44] Mumford, *The Golden Day* (New York: Dover, 1926), pp. 123-24.

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ready to upset every aspect of modern industrial society except the fragmentary culture, which had brought it into existence."

What they lacked, Mumford wrote, was a "concrete image of perfection." The problem was not that the "muckrakes," or their descendants in the RPA or the sixties' batch of Realists (Robert Moses, Morton and Lucia White, Nathan Glazer, Jane Jacobs, whom we discussed earlier), were too concrete. Nor was it Farrell's and other orthodox Marxists' problem that they were interested in theory, per se, as the realists might charge. Rather, few if any of Mumford's critics confronted the *concrete* problems of the city and of the modern industrial order with some kind of *theoretical* backbone: some principle, a vision, some "utopian" ideal of "perfection." This fusion of the practical with the theoretical is something rather unique and especially valuable about Mumford's work. It will be the major theme of this dissertation. Without it, while the Trotskyists' abstract critiques were often too narrowly theoretical to appeal to ordinary people, the brunt of the muckrakes', the RPA's, and the Realists' charge, after they had already surrendered their critical imaginations, was easily undermined by the "canny and logical" defenders of capitalism. For if "the diffusion of existing values all that was required of a better social order," then "the existing regime could diffuse values, too. Did not bank accounts spread—and Ford cars—and movies—and higher wages in the skilled trades?"[45]

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[45] *Ibid.*

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A Concrete Image of Perfection

During the twenties, thirties and forties, Mumford was far more concerned with the practical problems of democratic economic and resource planning than he was with metahistory. The key to Mumford's ideas in this period was the need for what he called "a concrete image of perfection."[46] It was not enough to just have the ultimate analysis of capitalism, as Marxists thought. Nor was it sufficient to merely acquaint yourself with the particular problems of ordinary people, as the settlement house advocates attempted. The problem was to connect the two: to make, as Marx would say, "*theory grip the masses.*" *An image, or pool of images, had to be found, which connected the concrete to the ideal, and thus could seize the imagination of ordinary people and educate them about what the ideal would look like.*

Mumford saw the idea of regional planning as an eminently practical as well as vitally necessary alternative to the chaos and irrationality he saw around him. I believe this is the central focus and the basis of Mumford's thought. While ecological values and vitality were of course always important to Mumford, these values were connected, at least early in his career, to a *political* framework for change.

Mumford was the guiding intellectual light behind the Regional Planning Association of America, which also included housing advocate Catherine Bauer,

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[46] *Ibid.*.

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and architects Clarence Stein and Henry Wright. As Carl Sussman writes in his edition of RPAA writings, "The group's primary objective was a new approach to regional planning": a "normative approach to the then emerging . . . metropolitan form. . . ." They "scoffed at all regional planning that accepted the continued spread of metropolitanism as inevitable or, worse still, desirable. . . ." This "intolerance" was by no-means "purely professional," in the sense of the a-political, "value-neutral" attitude we usually encounter among scientific and professional experts in contemporary society. Despite their professional backgrounds, their animus grew out of "an essentially political clash between opposing social visions."[47]

Mumford's thought certainly had its elitist, technocratic aspect. He believed that cities and society should be planned scientifically, and that there existed an intelligent, educated elite who could do the job. But he also believed that ordinary people have to be involved in urban and social as well as environmental planning, and that only a democratic society can be ecologically as well as socially harmonious.

A New Historical Synthesis

It was these practical, social and political considerations, as a regional urban thinker, that originally shaped Mumford's exploration of history. He wanted to revise our view of history in order to make comprehensible the

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[47]In the preface to Carl Sussman, ed., *Planning the Fourth Migration: The Neglected Vision of the*

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psychological, ideological, and aesthetic pathologies of the modern fixation upon the Machine and the individual Ego, so that these pathologies could be effectively challenged. He did this by drawing upon such positivist thinkers as Auguste Comte. Comte enabled Mumford to understand the ways in which human ideas and ideals interacted with material forces, to become a force in their own right. Mumford's thought always tended to idealism; but I believe he improved upon the Marxist critique of capitalist society. The Frankfurt School's appropriation of the positive features of such conservative cultural critics as Nietzsche and Spengler helped them formulate their critique of modern capitalist mass society.[45] Similarly, using Comte's ideas, Mumford deepened his own, similar critique of modern society, broadened it, and made it more comprehensible.

Mumford accepted Comte's view that in each era human beings organize their lives around certain key institutions, concatenations of people's spiritual as well as material needs. "Every culture," Comte wrote, "has its characteristic drama. It chooses from the sum total of human possibilities certain acts and interests, certain processes and values, and endows them with special significance: provides them with a setting: organizes rites and ceremonies. . . ." Mumford also accepted Comte's notion that the city is "the stage on which this

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Regional Planning Association of America (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976).

[45] See George Freedman, *The Political Philosophy of the Frankfurt School* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 62-86.

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drama is enacted . . ." for "it is here," in the city. Comte wrote, that culture "reaches its highest pitch of intensity."[48]

In the medieval social "drama," people had once expected from the Church their social sustenance. For Mumford, this expectation was somewhat rational. He believed that the Church, along with the guilds, at least in the early middle ages, was really if imperfectly moral; that they fused the spiritual with the real, the human with the impersonal; that they took care of people, in exchange for obedience. Similarly, Mumford interpreted and evaluated capitalism through the social "dramas" he believed it created: the Megalopolis or Imperial City, the Market, the Media, the Machine, and the State. These modern institutions of social "drama" were, in some aspects, more rather than less irrational than the old medieval dramas. They were born during the breakdown of the feudal synthesis and the rise of commerce, imperialism, and grandiose power politics during the baroque era. These institutions did not resolve these social pathologies to form a new and higher synthesis. On the contrary, they were the embodiment of these new pathologies. Thus they encourage and exacerbate all the egoistic vices—greed and ambition being the principals—at the expense of the community, collective rationality, and spiritual needs. Since they work ultimately to satisfy the material needs of only a few, these institutions also fall far short even in this regard. Thus these institutions are, for the community as a whole, essentially irrational, self-destructive compulsions. They have come to take on a life of their

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[49] Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, p. 60.

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own, become ends to be pursued in themselves, as "self-evidently" rational, despite the actual cost to actual human beings.

This Comtean view of the modern era certainly has its drawbacks. It is too positive toward the Middle Ages; too negative toward the modern era. Throughout his work, Mumford is cognizant of the modern era's positive features—its potential for individual self-realization, the emancipation of women, and men, from drudgery, the organization of labor into powerful trade unions and movements that can potentially create a socialist society. The Frankfurt School's appropriation of conservative cultural thought often led them to an overly negative, pessimistic assessment of the modern era. So, too, did Mumford's Comteanism discourage him from highlighting these developments as much as other thinkers—Marx, or Mill, for example. As we shall see, it tended him to praise other backward-looking thinkers who favored the middle ages over the Enlightenment while overlooking their more sinister aspects—such as the German, nineteenth century, *anti-Semitic* agrarian romantic W. H. Riehle. But this conservative cultural heritage also permitted Mumford, however, like it did the Frankfurt School, to more implacably confront the modern era's negative features, especially in the realm of culture and consciousness. It permitted them and him, to better comprehend how modern capitalist society manages to thwart and redirect what should become revulsion against its ugliness and injustice, into a benumbed acceptance. It helped them, and him, to understand historical and social bases of this thwarted mass consciousness, this ugliness, this injustice,

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critically, rather than accept it as inevitable or natural, as realists Jacobs and the Whites did. And it allowed him to think creatively about the future, as well.

For Mumford, social reconstruction had to involve a new advance in human society, a new "drama," a new form of social rationality. This would once again transcend the divisions between the spiritual and the material, the personal and the impersonal, science and practical needs, the state, the individual, and the community, the subjective vs. the objective spheres of human reality. This time, though the synthesis would take a "higher" form: it would simultaneously be more democratic, embracing the everyday reality of ordinary people. In the tradition of Marx, and in league with other dissident intellectuals of the time such as Dewey, Mumford believed that this higher synthesis could only be achieved through collective ownership of the means of production, and democratic social planning.

Mumford's writing is animated by a vision that he called, as we discussed earlier, "organicist" approach. He argued for the creation of "garden cities," which he hoped would "widen into the prospect of a garden civilization."[50] This vision and program, he hoped, would integrate theory and practice, mind and body, the conscious and the unconscious mind, the individual and the society in the "beloved community" (an ideal which Mumford took from Randolph Bourne, as we shall discuss in the first chapter). It would unite the workers with the processes and fruits of their labor; human civilization with environmental nature;

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political and social planning and decision-making with human needs; the city with the region; an enjoyment of cosmopolitan universalism and freedom with a sense of belonging to the local community.

Mumford tried always to think in terms of building balanced, organic, life-enhancing relationships. The healthy ("garden") city must be based upon its surrounding region. The relations of the metropolis to its surrounding region were instead parasitic. In general, "in the name of mechanical progress, for the sake of purely quantitative production, mechanical efficiency," and "'bureaucratic order'," human society had "turned its back" upon the "three sources" that alone can give it beneficial, life-enhancing order. These are "nature," "the cumulative processes of history and historic culture," and "the human psyche." The result has been "to sterilize both architecture and the life that it should sustain and elevate."[51]

To be truly beneficial, a civilization must benefit its people in general, not a tiny profit-seeking ruling class. Mumford agreed with Marx that genuine civilization must fulfill rather than repress our natural, socio-historical, and psychological human needs.

Drawing upon such thinkers as Ebenezer Howard and Patrick Geddes, Mumford examined how the ideal of regionalism, along with collective ownership, could become a subversive force in people's consciousness,

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[50] Mumford, "Landscape and Townscape," *The Highway and the City*, p. 225.
[51] Mumford, "The Case Against 'Modern Architecture'," *The Highway and the City*, p. 174.

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permitting them to grasp how, concretely and collectively, they could democratically take control over their own lives. Here, again, there was in Mumford's work a profound advance, not only upon John Dewey, whose democratic theory always remained somewhat abstract and a-historical. It was also an advance upon orthodox Marxism, as practiced by the Stalinists or even by Trotsky, who always thought, contrary to Marx and Engels themselves that "formal democracy" was something from which the masses had to be weaned.

In terms of political theory, though Mumford himself may have been quite unaware of their similarities, one orthodox Marxist who foreshadowed Mumford's vision of a democratic regionalism was Rosa Luxemburg. Luxemburg disagreed profoundly with the Bolsheviks' instrumental view of democracy: as only a stepping stone to a socialism run despotically but benevolently by the revolutionary vanguard. For her, the process was inextricably bound up with the product, the subjective with the objective, democracy with socialism. Social irrationality was the product of repression, and no one was immune, not even the proletarian vanguard; therefore, democracy was absolutely needed to transcend the irrationalities of capitalism. As she wrote in her pamphlet, "The Russian Revolution": "the only effective means in the hands of the proletarian revolution" are "the speediest possible" realization of the "social guarantees" necessary to awaken the "life of the masses." Their "revolutionary idealism . . . can" be "kindled" and then "maintained over any length of time only through the

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intensively active life of the masses themselves under conditions of unlimited political freedom."[52]

What Mumford offers to this line of thinking is his desire to integrate such a notion of mass democracy into a visionary program for a new society; a program which will *attract* ordinary people to the rational cause of socialism. To make democratic planning attractive, Mumford knew he had to make it tangible to people, by connecting it to people's everyday lives. Regionalism (as Mumford conceived it) could do this, because it could connect to people's geography, and to their everyday culture. Thus, for Mumford, regionalism was as much a method of education as it was a body of ideas to be taught.

I think that this dialectical conception of regionalism offer some very important answers, or at least hints, for today's manifold political, social, economic, and environmental crises. It is my purpose here to explore that conception.

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[52] Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), pp. 71, 74.

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CHAPTER 2

MUMFORD'S RADICAL MENTORS

As I argued in the introduction, Mumford's basic goal was a romantic one: to unite the subjective and the objective spheres of human existence, torn asunder in the modern world by technology and the modern metropolis. Despite his dislike for the narcissistic aspects of Romanticism,[1] in developing his criticisms of the modern world, Mumford was influenced profoundly by the Romantic tradition, European and American. In this chapter, I would like to discuss Mumford's romantic intellectual teachers, beginning first with the European tradition.

Romanticism vs. Enlightenment

The history of 19th century Romanticism begins with the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries, which itself was a rebellion against the old medieval intellectual synthesis. Medieval thinkers saw nature as a realm of spiritual essences, limitations and hierarchies. This worldview supported the *ancien regime*, and its privileged first two feudal orders, the Church and the Nobility.

The Enlightenment rebellion against the ideology of the *ancien regime* was of a decidedly mixed character. Two, somewhat antithetical, strands predominated. First came the Rationalists, whose ideas predominated mostly in the seventeenth century: thinkers such as Descartes, Hobbes, Locke later, in the eighteenth century, Voltaire.

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[1] See Mumford, *The Condition of Man* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, Ltd., 1944), p. 290.

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In the eighteenth century there developed what we might call a dissident school of pre-Romantics, whose thought moved gradually away from rationalism and culminated with the ideas of Rousseau: a hero to many of the nineteenth century Romantics.

In the 17th century, Enlightenment thinkers such as Descartes and Hobbes presented the universe as well as the human beings within it on the model of a machine, whose every actions could be rationally analyzed and predicted by the laws of motion and matter. Rebelling against medieval teleology, these rationalist Enlightenment thinkers discounted the importance of man's compassionate emotions and his morality, as well. Self-interest, the calculus of self-advantage, the "seeking after power" was the only honest basis for understanding human nature.

The rationalist tendency of the Enlightenment served the interests of the rising bourgeoisie. It legitimated their rebellion against the old feudal system of privilege. It also rationalized, however, their insensitivity to the needs of the artisans, peasants, and workers. It rationalized—as "efficient," as "natural"—the growing division of labor, which intensified their exploitation of these producing classes. And it rationalized the alliance of the philosophes and the very wealthy bourgeoisie with "enlightened" despots like Friederich the Great of Prussia and Catherine the Great of Russia.

In the eighteenth century, however, arising within the Enlightenment itself, some thinkers rebelled against the abstract mechanism, rationalism, and/or class elitism of seventeenth century philosophy. Many of the ideas of the Romantic era had

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their origin among such eighteenth century Enlightenment figures. Rousseau, for example, was an open dissenter from the mainstream of the Enlightenment. The young Montesquieu and Diderot were cultural and sexual libertarians. Even Adam Smith expressed doubts in his *The Wealth of Nations* about the stultifying effects of the division of labor upon the human spirit belie the traditional view we have of him as unabashedly pro-capitalist.[2] The Romantics developed upon this, second body of Enlightenment thought. They, too, rebelled against the abstract rationalism and mechanism of the seventeenth century.

While the rationalists saw truth, knowledge, and reality as purely objective, "self-evident," the Romantics regarded truth and knowledge as at least partially if not completely subjective; and reality, something to be created rather than merely discovered.[3] Where the Rationalists valued pure thought, the Romantics sought to reclaim the realms of passion and heroism. The Rationalists sought to completely master man, nature, and the universe. Thus their model of all these spheres of reality was the machine. But the Romantics valued the living organism. For the Romantics, "organic" reality was far too complex than could ever be completely comprehended as a machine could be. For the Romantics, man, nature, and the universe were too beautiful and wonderful to be exploited and devitalized. The Rationalists employed an abstraction called "Man," essentially identical to every other man, as the unit of their mathematical, contractual models of human society. But the Romantics sought

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[2] See Alexander Broadie, ed., *The Scottish Enlightenment: An Anthology* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Canongate Classics, 1997), p. 432.
[3] H.G. Schenk, *The Mind of the European Romantics* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1967), pp. 3-8.

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out concrete, individual men, in all their diverse, complex, and infinite splendors, through both the Romantic's own introspective flights of fancy and in his study of history.[4]

A rationalist such as Condorcet regarded Progress as monolithic. The modern explosion in scientific knowledge and technology would automatically usher in progress for everyone in human society. But a romantic like Rousseau, Blake, or Shelley, saw that an increase in technological and military power could easily lead to a frightening concentration of power within human society, which in turn could lead to deadly and authoritarian consequences.[5]

"Organic" Freedom and Equality

The Rationalists of the Enlightenment had assumed the whole world could be ordered according to a single Idea—freedom, the social contract, natural law, etc.--whose truth was self-evident. Romantic "organicism" emphasized the complexity and interdependence of natural and human-social phenomena, the dependence of men upon each other and upon nature. While some Romantics—Chateaubriand, for example-- embraced the medieval ideology of organicism, others—Rousseau, Shelley, Blake, and the utopian communists who came out of that Romantic

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[4] John A. Garraty, Peter Gay, eds., *Columbia History of the World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 859-68.
[5] Schenk, pp. 9-12.

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Movement, like Fourier—wanted a society that was egalitarian and mutual. Each individual would be, as Hegel wrote, "for himself and for the Other."[6]

Rationalists like Bacon and Locke conceived the individual as separate from and antagonistic to other men and from nature, and celebrated this isolated Man's capacity to gain power over nature to satisfy his desires. But the Romantics and their radical descendants emphasized the fact that men were dependent upon each other and upon nature for both their survival and their happiness. Men had determinate social and natural needs. In Marx's words, they "suffered" when those needs were denied.[7] In *Faust,* Part II, Goethe shows how the self-aggrandizement of the enlightened planner could easily lead to the destruction of the ordinary people whose homes were in the way.[8] The Romantics' conception of freedom emphasized all men's right to realize their needs, not the right of a few to aggrandize themselves at the rest of humanity's expense. Though the Romantics certainly understood and celebrated Man's egotism, the egotism they valued was heroic, not selfish. Men had the need to actualize their powers and realize themselves: but before and on behalf of their community, not in spite of that community. As Wilshire writes, the Romantic's conception of freedom was one of "autonomy." This meant "to be in control of one's destiny, . . . to be in charge of one's life: to have the ability and the desire to act intelligently and effectively in the world." But the Romantic sought autonomy *within*

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[6] Bruce Wilshire, ed., *Romanticism and Evolution: The Nineteenth Century,* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), pp. 11-12, Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960).
[7] Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Mss. of 1844, *Marx-Engels Reader,* pp. 89-115.

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community rather than *from* it. For, as Wilshire writes, "For Rousseau, for Kant, . . . Society is that context in which free and intelligent action is possible. Only in cooperative social relationships can the individual realize his own potentials."[9]

Romantic Faith in the People

The Romantics' concern for community encouraged a far greater interest on the part of their more radical adherents, like Blake and Shelley, in popular liberation than were Enlightenment rationalists, like John Locke, who defended property accumulation at the expense of the poor. Many Romantics feared democracy because they identified it with the individualism, diversity, and the cult of heroic genius they cherished above all else. For some Romantics, this aversion to democracy led them into the arms of reactionary Catholicism.[10] For other Romantics, however, the quest for equality was strong. They saw their striving for equality as a complement to the general Romantic celebration of individualism and self-development. This was the strand of Romanticism that led from national patriotism, to popular cultural education, to the "positive [as opposed to "crude, leveling"] communism" of Marx and Engels.[11] In Antonio Gramsci's terms, in contrast to the smug elitism of some of the Enlightenment figures like Voltaire, romanticism as an historical movement takes its fundamental character from the "French Revolution." It is based upon "a special

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[8] See Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), pp. 60-70.
[9] Wilshire, pp. 19-20.
[10] Schenk, pp. 12-14.
[11] Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Mss.," *Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 84

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relationship or bond between intellectuals and the people, the nation. . . . . " The Romantics conceived this ideal relationship, not as "a servile unity resulting from passive obedience, but an active unity, a life-unity, whatever the content of this life may be."[12]

Popular Education

Naturally, the "bond" that the Romantics and the national people could not be based initially upon perfect equality. But it was the intention of many Romantics, unlike the Rationalists, to *educate* the masses to achieve the same level of culture and intellect as they; or, if they could not achieve this, at least to that level necessary to become the intelligent, masterful citizens of a democratic republic. (As the decades of the Romantic Movement wore on, this vision of popular empowerment increasingly took on the colors of Marx's "social republic," of revolutionary democratic socialism). The Rationalists, Voltaire, for example, often as not sanctioned the authority of the *ancien regime* as long as its most recent despots were "enlightened." The fact that the subjects of despotism kept quiet was reason, according Hume, to assume it was benevolent (Locke assumed a similar position with regard to constitutional monarchy). But beginning with Montesquieu and Rousseau, however, the Romantic Movement offered other explanations. They offered the first great critiques of this "consensus" theory. People were not happy under despots; they were frightened, coerced, manipulated, spiritually and culturally too undeveloped to

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[12] Antonio Gramsci, "Popular Literature, Content and Form," *Selections from Cultural Writings*

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comprehend their situation and how they might collectively change it.[13] Thus popular education was of great concern to Rousseau, with his novel *Emile,* as well as the Romantics, as exemplified in Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, as well as the Romantics' *Bildungsroman.* So it was of great concern, as we shall see, with Lewis Mumford, to develop and deploy a strategy of popular education and political organization against the modern regime of Capital and its neo-Rationalist cults of Machine and Megalopolis.

Against All Division and Alienation

The Rationalists saw human society in terms of a rational and perfectly comprehensible contract, made between abstractly identical Men, each of whom pursued the same abstract goal—whether this was power, profit, felicity, or freedom. The "political emancipation" produced by the bourgeois revolution, as Marx wrote in his essay, "On the Jewish Question," "is a reduction of man," a division and an abstraction, into two halves. "On the one hand," he is reduced "to a member of civil society," a selfish, materialistic individual. "On the other hand," he is reduced "to a *citizen,* to a moral person," but one who practiced a purely abstract, sentimental morality without reference to the actual world. But the Romantics were committed to uniting these two halves of actual, particular men, in their quest to fulfill their needs, satisfy their desires, develop all their talents and capacities, be the best and most

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(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 205-06

[14] For Marx's call for the "social republic," see "Civil War in France, *Marx-Engels Reader,* p. 631. For the eighteenth century critique of "consensus theory," see Marshall Berman, *Politics of Authenticity* (New York: Athaeneum, 1970), p. 14.

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authentic selves they could be in the eyes of themselves and others, as they freely chose to be. "Human emancipation," Marx envisioned, "will only be complete when the real, individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a" whole, full-rounded and realized "*species-being.*"[14]

Thus the Romantics understood society, not as a rational contract among abstract monads, but instead as a social and thus unpredictable drama. For the Romantics, "drama" meant conflict, individual diversity, spontaneity, and mystery. The Romantics argued that while the passionate, heroic mind could grasp and mold social reality, it could never exhaust or reproduce its riches in the realm of pure, rational thought. Thus, as Goethe illustrated brilliantly in his *Faust* drama, for the Romantics, true living was striving rather than achieving.[15]

Science and rationality were definitely part of the Romantics' worldview. But these, by themselves, were insufficient. What Romantics, such as Schiller, Blake, Thoreau, Melville, along with Marx and Mumford, all sought to do was to *re-integrate* the different spheres of society. The Romantics' main *enemy* was division: the division of labor which deadened the worker, the division of the city against the rural countryside, the division of classes, with a ruling class appropriating the fruits of science, technology, culture, and labor itself, while the majority suffered, were

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[15] Marx, "On the Jewish Question," *Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 46.
[15] Garraty and Gay, p. 863.

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manipulated, and remained uncultured.[16] The Romantics displayed increasing concern with the plight of the actual working, exploited and alienated men in bourgeois society. As Fichte put it, in "The Closed Commercial State" (1800): "Man should work, but not as a beast of burden. . . . He shall work without fear, with delight and with joy, and shall have some leisure time to raise his mind and his eye to the heavens. . ."[17]

The Past as Nostalgia, as Inspiration, as a Basis for Radical Historical Critique

For the Rationalists, with their faith in scientific progress, history and society were not something with which to unduly concern oneself. As he did for the common people, Voltaire expressed only contempt for the medieval past. The Romantics, however, saw the past in the present. They believed that the present could only be understood by understanding how it arose out of the past. Thus the positive meaning of the medieval society, institutions, and Christianity for human progress had to be understood rather than discounted.

This positive approach toward the past could take on various colorings, however, among the Romantics themselves. Novalis, for one reactionary example, transformed the medieval past into a golden age. Other Romantics, however, argued for a position beyond both Voltaire and Novalis, for a view of the past as inspiration.

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[16] Schenk, p. 27; Staughton Lynd, *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 92-95.
[17] Johann Fichte, "The Closed Commercial State," *Political Thought of the German Romantics*, ed. H. S. Reiss (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955), pp. 91-92.

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Coleridge wrote that "assuredly the way to improve the present is not to despise the past: it is a great error to idolize it, but a still greater to hold it in contempt."[18] Coleridge and Wordsworth believed that there was something to be learned from the past: the medieval past before their own time, the personal past that still lived in the heart of every man. By dismissing either the historical, social past or the personal, childhood past as worthless, they argued, we cut ourselves off from understanding the feelings and attitudes that still shape the present, and from the "joy and tenderness" with which we need to have toward our own inner selves.[19]

Yet a third approach toward the past arose: a radical critique of existing institutions as oppressive and unsatisfactory for the masses of men. The radical critique employed history to pierce the veil of mystification surrounding present-day institutions. It aimed to expose their oppressive nature by interring their oppressive historical origins. This view would profoundly affect Mumford's thought.

"To be radical," the young Marx wrote, "is to grasp things by the root. But for man the root is man himself." Thus radicalism must "overthrow all those conditions in which man is an abased, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible being. . . ." Marx counterpoises radicalism to the religious conception. Religion puts God rather than man at the center of man's ethical universe, and traces man's suffering to God's divine plan. But suffering, Marx wrote, was the result of social conditions. Thus anti-

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[18] Coleridge, Lecture IX, delivered at the "Crown and Anchor," Strand, London on 22 February 1819, cf. *The Philosophical Lectures Hitherto Unpublished*, ed. Kathleen Coburn [London 1949], p. 265; cf. Schenk, p. 40.

[19] See Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: Norton, 1991), pp. 88-89.

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religious radicalism, Marx writes, leads directly to social analysis. These oppressive social conditions themselves must be "rooted" in their institutional origins in order to be "overthrown." It must be shown, against the religious conception, that these social conditions are a product of human rather than God-given design. But then another problem presents itself: the problem of mystification or reification of these social institutions. Men have become accustomed to these oppressive institutions. They have adapted to them, accepted them in turn as God-given, or as "natural." These institutions, no matter how oppressive, also function in some small or illusory way to serve men. For example, the state preserves order, and may even provide a welfare check: the crowded, polluted mega-city still is better than rural idiocy because it provides some level of urbane society. Thus, intent upon exposing the fundamental evil of present-day institutions, the radical critic must perform a third "rooting." He must root men's understanding of these institutions in their historical origins. He must show the oppressive *motive* that motivated other, ruling class *men* to create these institutions, and why such men maintain and defend these institutions to this day. In this way, the religious counsel of acquiescence in one's misery can be dispelled. Misery can be traced back to an historical human origin, so that the human beings who are most oppressed by these miseries, conditions, and institutions, the proletarian "class with radical chains," may act to liberate themselves from their degradation.[20]

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[20] Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right:* Introduction," *Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Tucker, p. 60-65.

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Alongside the burgeoning radicalism of the artisan and then proletarian movements of the early nineteenth century, the radicals of the Romantic period, including Blake, Godwin, Shelley, the young Hegel, Feuerbach, and Marx and Engels, developed this analysis into a sophisticated tool for comprehending the institutions of class society and capitalism. Ultimately, Marx would develop this tool to become historical materialism.[21] According to Marx, the basic institutions and policies of present-day capitalist society—the free market, the hierarchical state, imperialism and the wars it led to, the industrial system, and, as we shall develop later, the modern metropolis—are institutions set up and maintained in the way they are in order to permit the ruling class to exploit and oppress the producing classes. Such institutions are therefore destructive of human beings and of nature, and create intolerable contradictions in modern society. Thus they cannot be reformed in order to serve those oppressed classes instead. As Marx says about the hierarchical state, these institutions must be "smashed" instead, if these classes are to liberate themselves from this oppression. To believe that they can be reformed instead to serve the oppressed classes is a delusion, fostered by the ruling class itself as well as privileged sectors of the working and middle classes—what Lenin called the "aristocracy of labor," the trade union leaders and their political and intellectual allies. As we have seen, like Lenin, Mumford himself characterized this misleadership in *Technics and Civilization* as a "sessile bureaucracy" whose overthrow was necessary for working class revolution.

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[21] See Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*.

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Because the concept of an historical or "genetic" critique is so complex, it is easy to caricature it and thus dismiss it. Therefore, we should deal with some possible objections. For example, Marx, Engels, and Mumford do not mean to imply that, in the future socialist society, there will be no state, no industry, no cities, etc. To take the state as an example, Marx argues that the working class will need a state to suppress its class enemies. But this will be a different kind of state—a radically democratic republic. And as we will see, while Marx, Engels and Mumford attacked the present, gargantuan form of the modern city, they proposed an alternative: what Ebenezer Howard called the "garden city."

Nor does the radial critic mean to argue that these institutions, as alienating and as contradictory as they are, contribute nothing to human progress. Capitalism itself, as Marx says in his *Communist Manifesto*, contributes enormously to increase, expand, and refine the forces of production. Industrial factories, no matter how horrid their conditions, discipline the proletariat. The modern metropolis destroys rural idiocy. It civilizes vast numbers of people. And, precisely by concentrating the proletariat, the metropolis makes the workers capable of revolution. But a revolution, against what? Against the oppressive conditions of capitalism, yes. But also, against the oppressive conditions of the congested mega-city. And so on. Mumford himself discusses how the luxuries of the baroque palace, such as beer and pleasure gardens, spread to the working masses in the early great cities, raises their expectations,

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civilizes them, whets their collective appetite for a more sensual public life.[22] The fact that such institutions at one time or otherwise partially serve human progress should not blind us, however, to their fundamentally oppressive nature. That is precisely the blindness, the mystical halo around such institutions, which the radical critique is designed to dispel.

I would like now to discuss the European Romantics' attitude toward the big city. Like the city itself, the romantic tradition of Mumford has been fiercely contested terrain. Morton and Lucia White, two of the liberal realists whom we met in our introduction, convinced many of their generation and after that while almost every American intellectual was an "anti-urban pastoralist" or "patrician," every European intellectual was pro-metropolitan.[23] Since we will encounter their distortion of this tradition again and again throughout this chapter, perhaps we should digress to discuss the history of the Whites' post-war liberal realist political position, alternatively known as "centrist."

The Centrist Tradition

"Centrist" intellectuals like Morton White, Daniel Bell, Sidney Hook, Lionel Trilling, Nathan Glazer, and Irving Kristol, had been socialist in the radical 30s. But they became disillusioned and demoralized by the Hitler-Stalin pact, the revelations about Stalinist atrocities, and the McCarthyite witchhunts. In flight from the "extremes" of both Left and Right, they allied themselves with the New Deal

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[22] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, 111-13.

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bureaucracy and thus with what Paul Goodman called its 50s and 60s successor: the "organized system." In the process, according to Alan Wald, "the views of former revolutionaries came into harmony with the dominant ideology, typified by Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s *The Vital Center* [1949]." These new "managerial intellectuals," as Lewis Feuer sardonically described them, now assumed that the achievements of the New Deal welfare and regulatory state were permanent. They argued that these achievements had themselves resolved the economic problems of the Great Depression, and that they were the product of the "experimental" and "pluralistic" attitude of Roosevelt, his "Brain Trust," and the new, "scientifically" administered, corporate liberal capitalist system then created. They assumed that Keynes had been proven right, that the capitalist economy had gone out of whack because the state had not previously stepped in to balance consumption against production. They dismissed, as "ideological," the older Marxist explanations. Marx and his followers saw such crises as inevitable, as intrinsic to the capitalist system itself.[24] They saw

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[23] Morton and Lucia White, p. 2, *et alia*.

[24] Early in his career, Marx had explained such crises as the result of an inevitable tendency toward "overaccumulation." Later, he explained them as due to a rising "organic," i.e., technical composition of capital, a rise in competition, and a consequent fall in the rate of profit. Ultimately, this fall, Marx believed, would result in periodic economic disasters, which could only be resolved if competition could be cut, and technology and labor costs cheapened, through the devastation of depression and war. Since the 1930s, Marxists have explained the resolution of the crisis as due to the expansion of the war economy, the destruction of international competition, and the extension of the U.S. Empire during the Depression and World War II. See Thomas Ferguson, "Industrial Conflict and the Coming of the New Deal: The Triumph of Multinational Liberalism in America," in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, eds. Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 3-31.Howard Brick, *Daniel Bell and the Decline of Intellectual Radicalism*, p. 218n; Karl Marx, vol. III, part 3, *Capital* (New York: Random House, 1981), pp. 317-78; Allen Oakley, *Marx's Critique of Political Economy: Intellectual Sources and Evolution, 2 vols.* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1984-85). Paul Mattick, *Marx and Keynes: The Limits of the Mixed Economy* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1969), and see the recent confirmation of the Marxist falling-rate-of-profit theory by Robert Brenner, in his issue-length article, "The Economics of Global Turbulence: Uneven

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the economic reforms initiated by the New Deal as merely a means employed by the ruling class in order to pacify a potentially revolutionary working class—until the next, inevitable economic crisis, when these reforms would be withdrawn and unemployment, poverty, etc. would once again soar.

Schlesinger acknowledged that the mass working-class and popular militancy of the period had something to do with the creation of this welfare state. But for Schlesinger, the economic depression only "accelerated" the "pragmatic" intellectual program of the New Deal intellectuals, which had been brewing among American intellectuals for quite some time. The depression also encouraged a willingness on the part of politicians like Roosevelt to adopt these intellectuals' "experimental" method.[25]

By employing the the term "experimental," Schesinger encourages us to think about the processes of social change as one might think about physical processes. The problem with adopting this view is that it leads us to ignore the social and economic context these "experiments." We obscure the class context: the fact that they are conducted, ultimately, the better to exploit us and to maintain what Marx called the social system of "mutual swindling and mutual plundering."[26] We assume that the results of these experiments are permanent, and thus assume that their economic

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Development and the Long Downturn in the Advanced Capitalist Economies from Boom to Stagnation, 1950-1998," *New Left Review* 229 (May/June 1998).

[25] Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "Sources of the New Deal," in *Paths of American Thought*, edited by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and Morton White (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1963), pp. 372-91.

[26] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," section on "The Meaning of Human Requirements," *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 93.

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basis—capitalism—is as fundamentally stable as such natural phenomena as planets or stars. We assume that capitalism may be permanently stabilized because our "experiments" have merely served to stabilize a system whose intractable tendencies to crisis have, for the moment, run their usual, disastrous cyclical course.[27]

As a result of this confusion, the intellectuals situated around Schlesinger's "vital center" became defenders of the new "liberal" capitalism, regulated by economic "experts," ameliorating the harshness and economic anarchy of the old *laissez-faire* system.

Civilization vs. Nature

Along with Communists, socialists, Trotskyists, anti-war activists and student dissidents, etc. these liberal "centrists" opposed radicals like Mumford, who criticized the new bureaucratic capitalism, its technological excesses and destruction of nature, its mega-cities, its imperialism, etc., in the name of regional socialism. Purportedly, these radicals threatened what Freud called "the return of the repressed," the barbaric, "irrational" "ideology" of the past, against which postwar liberal capitalism supposedly represented a bastion of progress, rationality, and "civilization." As I wrote in my introduction, the decentrist utopians like Mumford also threatened, in the paranoid mindset of liberal urban realists like the Whites, to aid and abet the forces that were destroying the old mega-urban centers in favor of the suburban exodus. As

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[27] Technological improvement, producing fall in the rate of profit, creating fall in the mass of profit, creating general crisis, depression, world war, lowering of costs and elimination of international competitors, and then, if the capitalists are lucky—if socialist revolution has not been successful or if the world has not finally devolved into barbarism--another round of accumulation, technological improvement, etc. See Mattick, *Marx and Keynes*.

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Peter Biskind, cultural historian of the 1950s, writes, Cold-War pluralists adopted and promoted a polarized ontology of "civilization" and "culture, with which they identified their own centrist position, against "nature," which they characterized as savage and identified with their extremist opponents. This opposition was conceived as a war to the death of one of the antagonists. The taming or even destruction of actual, environmental nature; or the marginalization or extermination of extremist opponents (especially, Communist insurgents) was therefore always justified, because they "threatened to disrupt or destroy or destroy culture."[28]

This liberal realist animus harks back to the primal animus in Western and particularly American culture, which portrays "civilization" and civilized virtues purely as urban. As literary critic Leslie Fiedler and historian Richard Slotkin have described, the divine mission of civilization, in this ideology, is to "tame" a primitive "wilderness," along with its "romantic" admirers and "infidel" or "savage" inhabitants.[29]

The Centrists' Defense of Capitalist Popular Culture

The centrists also attacked Leftist radicals for allegedly ignoring the real needs of the masses, needs that could be addressed, they alleged, by the new welfare state, mass culture, and consumerism. The radicals attacked these things as basically a sop to keep the masses quiet. Unlike the popular culture that the radicals desired, mass

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[28] Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), p. 106.
[29] Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Dell, 1966), pp. 160-61; Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Wesleyan: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).

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culture and consumerism failed to ennoble anyone. As we shall see in this chapter, this critique of actual popular culture and consciousness had extensive roots in the history of American radicalism, stretching back to Ralph Waldo Emerson. In any case, during the 1930s, when these 50s centrists had been radical themselves, they viewed radicalism as the best representative of and fighter for the genuine interests and needs of the masses. Now, in reaction to the radicals' critique of mass culture, they branded radicals elitist and insensitive instead.[30]

As we shall discuss, there is an element of truth to such allegations about American intellectuals, even the most democratic ones, like Jefferson, Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, or Mumford. Emerson was certainly racist, Hawthorne's and Melville's support for the demos had a paternalistic edge, Mumford's condemnation of lowbrow culture (what Mumford called "Broadway"), like Macdonald's, was a bit too sweeping. But centrists like the Whites employed such allegations unfairly. They attacked some of the elitist, iconoclastic statements made by some of these thinkers—especially Henry Adam's notorious anti-Semitism--in order to smear all of them with the label of elitism. They seized upon these thinkers' critiques of mass culture as

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[30] See Alan Wald, *The New York Intellectuals,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), p. 8; Terry A. Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals:* Partisan Review *and Its Circle* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), pp. 126-27, 146-95; Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Vital Center* (Boston, 1949); Richard Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), pp. 130-36; Howard Brick, *Daniel Bell and the Decline of Intellectual Radicalism* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986). Lewis Feuer is quoted from his introduction to a 1950s edition of Marx and Engels' "Communist Manifesto" by Alexander Cockburn in his "Beat the Devil" column: titled "Commie Manifesto," *Nation,* June 15-22, 1998. And see the exchange of views on mass culture between such radicals as Bernard Rosenberg, Leo Lowenthal and Dwight MacDonald vs. liberals such as David White, Gilbert Seldes in Bernard Rosenberg and David

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manipulated and destructive, critiques that were sometimes excessive, but not without some foundation. They equated these critiques with contempt for the people who were manipulated, if not entirely, yet undeniably, by that culture. So, paradoxically, in the name of a (false) populism, they attacked genuine radicalism.

American Intellectual-Bashing

The Whites attack upon American intellectuals was part of a trend at the time, which had begun during the 30s among Morton Whites' Marxist "New York Intellectuals" associates, to lament that American intellectuals were incorrigibly anti-modernist and inferior to their European brethren.[31] More sensitive and genuinely Marxist critics like James Farrell, who hailed from Chicago, rejected such dismissals. Farrell saw the strengths and the possibilities of radical and populist intellectual traditions on this side of the Atlantic. He chose to see the parallels between American and European radical thought, to see how European modernist attitudes could infuse these native radical traditions, to celebrate the modernity of Dos Passos, Faulkner, Hemingway, and Dreiser.[32]

The trend of native-intellectual bashing continued, however, in the work, among others, of Gilbert Seldes in the 1950s. Seldes blamed American intellectuals for criticizing mass culture rather than trying to "improve" it.[33] Seldes made the

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Manning White, eds., *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America* (New York: MacMillan Press, 1957), pp. 3-26, 46-97.

[31] See Cooney, pp. 126-27, 146-95.

[32] See James Farrell, *The League of Frightened Philistines* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1945).

[33] Gilbert Seldes, "The People and the Arts," *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, eds. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, pp. 74-97. This is excerpted from Gilbert Seldes, *The Great Audience* (New York: Viking Press, 1951), pp. 250-84.

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dubious assumption that these same intellectuals could have improved mass culture by participating in it rather than carping about it, even though commercial and then corporate interests exclusively controlled it. Similarly, the Whites blamed most if not all American intellectuals throughout our history for the demise of the big city because they criticized it rather than "loved" it, as the Whites alleged their European counterparts had done.

The Real European Romantics' Attitudes toward the Big City

The Whites provided no examples to substantiate their simplistic view that European intellectuals overwhelmingly "loved" the modern metropolis. Nor did they even attempt to show that this alleged "love" was responsible for the alleged relative success of the European metropolis, nor that the allegedly contrasting, "anti-urban" attitude of the archetypal American intellectual was responsible for the contemporary demise of the modern American metropolis. Nevertheless, their work has tended, to this day, to cower American intellectuals, to give them an inferiority complex, to get them to turn a deaf ear to radical critics of the big city and to their utopian, decentralist alternatives. But in fact, the Whites' argument, except for their

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In his *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963, Richard Hofstadter goes into great depth about the traditional bias in American life against intellectual thought. His blind spot, naturally, is the anti-intellectualism of his own post-war "centrist" camp. In Hofstadter's book, the "rise of the expert" (Chapter 8) is all to the American intellectual's good: for it creates a native American intelligentsia whose professionalism and pragmatism legitimates the general role of intellectuals in the eyes of the American public, despite right-wing conspiratorial fantasies to the controversy. But as the discourse of Seldes and the Whites reveal, these experts and their intellectual allies, interested because of their caste privilege in defending the post-war, liberal bureaucratic status quo, could be just as suspicious and demagogic toward *radical, critical, theoretical* intellectuals like Lewis Mumford and other socialists, as your "average man-in-the-street." See Andrew Polsky, *The Rise of the Therapeutic State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

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description of a few isolated pastoralists like Jefferson, James Fenimore Cooper, and Frank Lloyd Wright, and patricians like Henry Adams, amounts to utter nonsense. As I will attempt to show here, most American critics of the big city from Emerson to Mumford were neither "anti-urban" nor anti-democratic. They were simply anti-*mega*-urban. They were critical of the metropolis, not because they feared the poor, as the Whites alleged, but precisely because of the big city's deleterious effects *upon* the poor. Finally, as Burton Pike has shown, on the whole, most European intellectuals were just as critical of the big city as were the Americans, and for the same reasons. As Pike and Anselm Strauss, a far better historian of attitudes toward the big city in America, have shown, critics on both sides of the Atlantic were responding to an objective problem, for which they were obviously not responsible themselves.[34]

Carl Schorske has carefully analyzed the actual, contrasting attitudes in Europe toward the growing modern metropolis. There were certainly European intellectuals, according to Schorske, who favored the big city. But their opinions prevailed only among eighteenth century Rationalists. Voltaire's picture of the big city as a "city of virtue" celebrated the way in which the "industry and pleasure" of the new urban patrician class provided both employment to the rich and, allegedly, inspiration to the poor to advance themselves through hard work.[35] In London, the journal entitled the

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[34] Burton Pike, *Image of the City in Modern Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981); Anselm Strauss, *Images of the American City* (New York: The Free Press, 1961). See also Irving Howe, "The City in Literature," *Commentary*, May 1971, pp. 61-68.

[35] Carl E. Schorske, "The Idea of the City," *Thinking With History: Explorations in the Passage to Modernism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 38-39. For a similar account of Voltaire's ideas, see Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 144. Pike reveals that even

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Spectator, authored and edited by Addison and Steele, shared and promoted this ideology, what we might call the ideology of "urban uplift." But even in the title of their journal, Addison and Steele revealed the limitations of this ideology. As Wyn Kelley describes this discourse, the 18th century, middle class urban "spectator's extraordinary flexibility gains him access to the worlds of fashion, commerce, theater, family, government, and even the suburbs, yet only because he defines himself, though ironically, as an observer rather than a participant in these worlds. . . ." The spectator, even as he pretends to reveal the secrets of the city for the benefit of his middle class audience, distances himself from the economic and existential misery of the lower classes. It is only through such distancing that the spectator may sustain his vision of the real existing city, in all its squalor, as "an ideal city, a great capital."[36] This strategy of deliberate denial seems to be precisely the "pro-urban" "myth" which the Whites seek to promote as the "natural," i.e., healthy, attitude toward the mega-city. Later, we shall see how Jane Jacobs celebrates this strategy as well.

In the nineteenth century, few noteworthy intellectuals in Europe adopted this attitude. In nineteenth century America, however, this school developed a strong counterpart, if not among American intellectuals (As Kelley writes, Melville satirized it "savagely," especially in his early novels[37]), at least among the business class and even the working class. Among the very wealthy, there developed the tradition of

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Voltaire, in 1748, expressed a certain degree of ambivalence toward the modern city. In his *The World as It is,* Voltaire wrote about the city, "if everything isn't good, at least it's passable." See Pike, p. 32.

[36] Wyn Kelley, *Melville's City* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 62-65.

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urban patrician philanthropy. As Christopher Lasch writes, this was not all bad; with it, the wealthy "understood" that "wealth" carried "civic obligations. Libraries, museums, parks, orchestras, hospitals, and other civic amenities stood as so many monuments to upper class munificence." But as Lasch continues, "this generosity" also "had its selfish side: . . . Civic boosterism amounted to good business in an age of intense competition among cities, each aspiring to preeminence."[38]

As a form of promotion, civic boosterism denied key aspects of industrial urban reality. In his novel of urban development in the Midwest of the nineteenth century, *The Magnificent Ambersons,* Booth Tarkington writes about the "idealists"--an alliance of factory owners and local merchants, who mott was "'The more dirt, the more prosperity'. They drew patriotic, optimistic breaths of the flying powdered filth of the streets, and took the foul and heavy smoke with gusto into the profundities of their lungs. 'Boost, Don't Knock!'"[39]

As Anselm Strauss reports, this civic boosterism among the bourgeoisie was complemented among the American working class by a myth of "urban opportunity." It drove people to the city in droves, in search of jobs and a better life. The Whites charge at the beginning of their book that American intellectuals had sinned because they had failed to create such a pro-metropolitan "mythology or mystique." But according to Strauss, this myth was just as and perhaps and even more popular than

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[37] Kelley, pp. 70, et passim.
[38] Christopher Lasch, "Introduction: The Democratic Malaise," *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: Norton, 1995), p. 4-5. For a fictional portrait of such families and their philanthropy, see Tarkington, *The Magnificent Ambersons.*
[39] Tarkington, *The Magnificent Ambersons*, p. 195.

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the older pastoral "myth of the garden" among the general populace in nineteenth century America.[40]

The attitude of the European Romantics, however, was far less sanguine than that of Voltaire. Like their intellectual counterparts across the Atlantic, the European Romantics saw the metropolis as a "city of vice." Rather than manufacture convenient fictions, as did the "plodding, ineffective 'reformers' of this period" and the "realists" of our own, the Romantics "really saw the world," as Catherine Bauer said about Engels' work on housing in the modern city, "and knew that it was not good."[41] They focused on the real miseries experienced by the poor in the big city. Mumford extended a note of gratitude to these thinkers in his autobiography. He mentions as noteworthy "Balzac, Hugo, Dickens, Dostoevsky, Zola, Gissing, and H.G. Wells," because, in their novels, they "depicted graphically . . the architectural and social disorders of contemporary urban civilization."[42]

Schorske divides this Romantic group into two wings. The first wing is "the city of the past": the ultimately reactionary "archaists." The archaists, according to Schorske, included "Coleridge, Ruskin, the pre-Raphaelites, Gustav Freytag in Germany, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy," who "firmly rejected the machine age and its modern megalopolis. In their respective ways, all sought a return to agrarian or small-town society."[43] These "Romantic anti-modernists" tended to discount the historical

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[40] See Strauss, pp. 167-98, Morton and Lucia White, p. 1.
[41] Catherine Bauer, *Modern Housing* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1934), p. 9.
[42] Mumford, *Sketches From Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982), p. 151.
[43] This is not entirely true—especially, not true about Dostoevsky. As Irving Howe writes, for Dostoevsky, in *Crime and Punishment*, the modern city is not just "the locale of the modern fever for

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necessity of a capitalist stage for human development, as well as even its positive achievements: technological advancement and urban social life.

The other wing of the critical school, however, was radical, the "city of the future." These were the "futurists," who "found their faith in the city as a civilizing agent severely strained by the spectacle of urban misery, but their melioristic thrust carried them over the chasm of doubt." Among the futurists, Schorske places socialists Marx and Engels, Emile Zola, and Emile Verhaeren. Raymond Williams places Gissing and H.G. Wells in this camp as well. Though they were not socialists like these other authors, we might also add progressive liberal humanists Hugo and Dickens. These "futurists" argued that out of the "degradation" of the city itself, as Schorske writes, "would arise the humanistic moral and scientific spirit to build a new society."[44] Like their American counterparts, these European radicals were no more "anti-urban" than they were anti-modern. Instead, they were simply anti-mega-urban and anti-capitalist. They understood and accepted the importance of modernity and urbanity to human society and happiness. But they refused to accept Megalopolis, any more than they accepted capitalism, as the proper form, or for that manner, as any kind of form, for the pursuit of these values, for the future. They saw Megalopolis and capitalism as historically limited, as serving their purpose in human

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mounting sensations; it "is also the emblem of Roskolnikov's possible redemption: it is the locale of men who share a community of suffering and may yet gain the ear of Christ." (Howe, pp. 63-64.) Ruskin idealized medieval Venice; just as Hugo celebrated medieval Paris. This would put them both in the camp, as discussed by Schorske in this essay, of Fichte, who celebrated the cities of the medieval German Empire. Schorske describes Fichte's medieval urban nostalgia as neither "archaic" nor "futuristic," but instead predating the division between these two camps.

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history, but unacceptable as its endpoint. Another, far better, form of society, city, and economy, was possible. They argued that this possibility must be grasped, and the present, bourgeois, mega-urban society, rejected.

This third, radical, progressive, anti-mega-urban "futurist" tendency within the Romantic camp, though it had a strong following in both Europe and, as we shall see, America, was a tendency which the Whites tried very hard to ignore. But despite the Whites' insinuation that he was a reactionary, Lewis Mumford belonged solidly to this tendency. This is not to say, however, that Mumford was as radical as the most radical among them: Marx and Engels, for example. Mumford had his share of conservative Romantic influences, as I would like now to discuss.

Conservative Romantic Influences Upon Mumford: I. Cultural Idealism

As Lukacs argued, the rational culmination of Romantic thought, I would argue, was the historical dialectics of Hegel and Marx; their notion that further human progress could only come through the "cunning of History": through the violent conflict of the industrial revolution, the socialist revolution. This was the ultimate synthesis of Enlightenment rationalism with the Romantics' far broader and more complex understanding of the world, of men, and their society.[45]

Most of the Romantics did not accept the materialist philosophy and analysis that would later inspire Marx's work, however. They agreed with the materialist left

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[44] Schorske, p. 48; Williams, "The City and The Future," *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 272-78.
[45] See George Lukacs, *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations between Dialectics and Economics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975; originally published in German in 1966).

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at the time that the world was going to hell because men were driven by selfish economic motives. But for the materialists, such as Fourier, the answer was to counterpoise a different system, still based on the human desire for Happiness, still based on economic motives and principles, but of a different, more socially harmonious order. The Romantics, however, sought to encourage men to reject the goal of Happiness itself, in favor of a "spiritual" goal, which they counterpoised to economics.[46] Many Romantics thus adopted a cultural idealist view of social change as opposed to a materialist approach. They hoped to persuade all classes of the superiority of their ideas, irrespective of the economic forces, conflicts, and crises that Marx and Engels saw at work in history.

II. Vitalism

As I have written, in the work of Marx and Engels, the Romantics' "organic" view of society culminated in a dialectical analysis of history and support for proletarian revolution. But in the work of some of the later nineteenth and twentieth century followers, especially in the work of Branford, Geddes, and Mumford himself, this organicism could degenerate instead into a mystical vitalism. As Lukacs argues, vitalism can be defined as the antithesis of the rational, dialectical, materialist strand of Romanticism in the work of Hegel and Marx. It is the notion that society, like nature, is not just complex: it is too complex to ever fully grasp its relations rationally. Any attempt to revolutionize society must therefore employ false

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[46] Schenk, p. 26.

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abstractions and lead to terrible calamities. Thus only gradual, evolutionary, change, led by a scientific middle class elite, could work. The scientific knowledge of this elite became, in the vitalist ideology, a kind of mystical intuition into the "organic" workings of society, which only the scientist, particularly the biological scientist, could hope to grasp.[47]

Vitalism also involves what Raymond Williams calls a celebration of the simple "virtues" and alleged clear-eyed vision "of the common [rural] people." Such people are allegedly immune, in the words of George Eliot, borrowing from German vitalist Riehle, from "sentiment," "theory," and "affection." According to Williams, this was a new "structure of feeling in which the earth and its creatures—animals and peasants almost alike—were an affirmation of vitality and of the possibility of rest in conscious contrast with the mechanical order, the artificial routines, of the cities." This valorization of rural people, rural life, and rural consciousness as "naturally superior" to that of urbanites and especially of urban intellectuals stems, according to Williams, from "the loss of a credible common [social] world" among urbanites under capitalism. This leads urban intellectuals, according to Williams, to look upon the past and the countryside with rose-colored glasses.[48]

Mumford exemplifies this pastoralist mode of thinking, and its concomitant scientific elitism, in the following passage from *The Culture of Cities*. At the end of

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[47] See Lukacs, *The Destruction of Reason* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1980, originally published in Germany in 1962), pp. 403-16, *et passim*. For a discussion of how Mumford's teacher Geddes inherited such attitudes from the Le Playist school (French sociologists Frederick Le Play and his disciple M. Edmond Demoulin) see Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 34-43.

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Technics and Civilization, as we have already seen, Mumford's organicism was still compatible with a call for proletarian rebellion and revolution against both the capitalists and the corrupt labor bureaucrats. In 1938, however, Mumford damned as "abstractions" any and all attempts, fascist, liberal, or socialist, to grapple intellectually with our current social problems. He writes that "we must" instead

> erect a cult of life: life in action, as the farmer or the mechanic knows it: life in expression, as the artist knows it: life as the lover feels it and the parent practices it: life as it is known to men of good will who meditate in the cloister, experiment in the laboratory, or plan intelligently in the factory or the government office.[49]

Vitalist W. H. Riehle was a forerunner of the modern ecology movement. In his 1853 essay, "*Field and Forest,*" he called upon people to fight for the "rights of wilderness." He was also, however, a pastoral reactionary, an anti-Semitic celebrant of rural peasant culture against industrialization and urbanization, a German nationalist, a forerunner of Nazism.[50] Yet in *Culture of Cities*, Mumford sees Riehl as a "valiant exception" to those who deal with "abstractions." By this, he meant not only the Marxist, "bare economic abstractions like the Capitalist Class or the Proletariat," or the bourgeois "legal abstractions, like Individual and State," but even such "cultural abstractions" as "the Folk," an abstraction which the *volkist* Riehle, clearly, did *not* abhor.[51] On p. 155 of *Culture of Cities*, Mumford quotes favorably

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[48] Williams, pp. 239-63.
[49] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, pp. 9, 11.
[50] For a discussion of these more sinister features, see Peter Staudenmaier, "Fascist Ecology: The "Green Wing" of the Nazi Party and its Historical Antecedents," in *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience*, Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier (San Francisco: AK Press, 1995), pp. 6-7.
[51] Ibid., p. 9.

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Riehle's attack on the Enlightenment's "impoverishment of the medieval "common community spirit."[52] In his bibliography, Mumford refers to Riehle as a "great cultural historian."[53] Not to say there can be no truth to Mumford's assertions. But the point is that Mumford says nothing negative about Riehle: nothing about his mysticism, nationalism, or anti-Semitism.

This uncritical affinity for vitalist ideology imparted a naive quality to Mumford's political views. For example, Mumford paid a visit to Germany shortly before the Nazis took over. Mumford referred to the rising Nazi menace, appropriately enough, as "maggots actively appropriating the dead flesh of the dynastic system." He argued that "Germany is in fact perhaps the one country in Europe that would be capable of instituting a complete communistic society without altering many of its fundamental attitudes without being terribly impeded by the weakness of the old order." "Whenever" he felt "a little upset (?!) by the blatant childishness and insanity of the middle class Nazis," Mumford writes, he "would think of the decent and self-respecting German worker, patient, methodical, perhaps a little stupid, but always honest; and I would be reassured." Mumford concluded by reassuring his readers that "At the bottom in Germany, there is sanity and strength."

There are some fine, working class, "basic communist" sentiments expressed here, no doubt. But there is also, as James Farrell wrote, a disturbing placidity, a faith also in the "social influence of the impoverished small nobility and the professors,"

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[52] Ibid., p. 155.
[53] *Ibid.*, p. 541.

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who have ensured that "pecuniary standards have never been solely dominant." In addition, Mumford assures us that "order, authority, technical ability and personal initiative are all" still "present in Germany." But Mumford's most important reason for believing that the Nazis would not take over, was seemingly, Weimar's culture of health, "of the body," popular sports, of sun-bathing, as well as its spirit of civic improvement.[54] As Farrell remarks, "In Germany of 1932, the momentous question of the hour was not nude sun bathing; it was—*state power*."[55] This brilliantly summarizes the problem with Mumford's vitalism. Mumford had a basic affinity for the working class and communism. But he had an unfortunate tendency to substitute an emphasis on ethical culture—in this case, the culture of modern hygiene—for a careful understanding of the nature of the class struggle. He had a vitalist penchant for damning the latter as an "abstraction," the former, as the "living reality." This makes him, in the eyes of a more serious Marxist thinker, like Farrell, something of a sap. And it set him up to become an uncritical apologist for imperialist war. A few years later, in his book supporting U.S. entry into World War II, the "sanity and strength" of the German working people became a culture which lacked a "long tradition of freedom." "The fundamental ideology of fascism," Mumford intoned, "was first formulated in the sermons, letters, and exhortations of Martin Luther." By focusing on culture to the exclusion of class struggle, Mumford could jump from a misplaced optimism about Germany's future to a fervent desire to kill those very

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[54] Lewis Mumford, "Notes on Germany," *New Republic*, October 26, 1932.
[55] James Farrell, "The Faith of Lewis Mumford, *Southern Review* 6, (Winter 1941): 417-38.

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same "patient, methodical, honest" German workers in which he had once placed his hopes. And in the same work, even as he moved from a prior celebration of German vitalism to damn all of German culture and society as irrational and proto-fascist, Mumford sought to create a new "organic" liberalism in America. This was a peculiar liberalism, much like the irrational vitalism he once championed and now condemned in German culture. It departed from First Amendment principles, upon which most if not all of the American liberal tradition is actually based, in the name of a mythical tradition, derived from a kind of Golden Age of "liberalism," manufactured largely by Mumford himself. This "organic" tradition would encourage the government to deny rights of free speech and privacy to suspected Nazis, And it would support Mumford in his efforts to vilify radical critics of the U.S. entry into World War II as too abstract-minded and weak-willed to deal with the challenge of Nazism.[56]

Aside from this extremely unfortunate episode, the vitalist currents in Mumford's thought still had value. They did indeed lead him to be wary of the abstractions, the idolatries of History and the Proletariat, into which the "orthodox" Marxist (who in reality had little to do with Marx's own supple and sensitive thought) usually fell. In the "organicist" tradition of Goethe, Marx, Ruskin, and Geddes, Mumford argued that planning and science, if they were to truly benefit Man, had to become sensitive to the ordinary needs of men, in their dependence upon nature and each other for their very survival as well as their happiness. As John Ruskin argued

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[56] Mumford, *Faith for Living* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1940), cf. Farrell. See also V. F. Calverton, "A Challenge to American Intellectuals," *Modern Quarterly* 5, (Winter 1930-31), pp. 407-

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against the tenets of classical political economy, in *Unto this Last* (1860), "THERE IS NO WEALTH BUT LIFE. Life, including all its powers of love, of joy, and of admiration. That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings. . . ."[57] Under the influence of this organicism, Mumford usually maintained his common sense. It led him to remain open to the environmental concerns of Marx and Engels themselves, if not their erstwhile followers. It led him, for example, to understand that mega-urban levels of stress, noise, pollution, and congestion can hurt us, or that our natural environment is not something we should harm if we ourselves wish to survive as a species.

As we will discuss, such pastoralism had a less benign effect upon the originator of Mumford's garden-city ideas: Ebenezer Howard, as well as William Morris. Howard and Morris were pastoralist enough to want the modern mega-city simply to rot. They were not interested in salvaging it.

Patrick Geddes, Mumford, and the rest of the RPAA did not follow Howard in this respect, however. Rather, as we shall discuss, they sought to rebuild the old mega-urban centers *as* they redistributed much of their populations to new garden city centers. And Howard himself was not really a reactionary. Howard's garden city scheme was urbanist and modernist. Howard, Geddes, and Mumford's garden cities were to have a vital social life, relying upon the latest technological developments, such as electricity and telephone communications. Neither Howard nor his followers

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21; Sidney Hook, "Metaphysics, War and Intellectuals," *Menorah Journal* 28 (August 1940), pp. 327-37.

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opposed modernity. Like the rest of the "futurists," including Marx and Engels themselves, they only opposed the present, extreme, toxic version of modernity: the modern, mainstream, irrational cults of Machine and Megalopolis, disguised as "rational," which celebrated technology and urbanism one-sidedly and promoted them at the expense of human life itself.

While their vision of garden cities was solidly modernist and futurist, the thought of Geddes and Mumford certainly had a streak of pastoralism in it. This pastoralism, along with their cultural idealism, moved their thought away from revolution into a reformist, "evolutionary" direction. The "evolution" they envisioned would be guided by a scientific elite.

III. The Evolutionary Road

Mumford shared Marx and Engels' commitment to a critical-historical analysis of present-day oppressive institutions. But as far as strategies for changing these, however, Mumford and his European teachers—Patrick Geddes and Victor Branford, Ebenezer Howard, as well as August Comte—were interested in the initial, evolutionary strain in Romantic thought instead of the revolutionary approach. Their notion was itself borrowed from the Enlightenment idea of Progress. It was articulated most clearly by the sociologist August Comte. Comte divided social processes into *social statics*, which maintained order in the society, and *social dynamics*, which created progressive social change. Comte agreed with Marx that the

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[57] John Ruskin, the "Ad Velorem" section of "Unto This Last," *The Genius of John Ruskin*, ed. John

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expansion of scientific knowledge and technological innovation was a spur to social change. However, Comte feared the class conflict that Marx welcomed. Comte believed that class conflict threatened rather than created progress. Comte argued that through the persistent promulgation of new and better ideology, science and technologies by a new, scientific elite, men could, as Condorcet had argued earlier, achieve a long-lasting harmony with nature and with each other

Mumford's mentors Patrick Geddes and Victor Branford (who were writing partners) adopted completely Comte's view of social processes as "static" and "dynamic," and his support for "evolutionary" progress through the ministrations of a disinterested scientific elite, rather than a revolutionary working class movement.[58] To some extent, as Christine Boyer and others have argued, so did Lewis Mumford and the RPAA. But as I hope to show in this paper, Boyer and others are wrong to argue that Mumford and the RPAA were completely captured by this evolutionary "discourse."[59] It competed, in fact, with Mumford's and the RPAA's more radical, rebellious, democratic leanings, especially during the Great Depression, when the Communist Party's "Popular Front" was in ferment.

D. Rosenberg (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 270.

[58] On the evolutionary theory of the Romantics, see Garraty and Gay, eds., pp. 865-66; On Comte, see Norman Goodman, *Introduction to Sociology* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), p. 6; and Alan Swingewood, *A Short History of Sociological Thought*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), pp. 40-46. On Geddes' indebtedness to Comte and his acceptance of social evolutionary theory, see Helen Meller, pp. 43-44, 60-63, and Patrick Geddes himself in his *Cities in Evolution*, excerpted in *Patrick Geddes: Spokesman for Man and the Environment*, Marshall Stalley, ed., (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1972), p. 140, *et alia*.

[59] See M. Christine Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1983), p. 197.

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The American Romantic Tradition

Though Mumford was profoundly influenced by European neo-Romantics like Geddes and Howard (whose work we shall discuss in more detail in Chapter 3) Mumford was American, and came out of the American school of radical, romantic thought. As we explore this tradition, however, we will see many parallels with the thought of the European Romantics.

The *antebellum* romantics such as Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, who called themselves the "Young Americans," initially shared Andrew Jackson's popular animus toward mercantilism, the state-chartered corporation and elitism. But as the commercial spirit, the competitive market, the capitalist corporation, and egoistic self-seeking prevailed, the intellectual became increasingly alienated from social life as well as from his democratic public. As Wilson Carey McWilliams relates, "the spread of literacy created a "an eager literary 'class'" of intellectuals who "gratified" by opportunities for "status," for recognition of their talents. But they were also "disturbed," for three reasons. Firstly, the "expansion of the 'reading public' made" the intellectual part of a "vast apparatus of publishers, copyrights, and commercial considerations." This meant that "literary livelihood" could only be "obtained at" the "cost of" the intellectual's "autonomy" as an artist. Secondly, it seemed to many intellectuals that the public upon whom they had become dependent exhibited a marked "lack of taste and critical judgment." Finally, whether they chose to pander to the crowd, or to remain aloof, they "could not ignore the fact that" their "work had little effects on the lives of men caught up in an expanding commercial society. Art

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and the mind had" lost its connection to most men's concerns and instead "become 'other worldly'. . . ".[60]

The intellectuals also noticed, especially in the Depression of 1836, the harsh toll that the new market took upon society. In New England, where these increasingly radicalized intellectuals predominated, according to MacWilliams, "Low-wage immigrant labor and child workers displaced former employees" and "affluence and a desire to escape personal responsibility led owners to migrate to cities leaving factories in the hands of "efficient" managers. . . .": an assessment shared by Herman Melville, among others at the time, in his novel *Pierre*. The regional artisan-agrarian economy was also destroyed, as "increasing competition from the national market forced agricultural prices down, put pressure on local merchants," and "deprived crafts of local monopolies." "The locality," MacWilliams concludes, "could no longer protect its own."[61]

The intellectuals responded to this alienation in various ways: ways similar to those adopted by their Romantic brethren in Europe. There were the religious revivalists: Deists such as Channing. There were the aristocratic nostalgists, like James Fenimore Cooper. But Cooper and his like, lacking a feudal tradition, pined for the old wilderness, and the elite brotherhood of male frontiersmen and Indians that they imagined there.

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[60] Wilson Carey McWilliams, *The Idea of Fraternity in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 229.
[61] McWilliams, p. 228.

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Then there were the pastoral Transcendentalists, led by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Like Wordsworth and Coleridge, the Transcendentalists sought a mystical union of the individual with nature. In nature, Emerson wrote, "all mean egotism vanishes [and] I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all: the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God."[62] Emerson represented, as Mumford wrote, the best of what America had to offer to human culture.[63] Emerson celebrated the well of creativity he felt lay in the heart of every man, once the shackles of the past, the old dogmas and repressions, were removed. His work inspired Nietzsche as well as John Dewey, Randolph Bourne, Mumford, and many others.

Though Emerson has been painted as a boundless, uncritical optimist, this is far from accurate. As McWilliams writes, Emerson did not reject his contemporary "environment of individualism, competition, and technological advance; he only desired to add to it a new state of mind."[64] Yet Emerson's thought reflected the profound ambivalence felt by intellectuals toward this *ante-bellum* American environment. While he upheld the "infinitude of the private man,"[65] he was greatly disappointed in the popular culture of his day. He wrote that his country was pervaded by "selfishness, fraud, and conspiracy," that the American people were a

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[62] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," *Selected Writings*, ed. William H. Gilman (New York New American Library, 1965), p. 129.
[63] Mumford, "Morning Star: Emerson," in *Interpretations and Forecasts: 1922-72* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973), pp. 17-34.
[64] McWilliams, p. 234.
[65] Emerson, *Emerson in His Journals*, ed. Joel Porte, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 236.

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"puny and feeble folk."[66] While he supported democracy, he hated the demagogues. He upholds radicalism, in general, but attacks "the spirit of our American radicalism" as "destructive and aimless; it is not loving; it has no ulterior and divine ends, but is destructive only out of hatred and selfishness. . . . [67]

Not atypically for his time, Emerson felt that the Irish, Indians, Chinese, and blacks were inferior to whites. Yet this racism did not stop Emerson from supporting the abolitionist movement. He was also a vocal critic of Jackson's removal of the Cherokee Indians from Georgia. Though Emerson thought the non-white races inferior, they were in his eyes still human, still worthy of freedom and dignity.[68] Emerson supported free trade, and was for most of the time, as Cornel West argues, blind "to the social misery of working people." Yet Emerson called capitalism "a system of selfishness . . . of distrust, of concealment, of superior keenness, not of giving but of taking advantage."[69] He decried the "loud cracks in the social edifice" produced by the depression of 1836: "Young men have no hope. Adults stand like daylaborers in the street. None calleth us to labor . . . the present generation is bankrupt of principles and hope, as of property."[70] He wrote that the "invasion of Nature by Trade . . . threatens to upset the balance of man and establish a new

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[66] Emerson, as quoted in Gay Wilson Allen, *Waldo Emerson* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), pp. 545, 381.
[67] Emerson, "Politics," *Selected Writings*, p. 354. By "radicalism," Jackson probably meant Jacksonian Democracy.
[68] See Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 28-35, 21.
[69] West, p. 23; Emerson, as quoted in Michael T. Gilmore, "Emerson and the Persistence of the Commodity," in *Emerson: Prospect and Retrospect*, ed. Joel Porte (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 67.

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Universal Monarchy more tyrannical than Babylon or Rome. Trade is the lord of the world nowadays—& government only a parachute to this balloon."[71]

And despite his racism, Emerson and his fellow Transcendentalists ultimately rejected the elitism of Cooper and Channing, in favor of a philosophy of democratic education. If indeed, as McWilliams writes, Channing was correct to argue that "only great men see through the delusions of physicality to the reality of fraternity, the Transcendentalist insisted that those great men could teach others." As Emerson wrote, "Men such as they are, very naturally seek money or power . . . And why not? For they aspire to the highest, and this, in their sleep-walking, they dream is highest." But the educator had but to "wake them, and they shall quit the false good, and leap to the true. . . This revolution is to be wrought by the gradual domestication of the idea of Culture. The main enterprise of the world for splendor, for extent, is the upbringing of man."[72]

According to McWilliams, Emerson's student Henry David Thoreau was not as mystical as Emerson. While there is certainly a strong streak of mysticism in Thoreau's nature writings, Thoreau emphasizes instead man's need to recognize his mortality and his limitations. While Emerson, as we have seen in the above quote, sought transcendence in an "egoless" detachment from the petty concerns of capitalist society, he often confused this with the arrogant egotism of the new American

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[70] Emerson, as quoted by Allen in *Waldo Emerson*, p. 293; and by Gilmore, " Emerson and the Persistence of the Commodity," *Emerson: Prospect and Retrospect*, p. 73.
[71] Emerson, *Emerson in His Journals*, p. 403.
[72] Emerson, "American Scholar," *Selected Writings*, p. 236.

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imperialism.[73] But Thoreau completely rejected such identification, and deepened Emerson's embryonic critique of capitalist society. Thoreau criticized property accumulation, the state, chattel and wage slavery, the shallowness of popular culture, and the diminishment of local, face-to-face village community and regional culture in favor of the growing big city and its impersonality.[74] Echoing Emerson, Thoreau recognized that capitalism was putting new shackles upon self-development, freedom and upon life itself. Sounding like Emerson, as quoted above, but also, much like Marx's essay in the early 1840s, "On the Jewish Question," Thoreau wrote, "Even if we grant that the American has freed himself from a political tyrant he is still the slave of an economical and moral tyrant."

But Thoreau turns this critique of capitalist economics, of slavery, and of imperialism back into a critique of personal morality and of culture, rather than the analysis of "social forces," and the hint of a revolutionary strategy, with which Marx concludes his discussion of the same topic. For Thoreau continues, "Now that the republic—the *res publica*—has been settled, it is high time to look after the *res privata*—the private state. . . ." He then concludes: "The chief want in every State. . . (is) high and earnest purpose in its inhabitants. . . . When we want culture more than potatoes and illumination more than sugar-plums, then . . . the result, is not slaves, but men."[75]

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[73] See West, pp. 11-28.
[74] McWilliams, p. 297, referring to Henry David Thoreau, *Writings*, vol. II, pp. 50, 92, 250, 312, 321, vol. VI, pp. 157, 300; *Journal*, vol. V, pp. 310-11.
[75] Thoreau, "Life Without Principle," *Atlantic Monthly* XII (1863), pp. 484-95; cf. McWilliams, p. 295.

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For the intellectual development of later admirers of such thinking, such as Mumford, this is both good and bad. It tends to lead later American radicalism away from the social analysis and revolutionary ideas of Marxism, into cultural idealism and the belief that social change can be had merely by refocusing consumer demand, which, as we shall see, Mumford was wont to argue. This fudges on the question of class and social agency altogether. It attributes social evils to the consumer rather than to the capitalist, and simultaneously holds the consumer rather than the revolutionary worker responsible for righting these wrongs. Thus, since such an approach is eminently impractical, it often leads simply to resignation. When nothing happens, when few if any people get the moralistic message one is trying to put out there, one is tempted to throw up one's hands in disgust at the "perpetual cussedness of human nature," to quote Mumford himself in the *Story of Utopias,*[76]. And this path of weary, baffled resignation is one that we see Mumford take by the 1960s, as I noted in the introduction.

On the other hand, Thoreau's line of thinking here had its positive side as well. For, as I wrote before, it makes American radicals like Mumford, or Dewey, or many others, wary of the quasi-religious faith exhibited by the orthodox Marxist in grand sociological abstractions, like History or the Proletariat (Trotsky comes to mind): these great *deus ex machina* that will supposedly deliver the goods without the necessity of self-reflection or critical thought. As I mentioned before, this aversion

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[76] Lewis Mumford, *The Story of Utopias* (New York: Viking Press, 1962, originally published 1922), p. 251.

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can deteriorate into a mystical vitalism, which shuns all consideration of social forces as too rationalistic. But it also can lead us, as I wrote before, to an ecological awareness that the rationalist liberal or "orthodox" Marxist usually shuns. It can also lead us to ask important questions about popular culture, equally ignored by these people. Beyond all the platitudes, what is the actual state of popular consciousness? What role do the proletariat and the poor play in their own oppression—subjectively speaking, that is? It leads us to a critique of the problems with that consciousness, to an understanding of how people can be manipulated to support their own domination and exploitation, and to strategies for freeing people from this intellectual manipulation.

As Wilson Carey McWilliams writes, Thoreau's desire (much like Mumford's) was to "redirect the state and its citizens, to shift the goal of politics from the purposes of commerce and the machine to the goal of human development." For Thoreau, the popular culture and consciousness of his era reflected a lack of such development. The mere fact that there had occurred, as Marx was later to write, a "political revolution," for the sake of political freedom, had not created by itself a revolution in spiritual development. The "gregariousness" of "the American" had certainly been developed, but not his "intellect." Thus, according to Thoreau, he had "dwindled into an Odd Fellow," a philistine, whose primary goal in life was not really fraternity or freedom, but security, who "ventures to live at all only by the aid of the

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mutual insurance company, which had promised to bury him decently."[77] The American, or so the theme of much of Thoreau's work runs, typically valued the accumulation of goods for mere life, over the good life, for himself and for his fellow man. Thus, as is hinted in the above quoted passage, even slavery and imperialism could be tolerated: for did it not cheapen the price of "potatoes" and "sugar plums" for the consumer?[78]

Thoreau wrote, "I wish to speak a word for Nature. . . . I wish to make an extreme statement. . . . for there are enough champions of civilization." On the basis of such statements, critics such as Morton and Lucia White claimed that Thoreau was an "assailant of civilization."[79] But this interpretation, which is fairly prevalent, is incorrect. Instead, Thoreau attacked the "savagery" with which our *present* civilization assaulted, repressed, and destroyed our environmental as well as our own human, subjective nature. As I discussed earlier, like many of their generation of post-war liberal "centrists," the Whites assumed that if you supported civilization, you supported mega-urban expansion and the repression and destruction of nature—if you didn't, you were a barbarian. But Thoreau attacked this destruction in the name of civilization itself. Thoreau noticed that present civilization recreates savagery, in the form of poverty and environmental destruction. Sounding strikingly like Marx's writings on the misery of big city housing for the workers in his *Economic and*

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[77] Thoreau, "Life Without Principle," *ibid.*
[78] See Mumford, excerpt from his *The Golden Day,* in his *Interpretations and Forecasts,* pp. 39-44.
[79] Morton and Lucia White, pp. 30-31.

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Philosophical Mss. of 1844 (which we will discuss in Chapter 3)[80], Thoreau wrote, "In the large towns and cities, where civilization especially prevails, the number of those who own a shelter is a very small fraction of the whole. The rest pay an annual tax for this outside garment of all, wigwams, [which] keep[s] them poor as long as they live. Thoreau notes the irony of calling this situation "civilized": "On the one side is the palace, on the other are the almshouse and 'silent poor.' . . . It is a mistake to suppose that, in a country where the usual evidences of civilization exist, the condition of a very large body of the inhabitants may not be as degraded as that of savages."[81]

As Wilson Carey McWilliams has written,

> Thoreau's quarrel with civilization, in fact, lay in his charge that civilization was insufficiently civilized. Modern civilization forgot the permanent existence of the savage in man, which can still be discovered when we "dredge down into the murk" of man's nature. Fascinated with technological achievements and institutional restraints, civilization has not overcome the savage; it has not changed man's motives or desires. Hence, though it may outwardly have restrained savagery, civilization has placed the savage "at the place of honor" as source of the motive power of life and society. The very accomplishments of civilization, consequently, make it more dangerous than barbarism.[82]

The ideal civilization, Thoreau hinted, would attempt to master the savagery of our human and environmental nature without destroying or exploiting either for

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[80] See Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 94-95.
[81] Thoreau, "Walden," *Writings*, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1906), pp. II, 33, 38. Cf. Staughton Lynd, *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism*, p. 95.
[82] McWilliams, p. 292; quoting and referring to Henry David Thoreau, *Writings*, vol. I, pp. 55-56, vol. II, pp. 44, 132, 236, 242, 315, 320, 368; *Journal* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906), vol. I, pp. 253, 337-338, vol. XI, pp. 212, 410-412, 424-425.

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shortsighted gain. This social and ecological critique is the kernel of American romantic radicalism. We will see it in the work of Melville, and in the work of Mumford. As Mumford argued, for example, in 1922 for Harold Stearns' symposium, *Civilization in the United States,* "our metropolitan civilization is not a success. It is a different kind of wilderness from that which we have deflowered—but the feral rather than the humane quality is dominant: it is still a wilderness."[83]

Though Thoreau went beyond Emerson with this social and ecological critique of Western civilization, he did not transcend Emerson's individualism. In place of Emerson's market-friendly, boundlessly optimistic faith in the individual, Thoreau substituted an individual moralism. He only counseled withdrawal to the woods and civil disobedience against the evils of present civilization. Against the Emersonian ideal of "transcendent," pure individualism, other intellectuals of the nineteenth century came to promote the ideal of a "transcendent community."[84]

Nathaniel Hawthorne further developed upon Thoreau's critique, to argue that the big city represented a threat to community. In his work, *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846), he argued that the urban poor suffered from "the tainted breath of cities, scanty and unwholesome food, destructive modes of labor and the lack of those moral supports which might partly have counteracted such bad influences."[85] In his *Atlantic Monthly* article "Outside Glimpses of English Poverty" (1863), Hawthorne

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[83] Mumford, "The City," *Civilization in the United States: An Inquiry by Thirty Americans,* ed. Harold E. Stearns (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1922), p. 20.
[84] Raymond Jackson Wilson, *The Quest for Community: Social Philosophy in the United States, 1860-1920* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1968), pp. 1-31.

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later argued that in the big city, the poor suffered a "diseased flaccidity of hope" and a "chill depression of the spirits." While "it is beyond the resources of Wealth"—the rich people who live there—to keep the "smoke," "dirt," and "smut," physical as well as moral, "away from its premises or its own fingers' ends," "Poverty"—the poor—given their relative lack of economic and cultural resources, tend to resign themselves to this "smut" of urban living "without a struggle."[86]

Like the other authors in the Romantic tradition, Hawthorne can be accused of a paternalistic moralism here. But readers ought to notice what the Whites never admit about Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, or many other American intellectuals. The Whites would have us believe that the animus of intellectuals like Hawthorne toward the metropolis was motivated *primarily* by a patrician disdain for the poor or by an aesthetic distaste for the ugliness of the modern city.[87] But such passages make clear that, in his case, as in Thoreau's case, this animus was motivated primarily by his *concern* for the poor's physical and economic welfare. Notice also the connection that Hawthorne makes earlier in the passage between the big city and the alienated and degraded conditions of modern, proletarian labor. This is a connection that Melville, Marx, and Mumford also noticed, as we will see.

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[85] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1900), volume I, pp. 22-245; cf. McWilliams, op cit., p. 315.
[86] Hawthorne, "Outside Glimpses of English Poverty," *Atlantic Monthly*, XII (July 1863), p. 36, 42. Since "smut" this has come to narrowly connote pornography, I think the Yiddish *schmutz* better captures Hawthorne's meaning. For he uses it here interchangeably with "dirt," "smoke" as well as "dark influence."
[87] This latter, aesthetic disdain is in fact what the Whites' attribute to Hawthorne to exclusively explain his "anti-urbanism." See *Intellectual vs. the City*, pp. 41-46.

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Hawthorne also developed Thoreau's criticisms of Emerson's eternal optimism and faith in the individual and the competitive market. After Emerson had done his best to dismiss the concept from our consciousness, Hawthorne reintroduced the concept of sin back into American literature, most noteworthily in *The Scarlet Letter*. But Hawthorne's concept was far more secular that that of the Puritans. He defined sin as the individual's "desire," as McWilliams paraphrases him, "to be independent of others and of the world, expressed" in such a way as to demand "that others submit to the will and desire of the self."[88] Thus Hawthorne's concept of sin contained a critique, not only of prideful rebels like Hester Prynne, but hypocrites like her secret lover, the Reverend Dimmesdale, the supposed pillar of the Puritan community.

With his portrayal of Dimmesdale, not to mention his evil tormentor, Dr. Chillingsworth, Hawthorne attacked the old Puritan belief that social and economic success was a sign of divine grace. In the *Scarlet Letter* and other works, Hawthorne hinted that all was not right with American *ante-bellum* society. In the main, Hawthorne counseled Americans to embrace communal virtues such as trust, honesty and humility. But Americans of the Jacksonian era, increasingly engulfed as they were in the competitive market, felt increasing ambivalence about the wisdom of placing trust in their fellows. The understandable response was to seek to dominate, trick, or exploit others before they did the same to you, to anxiously seek physical and financial security at the expense of one's ideals or heartfelt desires. Hawthorne's concept of sin was a sin against community; but the community itself was now

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[88] McWilliams, p. 308.

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appeared as a "confidence" game, as Melville would later portray it in his novel, *The Confidence Man.*

Following closely in the footsteps of his friend Hawthorne, Herman Melville, about whom Lewis Mumford wrote one of the first great biographies, was perhaps the most brilliant and most radical intellectual of this period in America. Like Thoreau, Melville offered a "ruthless critique of everything existing" in modern society, and continued Thoreau's notion that modern civilization could actually be more destructive to humanity than "savage" nature. In his novel *Israel Potter*, Melville wrote disparagingly that John Paul Jones, and by implication America, was "intrepid, unprincipled, reckless, predatory, with boundless ambition, civilized in externals but a savage at heart." Similarly, in January 1857 while he was in Jerusalem, Melville made the following comment in his journal: "Is the desolation of the land the result of the fatal embrace of the Deity? Hapless are the favorites of heaven."[89]

In his most famous novel, *Moby Dick*, Melville, according to Mumford, "brings together the two dissevered halves of the modern world and the modern self. . . ." These are "its positive, practical, scientific, externalized self, bent on conquest and knowledge, and its imaginative, ideal half, bent on the transposition of conflict into art, and power into humanity."[90] As Michael Paul Rogin agrees with Lewis Mumford, *Moby Dick* contains a critique of the basic drive of the capitalist to master and destroy Nature as well as to isolate oneself from dependence upon her. This insane,

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[89] Herman Melville, *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile* (New York: Warner Paperback Library, 1974), p. 159. The quote from Melville's "Jerusalem Journal" of January 1857 is in Michael Rogin's *Subversive Genealogy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), p. v.

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imperialistic drive is based, ultimately, upon the individual ego's fear of community, of social dependence.

In the quarterdeck scene of *Moby Dick*, Ahab gets his crew to swear a blood oath to destroy Moby Dick, a quest that ultimately leads to their destruction. This can easily be read as a critique of the new mass culture, of the mass public, of the new political demagoguery. On the surface, this culture looked like democracy, like liberation. But in reality, because the masses had not been educated to understand the relevant issues or ideas, they were being manipulated. The "liberation" offered by leaders like Jackson was really a liberation of selfish egotism, of competition, of the competitive free market, which culminated in the economic disaster of 1836. Jacksonian politics also did nothing to resolve the problem of slavery but sweep it under the rug with one immoral "compromise" after another. So it also threatened to culminate in the ultimate disaster of the Civil War, which Melville foresaw in the late 1840s. Melville meant the destruction of the Pequod as a portent of the looming destruction of the American body politic—a destruction that loomed ultimately because of human egoism, mutual manipulation, and fear of interdependency.[91]

Like Marx, Melville made his critique of the harsh destructiveness of modern civilization on behalf of a communal, interracial ideal, which put the welfare of the disinherited first. Melville was especially sensitive to the way in which the egotism and misery of modern capitalism could thwart the tremendous possibility of

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[90] Mumford, *Herman Melville*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1929), p. 131.
[91] See Rogin, pp. 115-26.

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egalitarian community, inherent in American democracy, and manipulate it to destructive ends. As the narrator of *Redburn,* a sailor on his first sea-voyage, laments about the fighting between English and Irish immigrants on the ship,

> it was a . . . a miserable thing, to see these poor emigrants wrangling and fighting together for the want of the most ordinary accommodations. But thus it is that the very hardships to which such beings are subjected, instead of uniting them, only tends, by imbittering their tempers, to set them against them one another; and thus they themselves drive the strongest rivets into the chain, by which their social superiors hold them subject. [92]

Walt Whitman offered a similar radical critique of the new, supposedly "democratic," but in reality, egoistic culture. Like Melville, Whitman was fundamentally democratic in his thinking. But he, too, refused to accept the appearance of democracy for its reality. Like Melville, like the Transcendentalists, Whitman felt that democracy required certain cultural prerequisites. The mere right to vote and to enter the market did not satisfy them. What was needed was a process of democratic education, which would truly prepare the masses for the exercise of political power. The workers needed knowledge about politics, society, economics, and philosophy, and an aesthetic and emotional sensibility which would lead men out of themselves and their own selfish concerns, and, as Rousseau had argued a century earlier, to adopt the common good and the ideal of loving community as their own. Whitman decried the "plentiful meanness and vulgarity of the ostensible masses,"

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[92] Melville, *Redburn: His First Voyage* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1957), pp. 254-55; see also McWilliams, 364-71.

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their "shallow notions of beauty," their "lack of manners."[93] Against the "fashion-cultures," as he called them, of both the Old World and the New, Whitman sought "a new-founded literature, . . .underlying life, religious, consistent with science, handling the elements and forces with competent power, teaching and training men—and, . . . the entire redemption of woman. . . ."[94]

Against the manipulation and egotism of Ahab, Melville counterpoises the *Pequod's* multiracial community of sperm oil worker-sailors, the friendship between white Ishmael and black Queequeng. The good community begins not with a blind patriotic love of abstract ideals, like the State, but instead upon fraternal love for one's lovers, friends and neighbors. Walt Whitman, of course, was a perennial celebrant of such fraternity: his ideal city was that of "walks, orgies, and joys." Mumford cited this wonderful description of the ideal city-of-the-future from Whitman in his autobiography.[95]

Like the other authors in this American Romantic tradition, Melville was profoundly ambivalent toward American democracy and popular culture, as actually experienced rather than as idealized by its more uncritical champions. In *White Jacket,* he permits his character, the poet Lemsford, to articulate this ambivalence for him, in Lemsford's conversation with gentleman sailor Jack Chase:

> "Blast them, Jack, what they call the public is a monster, like the idol we saw in [Hawaii], with the head of a jackass, the body of a baboon, and the tail of a scorpion."

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[93] Walt Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," *The Portable Walt Whitman* (New York: Viking, 1973), p. 327-28.
[94] Whitman, p. 328.
[95] Mumford, *Sketches From Life* (Boston: Beacon, 1982). P. 35.

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> "I don't like that," said Jack: "when I'm ashore, I myself am part of the public."
>
> "Your pardon, Jack; you are not. You are then a part of the people, just as you are aboard the frigate here. The public is one thing, Jack, and the people another."
>
> "You are right," said Jack. . . . "The public and the people! Aye, aye, my lads, let us hate the one and cleave to the other."[96]

Here, the "public" stands for what we might call "public opinion," the mass as they are now. Their cultural tastes are undeveloped: they fail to appreciate Lemsford's poetry (or Melville's novels). Demagogues manipulate their political sensibilities. The "people," on the other hand, is the nobility Melville purports to find latent in the *demos,* their tremendous potential for human culture to be unleashed, from the shackles of ignorance and market individualism, through cultural and political education.

The distinction Melville draws here between the "public" and the "people" could be viewed as elitist. In a sense, it is. Melville insisted upon the duty of the democratic intellectual to seek nobility for himself and to be critical of its absence, even, or perhaps especially, within the "people" whose cause he championed. Melville is not attacking the people, but the conditions in which the potential of the "people" is thwarted by modern society.

Melville's notion of democratic nobility is related to Thomas Jefferson's notion of the "natural aristocrat." Jefferson's "natural" aristocrats were men of high intellectual and leadership qualities, in every class, and that it was the task of

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[96] Herman Melville, *White Jacket*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), chapter xlv, pp. 195-96.

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democracy to allow such "aristocrats" to lead and to serve the public.[97] Andrew Jackson and his "b'hoy" followers transformed this republican concept, which stressed public virtue, into one of individualist advancement—only through market competition could we find the man who was naturally born to "lead," which to the Jacksonians meant to be on top, commercially speaking. Melville's concept differs from both Jefferson's and Jackson's, however. Throughout his work, up through at least Moby Dick, Melville offers a criticism in his work of Jacksonian competitive individualism. As Wyn Kelley and Michael Paul Rogin have shown, Melville's own version of democratic nobility is pretty much the same as Marx's social "categorical imperative," presented in his "Introduction" to the "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State," as well as in his essay, "On the Jewish Question." For Melville as well as Marx, nobility and freedom cannot be the monopoly of a self-acclaimed "virtuous" political or commercial elite. Instead, in Marx's words, they are produced when we "overthrow all those conditions in which man is an abased, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible being." In his novels, Melville attacked all the bad social conditions that Marx attacked, and some more: slavery, imperialism, alienated, wage-labor, as well as flogging and sexual repression. In his essay, "On the Jewish Question, Marx argues that the human community as a whole is ennobled when the "individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships," recognizes himself as a part of the human community, as a communal being. In his *Economic and*

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[97] Jefferson used this in his October 28, 1813 letter to John Adams, who sought to create an American aristocracy-by-birth. *The Portable Jefferson,* ed. Merrill Peterson (New York: Viking,1975), pp. 533-

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Philosophical Mss., Marx wrote, "Assume man to be man and his relationship to the world to be a human one: then you can exchange love only for love, trust for trust, etc."[98] In his critique of James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*, Marx writes of the inhumanity and alienation of the capitalist production. In contrast, he writes,

> Let us suppose that we have produced as human beings [i.e., in a socialist economy]. . . . In the individual expression of my own life I would have brought about the immediate expression of your life, and so in my individual activity I would have directly *confirmed* and *realized* my authentic nature, my *human, communal* nature. Our production would be a many mirrors from which our natures would shine forth.[99]

In a similar vein, as an antithesis to the destructive, Jacksonian-like mania of Captain Ahab, Melville, seriocomically, delineates a homoerotic utopia among the sailor-laborers on board the Pequod in the "A Squeeze of a Hand" chapter of *Moby Dick*, as they squeeze the congealed globules of sperm oil together:

> Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say, - Oh! My dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness.[100]

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39. *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 60, 46. See Wyn Kelley, *Melville's City*, for a confirmation of this about Melville.

[98] *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 60, 46, 105. Wyn Kelley, *Melville's City;* Michael Paul Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy*.

[99] Marx, *Early Writings*, ed. Quintin Hoare, tr. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (New York: Vintage, 1975), pp. 277-78.

[100] Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1972), p. 527.

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Melville's concept of democratic ennoblement is not elitist at all. He is aware, however, how easily the notion of a pro-democratic intellectualism can lend itself to elitist pretensions. In *White Jacket,* the notion of an intellectual "aristocracy" is surrounded with irony. The poet Lemsford, quoted above, is obviously speaking out of a sense of personal disgruntlement with the tastes of his reading public. Even Chase, the Jeffersonian "natural aristocrat," a "gentleman sailor," disagrees at first with Lemsford. When he does so, however, it seems as if Lemsford, like any demagogue, is flattering Chase into agreement. The distinction Lemsford makes is just a little too neat; too convenient. He seeks to love the people as a passive, potential object of cultural education; but damns them completely for their actual manifestation, in the here and now, as they make cultural and political choices, form political movements, etc. Conveniently, Lemsford casts himself and other poets and intellectuals in the role of savior, whose genius alone can transform the people into the public. There is little or nothing they can do by themselves to accomplish this.

Melville is certainly not blind, in *White Jacket* and in later novels *Moby Dick* and *Pierre,* to the egoistic dangers of such an intellectual stance—the stance of what we might call "self-willed aristocracy." This is a stance which we will see Melville's admirer, Lewis Mumford, adopt. Melville's father was an aristocratic merchant, went mad and died as the result of a business scandal. Melville was conscious that some of his and other intellectuals' aristocratic pretensions were motivated by personal status anxiety, the fear his contemporaries of falling into the working class, or worse, as Melville himself was forced to ship as a common sailor, an experience he relates, and

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satirizes, in *Redburn*. Self-willed aristocracy could easily become an iconoclastic trap, Melville recognized. Pierre's purist idealism is what leads to his downfall; Ishmael's penchant for transcendental reveries while serving on the topmasts almost pitches him to a watery death. The "White Jacket" designed and worn by that novel's protagonist is a metaphor for the pitfalls of this position. It sets him off from the "mob" of "incognitoes," and he values this. It also makes him lonely, however. It is also so cumbersome that when he accidentally falls into the ocean, it almost drowns him until he manages to fling it off.

As we shall discuss later, Mumford adopts a similar, problematic political and cultural stance as White Jacket's. Mumford himself was the illegitimate son of a wealthy father and a domestic servant.[101] In the 1930s, Mumford's writing displays a deep sympathy with the cause of the oppressed, especially as they are oppressed by the poverty and ugliness of modern urban life. But there is little in this writing about the actual struggles of the oppressed against these conditions. There is here indeed in Mumford's writing a "white jacket" of narcissism, borne perhaps of status insecurity. There is a fascination with the imagined power of white-smocked professionals, doctors, engineers, scientists to effect the changes Mumford would like to see made on *behalf* of the "people." Conversely, Mumford seems uninterested in discussing the militant struggles of the working class "public" (under, for example, the leadership of the CIO, the Communist Party, the Trotskyists) to do for themselves. The difference

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[101] See Donald Miller, *Lewis Mumford: A Life*, pp. 8-13.

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between Melville and his biographer Mumford is that Mumford always seems far less conscious of this potential pitfall in his own pretensions to self-willed "aristocracy."

The Communitarians' Dilemma: Small Town Parochialism, Big City Realism, or the Regional City?

We turn now to a later generation of intellectuals, the Progressive "communitarians," as Jean B. Quandt terms them. These developed their thought in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century. This school included John Dewey, Jane Addams, Charles Horton Cooley, William Allen White, Robert Park, Mary Parker Follette, Franklin Giddings, and Charles Peirce and Josiah Royce. They were part of the Progressive movement, but formed a distinct subset. They emphasized concerns about building face-to-face community rather than the ideal of centralization of state power and scientific expertise promoted by other Progressives, such as the editors of *The New Republic:* Herbert Croly, William Weyl, Walter Lippmann. These communitarians all came from small towns. They sought to carry forward the romantic as well as religious concerns of their elder mentors of the *antebellum* period: Emerson, Channing, Melville, Whitman, etc. Most of them understood that both the small village and the old religion were obsolete. But though they were deeply divided in their solutions, in ways that will remind us of the divisions within the earlier Romantic movement, they shared a desire to translate the values they saw in the small town of the early part of the nineteenth century into the modern era. They sought to realize meaningful, harmonious, face-to-face community, and the old

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Protestant hope for a unity of man, God, and nature through reason.[102] All the communitarians had a great influence upon Mumford.

Charles Cooley and the Social Settlement Movement

From sociologist Charles Cooley, especially, Mumford derived his "sociology of groups," which Mumford thought essential to urban studies. Cooley's thought represented a "challenge," in Mumford's words, to the "whole order of" previous "planning," whose "emphasis still lay on the city as a whole, treated as a single unit." In contrast, Cooley's sociology emphasized the importance of small groups to sociology and to urban social health. As Mumford wrote, Cooley described

> the part played by the intimate, face-to-face community, one based on the family, the commonplace, and general shared interests, rather than on specialized vocations and conscious affiliations. . . . No matter how differentiated and directed the life of a great metropolis finally became, there remained, at the core of its activities, the same processes and loyalties one discovers in the village.[103]

Integrally related to Cooley's new sociology of urban small groups was the movement around the "Social Settlement" in England. The most famous "settlement" was Canon Samuel Barlett's Toynbee House[104] and its U.S. cousin, the "Neighborhood House"/"Community Center" movement, led by Jane Addams[105] and Clarence Perry, and supported by Addams' friend, Dewey. This social settlement

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[102] Jean B. Quandt, *From the Small Town to the Great Community: The Social Thought of Progressive Intellectuals* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press: 1970).
[103] Mumford, "Neighborhood and Neighborhood Unit," *The Urban Prospect*, p. 61-62.
[104] Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) p. 40.

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movement had a vision of radical democratic planning, for the city as a whole, through the revitalization of neighborhood community.[106] According to Mumford, it "sought to animate civic life by providing a common local meeting place to provide a forum for discussion and to serve as basis for community activities that otherwise had no local habituation." More directly, it also "answered so many of the needs of the great city, particularly those of anonymity and loneliness. . . ."[107]

Municipal Socialism and Garden-City Regionalism in the Social Settlement Milieu

Cooley and the social settlement house workers inherited their democratic radicalism from an earlier urban populist movement. In his New York mayoral campaign of 1886, Henry George and his United Labor Party united populists and socialists to champion "municipal socialism": a program for democratic control and ownership of the land and utilities of the big city.[108] This ideal continued with the Progressive movement. At the turn of the century, another communitarian, Frederick Howe, writer, Progressive urban

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[105] Hall, *ibid.*
[106] John Fairfield, *Mysteries of the Great City: The Politics of Urban Design: 1877-1937* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1993), pp. 127-29.
[107] Mumford, "Neighborhood and Neighborhood Unit," *The Urban Prospect*, p. 62-63. While Perry certainly had radical ideas, he also, up until the Great Depression, at least, seems to have been fairly timid about promoting those ideas to the point of challenging the basic, capitalist contours of the contemporary city. Up to that point, he had hoped that "enlightened businessmen" themselves might take up his ideas; that there was no need for any sort of mass popular movement to champion them, instead. See Fairfield, pp. 209-15. Clearly, Mumford did not accept such timidity.
[108] This Populist program for democratic control, supported by some Progressives, would have assuredly expanded the power of the state over the economy. It differed from the program of the later, statist Progressives of the *New Republic* editorial board, in that control of the state would devolve to the popular community, not to small, centralized bodies of supposedly neutral experts.

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reformer, and "single tax" advocate, shared the settlement house workers' concern with the problems of the big city for the poor, and their commitment to radical civic democracy. In such works as *The City: The Hope of Democracy* (1905) and *The Modern City and Its Problems,* Howe advocated municipal socialism.[109]

Ultimately, however, the enormous problems they saw with Megalopolitan levels of congestion convinced George, Howe, as well as Cooley, and settlement house workers like Mary Simkhovitch that a change in the politics or even ownership of the big city was not enough. They came to understand the need for a decentralized alternative. Besides supporting municipal socialism, Henry George's United Labor Party of the 1880s supported striking transit workers. They also advocated the development of rapid public transit, and of "home ownership" programs on the outskirts of the city, to permit the urban masses to avoid the necessity of both living and working in the squalor of the big city slum. George was not interested purely in suburban development for working people, however. With their program of municipal socialism, George and the ULP sought to build an "urban

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[109] Louis F. Post and Fred C. Leubuscher, *Henry George's 1886 Campaign* (reprint of 1886 edition, Westport, Connecticut, 1976), pp. 14, 27; See also Edward P. Mittleman's article about the 1886 race in Chicago, which united a similar coalition of socialists and single-tax populists around a municipal socialist campaign, "Chicago Labor in Politics," *Journal of Political Economy* 28, May 1920, pp. 407-27.Cf. Fairfield, *Mysteries of the Great City,* pp. 15-47, 83, 93. Frederick C. Howe, *The City: The Hope of Democracy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905); *The Modern City and Its Problems* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919).

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republic,"[110] which would lessen population congestion in the urban center and increase public and cultural facilities for the workers who chose to stay there, as well. Cooley adopted this program as his own in the early 1890s.[83]

In 1907, settlement worker Mary Simkhovitch committed herself to a program of regional decentralization of the big city population into garden cities along the lines Ebenezer Howard had proposed. In a speech she gave in 1909, Simkhovitch said, "The reason the poor like to live in New York is because it is interesting, convenient, and meets their social needs. They live there for the reason that I do; I like it." However, as Allen Davis further reports the text of this speech, Simkhovitch insisted that it was "because she liked cities and wanted to make them more livable, not because she wanted to recapture the small town," that she "argued for reducing the density of urban population. . . better distribution of population, better transportation, restriction of the number of people who could live in a single area, and above all, city planning on a regional basis."[111]

In *Land and the Soldier* (1919), after writing for years that the mega-city was the only "hope for democracy," Howe also supported Howard's garden city scheme, which we will discuss in chapter 3. The main thrust of *Land and the Soldier,* however, was to support the proposal of civil engineer Elwood Mead that the government enlist veterans to reclaim wasteland and

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[110] This is Fairfield's term for Henry George's vision; see Fairfield, p. 45.
[100]Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement, 1890-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 72-73; quoting Mary Simkhovitch, "Committee on Congestion and City Planning," Simkhovitch MSS, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College. See also Fairfield, pp. 127-28.

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build smaller rural cooperatives for themselves, relying upon farming and handicraft for subsistence. Woodrow Wilson's Secretary of the Interior, Franklin K. Lane, and New York State Governor and future President Franklin Delano Roosevelt also supported the program.

Such proposals were problematic, however. Mead, Lane, and Roosevelt romanticized the old pastoral, homestead idyll and the rural small town. They lacked a concept of the need for industry or for a larger, vital urban community: Howe wrote that a small community center would be enough for the soldier-farmers and their families. Neither Howard nor Mumford would therefore have considered such proposals socially or economically viable, in the long run. Still, when one hundred of them were actually built in the 1930s, by Rexford Tugwell's Resettlement Administration, they were a step in the right direction. For some families, they represented a distinctly better way of life than the rural or mega-urban poverty under which they had lived in the past. And wastelands got cleared and settled. As for other groups in society, farmers resisted the program because they saw it as competition. Labor intellectuals attacked it as a new form of serfdom when they saw that the industry required would come from the private sector. But when the government threatened to step in to provide factories—a factory to make post

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office equipment, for example—then business started crying about creeping communism. [112]

Park and the Chicago School's Big City Realism

Like Addams and Cooley, Chicago School sociologist Robert Park also developed upon the notion that urban ethnic enclaves could provide a wealth of "primary relationships," similar to those of the old small town. The inhabitants of these enclaves, however, would still be afforded more pluralistic cultural choices and cosmopolitanism than in the old small town because of their proximity to other ethnic cultures. Park thought that "urban neighborhoods and social institutions" must "find ways for people to engage, both imaginatively and practically, in communal activities" if society were to satisfy the "baffled wish to participate." "Secondary groups," as Quandt writes further, "were too impersonal to fulfill the need for personal response and self-expression; for this reason, they did not compel the allegiance of affection of the urbanite, who slipped away from their grasp" into what Park called the "romanticism" of "automobiles and flying machines."[113]

Park also developed the notion, later shared by Mumford, that big city life suppresses the potential of human beings to become participants in all areas of life, "politics, religion, art and sport," and makes them spectators instead. As Quandt

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[112] Frederick C. Howe, *Land and the Soldier* (New York: Charles Scribners and Sons, 1919); Paul K. Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1959), pp. 43-52, 112-117, *et alia.*

[113] Quandt, pp. 146, 52. Quoting Park, *Old World Traits Transplanted* (New York, 1921), pp. 261-62; *Science of Sociology*, p. 287, "The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the

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writes, this suppression resulted in "the restlessness and the search for novelty on the part of people deprived in the "artificial" environment of the city of "natural" outlets for participation which small-town and rural society had once provided." Park derived from Jane Addams his idea that there existed marked "contrasts between the warmth, the sincerity, and the wholesomeness of primary human responses and the sophistication, the coldness . . .of secondary organization of urban life."[114]

Mumford later developed Park and Addams' ideas about the problems of the "secondary" relations of the urban mainstream into a theory of how megalopolis tends to breed the sado-masochistic spectacle and politics of fascism,[115] as we will discuss in the following chapter.

But Park's conception of community was not the same as Cooley's. Morton and Lucia White sought to paint Dewey's radically democratic liberalism as a precursor to their own urban realist position. Thus the Whites imagine that there was an alliance between Park and his Chicago school, on the one hand, and the Dewey, Addams, Cooley, and the settlement house workers, on the other.[116] Nothing could be further from the truth, however. Whether he himself thought so or not, Park's concern for the sake of neighborhood relationships was not democratic. He sought to strengthen neighborhood relationships as part of a program for a new, "modern" form of social control, in order to stabilize capitalist society and protect it from the popular "crowd."

Urban Environment," *The City*, (Chicago, 1925), p. 117. See also Morton and Lucia White, pp. 155-67.

[114] Quandt, p. 146. Quotes are from Robert Park and Ernest Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (Chicago, 1921), p. 329.

[115] Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, pp. 267-79.

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By this term, Park seemed to mean both the militant working class movements as well as the violent racist mobs of the period.

Robert Park did share with John Dewey and Jane Addams a nostalgic fondness for the virtues of small town life.[117] But for Park, unlike Dewey, this nostalgia did not ultimately translate into democratic radicalism. Rather, as the Whites themselves admit, Park saw such translation as intrinsically hopeless. Like James Fenimore Cooper's stance toward the romance of the frontiersman and the Indians, Park cultivated his nostalgia for the small town purely as a purely subjective feeling, which he completely separated from his resigned, "scientific," "realist" stance toward objective, contemporary social reality.[118]

Park's Chicago School dismissed their radical reformist brethren in the social settlement movement as standing in the way of an inevitably benevolent progress, as prisoners of these radicals' loyalty to the rural past. In his book *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (1929) Park's Chicago School associate Harvey Zorbaugh wrote that the typical reformer of the turn of the century had been a "fanatic who has waged an uncompromising war on reality. He has been a sentimentalist and romantic who has thought all things possible."[119] For "realists" like Zorbaugh, the only proper attitude toward mega-urban contemporary reality was acquiescence, not criticism.

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[116] Morton and Lucia White, p. 234.
[117] Morton and Lucia White, pp. 155-78.
[118] Morton and Lucia White, p. 167.
[119] Harvey Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929), p. 270.

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Morton and Lucia White imply that the Chicago School "sociologists" were joined by "social workers" like Jane Addams and "philosophers" like John Dewey in arguing for the "naturalness" of the modern metropolis against "romantics who urged city-dwellers to follow nature and abandon the city."[120] But like so many other of the Whites' claims, this is false. Instead, Zorbaugh attacked Addams', Dewey's, and others' *radicalism:* their call for *democratic control* and *neighborhood community,* their solidarity with labor militants, their support for municipal socialism. The Chicago School's notion that the big city was "natural" was a species of *Social Darwinism,* whose basic import was to justify and reify bourgeois urban development and elite planning at the expense of neighborhood life.

Park's Social Darwinist views of urban development is revealed in the following passage:

> Every city, every great city, has its more or less exclusive areas or suburbs; its areas of light and of heavy industry, satellite cities and casual labor mart. . . . Every American city has its slums; its ghettoes; its immigrant colonies, regions which maintain more or less alien and exotic cultures. Nearly every large city has its bohemias and hobohemias, where life is freer, more adventurous and lonely than it is elsewhere. These are the so-called natural areas of the city.[121]

But though Park considered these rougher areas of the modern metropolis to be most "natural," he implies that the entirety of the city's spatial, social, ethnic, racial, and class divisions are also "natural"—in the Social Darwinist connotation of the term, as "inevitable." For Park, market "competition," which Park also accepted as

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[120] Morton and Lucia White, p. 234.

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desirable and as inevitable "naturally" created these social divisions. This naturally led to periods of racial and ethnic conflict. But such conflict might issue in a process of "communication," "accommodation," and then "assimilation." The basic divisions created by competition could never be erased. But social groups now at least "communicated" better with each other, and stuck to their own cultural values a little less rigidly.[122]

The settlement house reformers aimed to radically transform the city and integrate these divisions, in order to revive a sense of local democratic community. What was needed instead, according to Zorbaugh was "a new city plan, a plan that is possible because it is based upon a recognition of the natural process of the city's growth, a plan that is the dream not of an ideal, but of a real, city." This planning was to be done, not by local community reformers, but instead by "experts." Zorbaugh's example of such experts was the Russell Sage Foundation, which clearly represented the most powerful financial interests in New York City, when they formulated the Regional Plan of New York in the 1920s.

Park distinguished between a plebian "crowd"—emotional, irrational, and potentially violent--and a more rational, orderly, middle class and wealthy "public."[123] In like fashion, Zorbaugh wrote that his "experts" would hopefully be

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[121] Robert Park, "Sociology, Community and Society," in William Gee, ed., *Research in the Social Sciences* (New York, 1929), p. 198-96.
[122] See Fred H. Matthews, *Quest for an American Sociology: Robert F. Park and the Chicago School* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977), pp. 161-62, citing Robert F. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1921), pp. 508, 735.
[123] Park, *The Crowd and the Public and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

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backed by a rational "public," whose interrelationships would be "secondary" rather than neighborly. Against the old democratic ideology, mistakenly "exalting" the "man in the street," according to Zorbaugh, this "public" would now value "will, vision, leadership, and wealth." Such "resources," according to Zorbaugh, "tend . . . to become segregated on the city's Park Avenue or Gold Coast." In other words, a truly "realistic," effective planner had to work with rather than confront the basic contours of the existing city. He had to accept as a given its polarized class structure, and the deleterious effects, which Zorbaugh acknowledged, this structure had upon the development of urban society. These included highly congested levels of population, loss of neighborhood community, increased concentration of decision-making power into the hands of the wealthy elite and of professional planning experts, and social stratification along racial, ethnic, as well as class lines. The task of the "realistic" planner was to acknowledge these developments, and even actively promoted a few of them.[124]

The usual result of such "realist" philosophy can be seen in the Chicago School's actual political dealings with racial conflict. Urban historian John D. Fairfield, in his *Mystery of the Great City,* discusses the Chicago School's participation in the Illinois Commission on Race Relations after the Chicago race riot of 1919. Trade union militants had emphasized that the riots were a product of the bosses' pitting one race against another, via scabherding, and of the landlords' similar policy of division, via blockbusting, of, in Fairfields words, "overcrowded housing,

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[124] Zorbaugh, pp. 252-79. Robert Park wrote the introduction to this book.

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job discrimination, and physical violence." The militants insisted that the riots could only be stopped if workers of both races came together to recognize their common interests as workers. But the ICRR, as Fairfield writes, "proposed no significant changes in that order. Instead, and paradoxically, the commissioners looked to elites with vested interests in the status quo for an improvement in race relations." In their own words, the commissioners traced racial conflict to "moods and antagonisms expressed in words and shown in manners" only.

Thus the solution proposed by the ICRR was to preach against the irrationality of segregation, encouraging landlords, lenders, union leaders, employers, and municipal officials to treat blacks fairly. In other words, the ICRR appealed to the "public" to adjust things from the top; they did not support the militant leadership of the "crowd," the grass-roots labor movement, to build mass pressure from below. But as such, as Fairfield notes, "'racial adjustment' becomes a paltry thing, an accommodation to the status quo."[125]

Peirce's Ideal of the Beloved Community

The phrase "Beloved Community," cherished by Van Wyck Brooks and Randolph Bourne as well as the Students for a Democratic Society, was coined by the founder of pragmatist philosophy, Charles Sanders Peirce, whose career spanned the latter part of the nineteenth century. Peirce's concept was explicitly anti-capitalist. Peirce attacked the rapacious individualism, the sordid "Americanism, the worship of

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[125] Fairfield, pp. 185, 187.

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business, the life in which the fertilizing stream of genial sentiment dries up."[126] In envisioning his communal alternative, Peirce harkened back to the Puritans' vision of a "community of grace."[127] While the Puritans were focused on the life hereafter for the elect, they conceded the need men have for a loving community—good neighbors, good family life—while they lived here on Earth. Peirce was more interested in this earthly community than were the Puritans. But when he wrote of this community, he was of a divided mind, and this division limited his vision. In one sense, "beloved community" meant a community of philosophers and scientists. Their scientific quest for truth, according to Peirce, was of the nature of "love," a love which came to influence their own feelings toward each other, a love which might transcend, Peirce felt, the egotism of competitive capitalist society.[128] On the other hand, Peirce felt that scientific truth was not enough as a basis for community. Science by itself led to skepticism and ultimately, the egotism of capitalist society. As a member of the Episcopal Church, he saw Christian morality as the ultimate basis for his beloved community. He wrote, "Neither Old nor New Testament is a textbook

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[126] Charles S. Peirce, alternative version of lecture, "On Detached Ideas in General and on Vitally Important Topics," given 1898, in *Collected Papers*, eds. Charles Hartshone, Paul Weiss, and Arthur Burks, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), Volume 1, "Principles of Philosophy," p. 361.

[127] See Perry Miller's discussion of the Puritans' "social covenant" and "community of grace," in his *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1939), pp. 407-431. For a discussion of how the Puritans were an important source for the concept of "beloved community," see McWilliams, pp. 112-69.

[128] R. Jackson Wilson, *Quest for Community*, pp. 1-31; John Patrick Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 190-94.

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of the logic of science, but the latter is certainly the highest existing authority in regard to the dispositions of heart which a man ought to have.[129]

Obviously, this is not exactly traditional Christianity. It is more reminiscent of Rousseau or Jefferson's secular religion of the heart. Indeed, Peirce views Christianity almost pragmatically, as a means to open up men's hearts in order to allow them to live together harmoniously, not because he fears eternal damnation. Yet there is still tension between Peirce's religiosity and his support for science. Organized religion has often acted throughout history to repress free thought. . Yet by itself, science certainly can become amoral. Thus the question that would vitally concern future American philosophers, such as Dewey, Santayana, Bourne and Waldo Frank, and Mumford: if not from religion, then from whence should the values that guide science come? Peirce himself suggested the answer that his later followers would adopt. According to intellectual historian Eugene Rochberg-Halton, Peirce viewed the ideal human community as not only loving, but also "abductive": as fundamentally creative rather than as a merely productive, crudely utilitarian entity. This is similar to the Romantic conception of human society as a dramatic one, as I wrote before. Peirce argued that human beings' highest purposes were aesthetic rather than immediately practical or individual.[130] It is to the aesthetic imagination, as well as to the realm of the "heart," that his later followers, including Mumford, looked.

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[129] Peirce, *Collected Papers, vol. 2,* pp. 399-400; West, pp. 46-49.
[130] Eugene Rochberg-Halton, "The Transformation of Social Theory," in Thomas and Agatha Hughes, eds., *Lewis Mumford: Public Intellectual* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 132-33.

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Josiah Royce's Idealism

The Hegelian idealism of Josiah Royce was fertile ground for Dewey's, the 20th century Young Americans' (Bourne's, Frank's, Brooks') and Mumford's quest to reconcile the human Subject with the Objective world it had made. Unlike Freud, Royce placed the human quest to know, understand, and reconcile with reality at the heart of human nature.[131] Yet Royce's idealism was ultimately marred by his absolutist metaphysics: his counsel that individuals sacrifice their own concerns to disembodied absolute ideals, rather than fulfill them collectively, as Peirce had hinted.

Royce was fond of Peirce's phrase, "beloved community." Long before he adopted it as his own, Royce had been somewhat radical, in the 1880s, the era of the populist-socialist "Muckrakers." In addition, at that time the field of sociology was developing in America, in the direction of collectivism. In *Dynamic Sociology* (1883), Lester Ward, a founder of American sociology, revised Herbert Spencer's theory of Social Darwinism, to develop his theory of what he termed "telesis." He argued that competition, while it worked in nature, was a hindrance to further human, social evolution, which must rely upon democratic, government intervention and rational planning instead.[63] This is another concept that would have great impact, among many others, upon Lewis Mumford's thought.

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[131] Josiah Royce, *Letters*, ed. John Clendenning (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 366-373. Cf. John Clendenning, *The Life and Thought of Josiah Royce* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 41.

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At this time, Royce himself became favorable to the ideal of socialism. But his support was no blank check. Royce criticized his fellow socialist thinkers, Marxists such as Eugene Debs of the Socialist Party and Daniel DeLeon of the Socialist Labor Party. In much the same terms as would Mumford in *The Story of Utopias,* Royce conceived the socialists' project to be crippled by the mechanism and individualism of the very society they were endeavoring to combat.[132]

By the time he began to popularize Peirce's term "Beloved Community," however, Royce's concerns had shifted more completely to the ethereal plain of idealist ethics. The "love" of his version of the "beloved community" would be borne of individual self-sacrifice for the common good, not collective self-fulfillment. The community Royce seemed to have in mind occurred only in the "church" or at a "great communal or national festivity." Royce's ideal of community never challenged the system of private property (which Royce felt to be sacrosanct) or the resultant capitalist division of labor: the "dreariness of the "factory" or the "complexity of the present social order" to which Royce also alluded.[133] At the turn of the century, Royce explicitly rejected socialist as well as all other popular political movements: from Henry George and Edward Bellamy to (more thankfully) Teddy Roosevelt-style imperialism and white chauvinism. In the fashion of the vitalism we discussed earlier, Royce argued that all such movements suffered from the inevitable corruption that

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[132] Clendenning, pp. 137-38.
[133] See Royce, "The Problem of Christianity," *The Philosophy of Josiah Royce,* ed. John K. Roth (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1971), p. 382, and Bruce Kuklik, *Josiah Royce, an Intellectual Biography* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), pp. 227-37

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resulted when "theories are reduced to formulas as guides to social action."[134] In addition, socialism was deemed by Royce to be fundamentally immoral because it threatened to take away private property, and weaken the family as well as the prevailing order of class society.[135]

In his later use of the term, "beloved community" became reduced to a community of "loyalty" by the alienated people of modern society to each other and to the State. Royce's use of the term became a synonym for a selfless voluntarism.[136] Yet the phrase itself, as Bourne and the SDS would attest, suggests something far different: the communist society foreshadowed in Hegel's notion of a society in which each man's goals would spontaneously comprise concerns both "for-Oneself" and "for the Other." In this society, "love" and "freedom" become synonymous, where there is respect for both our communal unity and our individual diversity. It also suggests the notion of socialist "wealth" that both Karl Marx and William Morris hoped would be accepted someday. For Marx, under socialism, "The rich man is simultaneously the man in need of a totality of vital human expression," while "poverty" now becomes "the passive bond which makes man experience his greatest wealth—the other man—as need."[137] For Morris, following Ruskin's ideas in *Unto This Last,* "wealth" signified "the means of living a decent life," something which capitalism failed to provide anyone. What it did provide was "riches": "the means for

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[134] Clendenning, p. 327.
[135] Wilson, p. 162.
[136] Clendenning, p. 347-48.
[137] Marx, "Private Property and Communism," in his "Economic and Philosophic Mss.," *Early Writings*, p. 356

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exercising dominion over other people."[138] For the early Hegel, for Marx, and for Morris, the good community was possible without sacrificing the self—if people could recognize that there were "selfish," or rather, self-fulfilling, pleasures to be enjoyed in the good community. As Mumford himself put this same, participatory ideal, in his *Culture of Cities:*

> through education the curve of the individual career may be ultimately harmonized with that of the community, not by a mere restriction of response to that desired by a governing despot, but by a widening of personal scope and opportunity, in those spheres of rational understanding and administrative action which are properly the concern of the citizen and the polity.[139]

Royce's Provincialism

Royce also provided another, although similarly limited, contribution to Mumford's thought, as well as for Bourne's concept of "Transnational America." For Royce championed "provincialism," which he defined as "the tendency of . . . a province to possess its own customs and ideals; secondly, the totality of these customs and ideals themselves; and thirdly, the love and pride which leads the inhabitants of a province to cherish as their own these traditions, beliefs, and aspirations."[140] This concept of "loyalty" would inform Mumford's and others' concept of regionalism, as we shall see in Chapter 5.

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[138] William Morris, "Art, Wealth, and Riches," lecture given at the Manchester Royal Institution on March 6, 1883, *Art and Society: Lectures and Essays*, ed. Gary Zabel, (Boston: George's Hill, 1993), p. 63; Ruskin, "The Veins of Wealth," in "Unto this Last," pp. 244-54.
[139] Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, p. 383.
[140] Royce, "Provincialism," *Basic Writings, v. 2.* ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), *p.* 1069.

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Morton and Lucia White assert that Mumford's regionalism was identical to Royce's provincialism. They state that "If, in place of . . . the word 'province', we read . . . the words "'Regional City', we have a recommendation very close to, if not identical with, that of Lewis Mumford. . . ." [141] But once again, this is tendentious. The two concepts are in fact quite distinct. Royce, along with fellow communitarian William Allen White, thought that the "loyalties" of the small town community were sufficient to sustain a viable regional culture.[142] But Mumford's ideal "garden city" population was anywhere from 30,000 to 100,000 inhabitants, and he also included in his vision the existence of "thirty world metropolei." (See Chapter 3). Royce damned "bigness" in itself, and thus disencumbered himself of any means to confront bigness' evils in the here and now. Royce's thought was ultimately reactionary, because he did not situate his provincialism upon new, progressive, terrain—the terrain, for example, of Cooley's, Park's, Addam's and Mumford's neighborhood urbanism or their garden city regionalism. Both of these projects attempt to blend the very real, cosmopolitan advantages of big city life, with that of face-to-face community and culture.

John Dewey

In his search for a modern understanding of how men could work harmoniously with each other and with nature, John Dewey seized first upon Hegelian dialectics, as had Royce. This was succeeded by Darwin's faith that empirical science could comprehend nature and provide proper direction for man, and by the pragmatic

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[141] Morton and Lucia White, p. 183.

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philosophy of Peirce and William James. His basic faith was in the idea that human nature required and deserved democratic community.

Dewey's basic animus was toward absolutist thinking. Thus he disagreed with Royce's Hegelian idealism profoundly. Dewey debated Royce publicly at the University of Pennsylvania in the course of the Harrison lecture series there in 1910. For Dewey, Royce's absolutism was the product as well as the cause of a "splendid isolation" from the real human community (let alone the "beloved community"). Thus Royce was guilty of a "pompous futility."[143] Elsewhere, Dewey saw the all-too-human, anti-empirical "quest for certainty," for metaphysical absolutes, whether religious or scientific, as a justification for traditional and contemporary hierarchies: the old aristocracy, the modern bourgeoisie. Absolutes arose as a perversion of the individual's desire for some permanence amidst the insecurities and flux of life, for a sense of meaning that transcends the individual's personal birth and death. But, for Dewey, ontological absolutes were a disastrous solution to this quest for meaning. They encouraged the people who believed in them to venerate tradition rather than comprehend life rationally.[144]

In the realm of educational thought, his personal specialty, the "absolutes" Dewey opposed were involved with the practice of "training" human beings for the rigid roles they were to occupy in an exploitative, hierarchical, mechanical social order. According to Dewey, "training" manipulated the student as an object, rather

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[142] Quandt, p. 150-51.
[143] Clendenning, pp. 348-49.

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than educated him as a subject. He argued that a democratic society must be based upon a dialogical process of education, in which the teacher attempted to fully engage the subjectivity and creativity of the student.

The basis of the modern pedagogy of "training," according to Dewey, was philosophical *dualism*. In perhaps his most important philosophical (as well as practical) work, *Democracy and Education*, Dewey implies that the dualism of John Locke (and of all of Western culture since Plato) was the real foundation of the disastrous "training" theory of education. This theory, which was developed further by the classic utilitarians, became the modern paradigm for educational theory, prevalent to this day. This theory was the theory of "formal discipline," of education as training of the "faculties." These faculties were certain key abstract skills. These were deemed magical levers that, once grasped through incessant drilling, allegedly produced "facility" in all the concrete aspects of living. These abstract skills were the analogues to the ontological absolutes Dewey criticized in philosophy and religion.[145]

Dewey viewed this conception as mythological. While the capacity for abstract thought certainly could be developed, it did not spring full-grown, Minerva-like, into the human psyche. Instead, it was the product instead of a dialectical interaction between the developing consciousness of the infant and his environment. Moreover, this consciousness itself was fundamentally *concrete*. The capability to think rationally was neither divorced from the concrete or superordinate to it. Instead, it

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[144] Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 79-82, *et alia*.

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was the result of the infant's own spontaneous capacity to organize concrete details into (pragmatically) meaningful structures: "such powers as observation, recollection, judgment, aesthetic taste, represent *organized results* of the occupation of native active tendencies with certain subject matters."[146]

It is perhaps true that Dewey overstates his case here. Children have, fortunately, a capacity for abstract thought that makes it unnecessary to experience in the concrete every abstract idea that they need to learn. But the Lockean tradition against which Dewey wrote placed far too much faith in the direct transmission of abstract ideas from teacher to student; far too little, if any, faith in the child's own capacity for learning. In terms of the philosophy of science, such dualistic views placed a premium on "dispassionate inquiry," on "disinterested observation," on a separation of fact from value, observer from observed, subjectivity from objectivity. The dualists pretended that the subjectivity of the observer could be transcended altogether. In terms of pedagogy, this meant a teaching process formulated and performed "by the book," without reference to the subjectivity and individual uniqueness of either the teacher or the student.

Dewey disagreed profoundly with these ideas. He argued alternative propositions: "Human activity is social activity: A being whose activities are

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[145] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Free Press, 1916, 1944), pp. 61-62.
[146] *Ibid*, p. 66.

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associated with others has a social environment. What he does and what he can do depend upon the expectations, demands, approvals, and condemnations of others."[147]

Education—the development of effective ideas, attitudes, and skills—science, and human life in general evolve only through sensuous, spontaneous interaction between self, society and nature, resulting from the subject's own interest in acting upon his environment to fulfill his needs. It is this sensuous, social interaction, rather than training the student in abstract, isolated mental skills, that educates for a general facility for life.[148]

Between the teacher and the student, there had to be an attitude of "guidance," not control. The teacher's job was to aid the student's own pragmatic efforts in "reorganizing and reconstructing" his own awareness of his environment and his reactions toward it, in order to grow in understanding and effective interaction with his environment. This entailed a process of sharing understandings and methods: not domination. Thus education required freedom and egalitarian community between teachers and students, adults and children.

Dewey saw that such an approach required certain social and political preconditions. He saw that the sensuous form of education he wanted was preconditioned upon a full, holistic relation between the individual and his activity, on the one hand, and society on the other. The individual could not live as an island unto himself. Society was the environment of the individual and his activity. Thus it

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[147] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[148] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

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held primary importance for the individual. But, like Marx and his Romantic predecessors, Dewey recognized that the presence of rigid class inequality limited this activity. It limited the wealth of the individual's interactions, and thus his development as a free, self-conditioning being.

Thus Dewey conceived democracy as the basis of all of the above: of the individual's activity, the wealth of his interactions, his development as a free being. He wrote, "Democratic society is peculiarly dependent for its maintenance upon the use in forming a course of study of criteria which are broadly human."[149] For "a democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience."[150] Democracy served Dewey's educational ideals, because it encouraged shared experience and community. Moreover, the community—its culture, its art, and its historic memory—outlasted the individual. Thus participation in the democratic community provided the only really lasting solution to the problem of meaning.[151] During the Great Depression, in his *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935), Dewey deepened his democratic populism into what might be described as "social liberalism." He argued that liberalism must no longer place its faith in "private control of the means of production. . . . The only form of enduring social organization that is now possible is one in which the new forces of productivity are cooperatively controlled. . . ." Dewey called for "organized social planning, put into effect for the creation of an order in which industry and

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[149] *Ibid.*, p. 192.
[150] *Ibid.*, p. 87.
[151] Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1925, 1929), pp. 37-66.

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finance are socially directed in behalf of institutions that provide the material basis for the cultural liberation and growth of individuals."[152]

The Conflict between Mumford and Dewey

In *The Golden Day,* Mumford criticized what he considered to be Dewey's neglect of the aesthetic dimension. According to Mumford, Dewey, like his teacher, William James, never broke out of the "limited circle of ideas in which the American mind was originally born." For Mumford, "pragmatism" was only "another name" for "compromise and acquiescence." Where James only warmed "over again in philosophy the hash of everyday experience in the Gilded Age," Dewey was only a little better, according to Mumford. Mumford credited Dewey for being "a severe and just critic of conventional education, and for undermining "conceptions of philosophy, art, and religion which represented merely the mummified experiences and aims of other generations." However, according to Mumford, Dewey was also guilty of "an unqualified belief in the procedures of common sense and technology, because these procedures have led to practical 'results'." Mumford then quotes Dewey as arguing that "happiness, too, 'is found only in success'." Disappointedly, Mumford concludes, "In other words, happiness means for Mr. Dewey what it meant for the pioneer: a preparation for something else. [153] Science and technology were properly means to other, genuinely human ends: economic, aesthetic and erotic. Yet,

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[152] Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1935), excerpted in Michael B. Levy, *Political Thought in America*, (Chicago, Dorsey Press, 1988), pp. 413, 418; Westbrook, pp. 42-63.
[153] Mumford, *The Golden Day,* pp. 136-37.

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according to Mumford, Dewey seemed unable to tell the difference. Mumford quotes Dewey as writing (in *Experience and Nature)*:

> Fine art, consciously undertaken as such, is peculiarly instrumental in quality. It is a device in experimentation, carried on for the sake of education. It exists for the sake of a specialized use, use being a training of new modes of perception. The creators of such works are entitled, when successful, to the gratitude that we give to inventors of microscopes and microphones; in the end they opened new objects to be observed and enjoyed.

Mumford remarks sardonically that "this is a fairly back-handed eulogy, unless one remembers Mr. Dewey's intense gratitude for all mechanical instruments."[154] Mumford also states that Dewey "has even written as if the telephone did away with the necessity for imaginative reverie—as if the imagination itself were just a weak and ineffectual substitute for the more tangible results of invention!" [155]

In his reply to Mumford in *The New Republic*, entitled "The Pragmatic Acquiescence," Dewey convincingly defended pragmatism, and his own prose, from what he branded as Mumford's unfair attack. Far from the conformist Mumford made him out to be, James was "the arch-heretic of his day, the intellectual nonconformist, the constant protester against everything institutionalized in action and belief, the valiant fighter for causes that if not lost were unpopular and conventionally ignored!" As for himself, Dewey denied that he had ever advocated an ideology of "adjustment." Dewey showed that Mumford had wrenched the passage quoted above about aesthetics out of context: that his original intention was to argue that art was

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[154] *Ibid.*, pp. 134-35.

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indeed precisely the end-in-itself Mumford took it to be, a theme which later occupied Dewey in his *Art as Experience* (a work which Mumford ignored).

The truth lies somewhere in between, I would argue. Dewey did advocate intellectual conformity and "adjustment" during World War I. Randolph Bourne rightfully attacked him for it. Bourne argued that Dewey's pragmatism was strong on ways and means to accomplish ends desired by individuals. It was very weak, however, on the subject of moral, collective *values*: the goals to which individuals *ought* to direct themselves.[156]

Bourne, however, did not discard pragmatism. He merely insisted that pragmatists needed to strengthen their commitment to ideals, and to critique and unmask false ideals and selfish interests, rather than confuse means with ends. But from Bourne's critique, Mumford leapt to the dubious and unnecessary conclusion that there was simply no room in pragmatism for ideals; that there was no difference between pragmatism and the crude utilitarianism of the capitalist or the pioneer.

Later, during World War II, as we discussed previously, Mumford's animus to pragmatism would lead him to accept a dangerous, repressive irrationalism. Dewey hints at this tendency of Mumford's, I think, when he refers to Mumford's concept of Dewey's pragmatism as akin to those "myths of literary criticism and historic interpretation" that "deaden" rather than "enliven."[157] Without the test of scientific

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[155] *Ibid.*, p. 134.
[156] Randolph Bourne, "War and the Intellectuals," *The Radical Will: Selected Writings 1911-1918* (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), pp. 307-18.
[157] Dewey, "The Pragmatic Acquiescence," *The New Republic, 49* (January 5, 1927), pp. 186-89. For a thorough explanation of the conflict between Mumford and Dewey, largely created by Mumford's

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method and critical intellect, Dewey argues here, "myth" degenerates far more rapidly than does pragmatism into authoritarian dogma. Ironically, Mumford's penchant for "myth" as a substitute for rational thought, begun in reaction to Dewey's acquiescence to imperialism and militarism during World War I, would rationalize Mumford's own acquiescence to the same thing, during World War II. It would lead him to adopt a visceral intolerance toward critics of the war, and, as Sidney Hook wrote at the time, to a temporary failure to make critical "intellectual distinctions."[158]

Despite their difference of opinion, Mumford owed a great deal to Dewey's democratic theory of education and politics, and his criticism of dualistic social science. Mumford wanted a radical democratic basis for urban planning, as we shall discuss in Chapter 7. But perhaps the most important of Dewey's contributions to Mumford's outlook was Dewey's ideal of education. Mumford translates Dewey's ideas on education into a populist politics of regionalism. It is Mumford's view that the realist planner, like the dualist teacher, interferes with the sanative, growth-conducive relation between people and the natural and social environment. Such planners and teachers treat people as objects to be controlled, rather than creative subjects, in sensuous interaction with their environment. For Mumford, regional

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misinterpretation, see Westbrook, "Lewis Mumford, John Dewey, and the 'Pragmatic Acquiescence," in *Lewis Mumford: Public Intellectual*, pp. 301-22, and Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, pp. 380-87.

[158] Sidney Hook, "Metaphysics, War and Intellectuals," *Menorah Journal* 28 (August 1940), pp. 327-37. Further evidence of Dewey and Hook's contention about the dangers of myth can be seen in the work of Morton and Lucia White. As we have already discussed, they begin their work in quest of a usable "mythology or mystique" for elite urban planners, and end up trashing almost every American intellectual as an "anti-urban" traitor—just as Mumford, ironically enough, had accused Marxists like Morton White had been at the time, of "betrayal" for resisting America's entry into World War II.

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society is the way of *organizing that environment,* just as in Dewey's ideal educational process, to encourage this human life-process.

In this regard, there is one chapter of *Democracy and Education* deserving of special mention. Here, Dewey applies his general theory of the educational process to elucidate, as he titles this chapter, "The Significance of Geography and History." He argues that "The meaning with which activities become charged, concern nature and man. When translated into "educational equivalents," Dewey continues, this

> obvious truism . . signifies that geography and history supply subject matter which gives background and outlook, intellectual perspective, to what might otherwise be narrow personal actions or mere forms of technical skill. With every increase of ability to place our own doings in their time and space connections, our doings gain in significant content. We realize that we are citizens of no mean city in discovering the scene in space of which we are people, and the continuous manifestations of endeavor in time of which we are heirs and continuers. Thus our ordinary daily experiences cease to be things of the moment and gain enduring substance.[159]

Here was a strong heritage for Mumford's later contention that the citizens' sense of themselves as citizens had much to do with their connection, or lack thereof, to the history, geography, and biology of their region, that educators for social change should attempt to strengthen such regional awareness.

I would like to turn now to other radicals who influenced Mumford: Thorstein Veblen, Alfred Stieglitz, and the 2nd group of "Young Americans," disciples of John Dewey who wrote for the journal, *The Seven Arts* in the 1910s.

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[159] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, pp. 208-209.

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Thorstein Veblen.

Thorstein Veblen turned the Social Darwinism of his laissez-faire teacher, William Graham Sumner, in a radical direction. Sumner viewed social classes as if they were separate species, each with its own unique traits. To some degree, Veblen accepted Sumner's view that each class had unique traits. He did not, however, accept Sumner's understanding of these distinctions. Sumner saw class these traits as natural, and saw the class position of the individual as "Society's" reward for these "natural" traits. Veblen reversed the direction of this causality. He thought that different class psychologies were the result of different class positions: of their differing relationships to labor, technology, and the social distribution of goods.

Sumner saw society as an arena strictly regulated by divine and natural "laws." These laws are violated when government steps in to attempt to create an artificial equality between classes which, by nature, were meant to be unequal.[160] Sumner seemed to ague that Society had a will of its own, not to be questioned by ordinary mortals.

Sociologist Lester Ward, cited earlier, had argued against Herbert Spencer's and his American disciple Sumner's pro-capitalist version of Social Darwinism, with his notion of "telesis." As Richard Hofstadter writes, Ward "bifurcated the Spencerian system," by making "a sharp distinction between physical, or animal, purposeless evolution and mental, human evolution decisively modified by purposive

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[150] William Graham Sumner, *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1883) excerpted in Michael B. Levy, ed., *Political Thought in America*, pp. 323-30.

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action." This permitted Ward to turn Social Darwinism on its head. Ward argued that laissez-faire was unnatural and detrimental to human society, and that governmental planning and intervention was natural and beneficial.[161] Veblen broke through the circular reasoning of the Social Darwinists at another point, by distinguishing between the mystical Social Darwinist concept of "Society," and the concept of "Social System" which Veblen developed. Through their control of the existing social system, Veblen argued, the ruling class distorted the *social* processes of reward and distribution, social esteem and ideology, for their own ends. This distortion ensured that, no matter what they did, whether or not society was served in the process, the ruling class would be "rewarded" for their "services." Unlike the Social Darwinists' concept of an all-seeing, all-benevolent "Society," Veblen's social "system" maintained the values of *this ruling class*, and was in turn maintained by *these values* and *this class*. But the values thus celebrated and rewarded were not socially benevolent. They were selfish, "predatory." The ruling class becomes the ruling class, not because of its social virtues, but because of the "predatory," "invidious," and "vainglorious" attitudes of the individuals which originally comprised it. The values of the Gilded Age Robber Barons, as they schemed to do each other in and exploit their workers so as to gain their respective monopolies and vast wealth, akin, according to Veblen, to the "leisure class" of primitive "barbarian communities," who similarly "exploit" the productive, "industrious" majority. These values became dominant because the ruling class became dominant, and vice versa. Just as in the

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[151] Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston: Beacon, 1955), p. 68.

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past, so in the modern era, might makes right, in terms of both the values communicated, and who gets to communicate them.[162]

According to Veblen, so far from being automatically benevolent, the values of the predatory business class led to increasing wastefulness, imperialism, militarism, and a marked tendency in modern society toward military despotism—as had occurred before World War I in "imperial Germany."[163] When he wrote *The Theory of Business Enterprise* (1904), Veblen believed that the working class might reverse this sinister dynamic. Their direct use of the new machine technology, according to Veblen, inculcated in them scientific rationality as well as the sense of pride they achieved through the attainment of craft skills. As the heirs to a truly rational consciousness, the working class might see through the delusions of patriotism and overthrow the business system, putting socialism in its place.[164] But though the ensuing years saw a radical syndicalist movement, the IWW, develop and organize for a nationwide General Strike, the wartime repression crippled this wave of working class militancy. In *The Vested Interests and the Common Man,* (1919) Veblen praised the I.W.W. and the radical Non-Partisan League for being "exuberant" and "untidy" in their dissent against the business system. Yet, according to Veblen, these groups lacked "a 'satisfactory constructive program,' such as the people of the uplift [which I take to mean the middle class public and their pundits--

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[162] Thorstein Veblen, "The Theory of the Leisure Classes," *The Portable Veblen,* ed. Max Lerner (New York: Viking Press, 1948), pp. 53-64.
[163] Veblen, *Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1915).
[164] See Veblen, "Ownership and the Industrial Arts," *The Theory of Business Enterprise* Chapter IX (1904), as excerpted in *The Portable Veblen,* pp. 324-48.

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TS] require to be shown before they will believe that things are due to change."[165] Perhaps this lack of leadership among the working class was responsible for the change in Veblen's attitude a few years later. In *The Engineers and the Price System* (1921) Veblen turned to the class of engineers, for the same values, and for the same potential—leading the workers, of course—to take over the system and run it rationally.[166]

Contrary to his followers' usual interpretation, however, Veblen looked to the engineers only for leadership of the working class, not to replace the working class with the engineers as the revolutionary agency to create a rational economy. He wrote,

> So long as the engineers have not at least the tolerant consent of the population at large, backed by the aggressive support of the trained work force engaged in transportation and in the greater primary industries, they will be substantially helpless to set up a practicable working organization on the new footing.[167]

But Veblen inspired disciples who were less democratic. In the twenties there arose a movement for "Technocracy," which hit its stride in 1932. According to R. Alan Lawson, the leader of this movement, Howard Scott, wanted "an engineering elite, whose competence earned them stewardship of the state, to direct economic enterprise and distribution with maximum efficiency."[168]

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[165] Veblen, *The Vested Interests and the Common Man* (New York: Viking Press, 1964), p. 182.
[166] Veblen, *The Engineers and the Price System*. (New York: Viking Press, 1944).
[167] *Ibid.*, p. 134.
[168] R. Alan Lawson, *The Failure of Independent Liberalism* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), p. 47. One of the Technocrats, Harold Ward, was sympathetic to Mumford decentralist ideas, as we shall discuss in Chapters 4 and 5.

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In their book, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* (1931), Adolph Berle and Gardiner Means called similarly for a "neutral technocracy," in which professional experts would employ an expanded State bureaucracy to control and run the existing corporate capitalist system, a "mixed economy" halfway between capitalism and socialism.[169] Two other, more radical writers, George Soule and Stuart Chase, only disagreed with the limited extent to which Berle and Means sought to collectivize the economy. They agreed with the idea that the economy ought to be run by a "Central Planning Board" whose experts would be above politics, because composed, not of "bargaining representatives of various interests, but of qualified experts representing the nation as a whole."[170]

As we shall see, Mumford was largely sympathetic with Veblen's actual, democratic sentiments on this point, as opposed to his "technocratic" disciples' elitist misinterpretation. Mumford always believed in the necessity of a mass movement to provide the political muscle necessary for the radical changes he envisioned. While Mumford was, therefore, no more a "Technocrat" than was Veblen himself, he shared with Veblen his somewhat idealistic view that the "engineers" were or could be motivated primarily by the conflict of their scientific values with the irrationality and waste produced by capitalism.

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[169] Adolf Berle and Gardiner Means, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968); Richard Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (Harper and Row, 1973), p. 69-71.

[170] George Soule, *A Planned Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1932), p. 252; Stuart Chase, *A New Deal* (New York: MacMillan, 1932); Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams*, pp. 71-74. Chase was a member of Mumford's RPAA; we will discuss his work in Chapter 5.

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Engineers and technicians, it has be argued, are themselves part of the working class.[171] They are exploited and alienated from control of their labor, and their intellectual labors makes a definite contribution to the use- and exchange-values of the product. And Veblen's notion that the contradiction between scientific rationality and bourgeois irrationality tends to radicalize engineers is also true. Through the years, there have been radical engineers and technicians—some of whom were friends with Veblen. But the engineers' conservative political tendencies should not be ignored, either. They are a privileged caste within the working class. While Veblen did not emphasize the effect of such privilege, he did not ignore it, either. In *The Engineers and the Price System*, he writes that despite their potential for radical action, the engineers remained "consistently loyal, with something more than a hired man's loyalty, to the established order of commercial profit and absentee ownership."[172] But this awareness did not lead Veblen to revise his thinking, to question whether the engineers could lead, and whether they rather would have to be led, or at least, would have to share leadership with ordinary workers. As Lewis Corey wrote in his *The Crisis of the Middle Class* (1935), the "new," salaried middle class is much too internally divided to play an independent role in politics. Its increasingly proletarianized majority can only fight for their interests when they ally

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[171] See, for example, Martin Oppenheimer, *White Collar Politics* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985).
[172] Veblen, *Engineers and the Price System*, p. 136.

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themselves with the working class "as *part* of the working class." [my emphasis]—i.e., as members of militant unions and socialist parties. [173]

On the positive side, this Veblenesque strand, in which both technocratic and democratic sentiments were combined, made for an interesting creative tension in Mumford's thought. In his unpublished essay, "Preface to Action," which we will discuss in Chapter 8, Mumford conceives the possibility of a dynamic and democratic relation between the two classes. For Mumford realizes that both classes have something to contribute to the process of social change. The masses must truly participate in the process: but the new class has self-confidence, bold ways of thinking, and education and knowledge, which the masses, after all, for the most part, lack.

On the negative side, however, this understanding of Mumford's could devolve into the Veblenesque belief that the intellectuals, scientists and engineers would be the only real leaders of social change. It often even went beyond Veblen, to the view that such an intelligentsia within the present capitalist system could engineer such social change. This was the view, not only of the more conservative, statist Progressives: for example, *New Republic* editors Herbert Croly and Walter Lippmann. It was also the view, as I discussed before, of Mumford's British mentor and Patrick Geddes.[174]. In his long career as a social thinker, Mumford seems to have adopted nearly every shade between these two poles: democratic, socialist, workers'

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[173] Lewis Corey, *Crisis of the Middle Class* (New York: Covici, Friede, 1935), p. 271n.
[174] Patrick Geddes, "Cities in Evolution," in *Patrick Geddes, Spokesman for Man and the Environment*, pp. 137-41.

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revolution vs. gradual, elitist cultural and technological reform of the existing system. This lack of definition permitted his thought on such questions to be as suggestive as it was confused.

Alfred Stieglitz: Seer, Photographer, Artist

The photographer Alfred Stieglitz, for whom Mumford had a great deal of admiration, grappled with the fundamental question: What does it mean to be human in a modern, artificial, inhuman society? Many of his subjects were individuals—including Stieglitz himself. Most stared forlornly at the viewer, from out of their loneliness. Stieglitz also made the inhuman environment of New York his subject. Often, as with his photograph of the view out of a skyscraper in mid-Manhattan, these were bleak, and offered no exit. Yet even these modern "landscapes" often showed optimism. These photographs, for which Mumford showed his appreciation in his essay, "The Metropolitan Milieu," often showed nature peeping through the cracks. The Flatiron building on 5th Ave. and 23rd St. (where it still stands today), for example, is completely surrounded by its natural "background": the adjacent park. Most people would photograph the building against other buildings. At the most, they would catch a corner of the park. By shooting it from *within* the park, by putting the grass and the trees in the foreground, Stieglitz offered a subversive hope to the rebels in his audience. He is saying, "Look, this building is a *part* of nature. In the scheme of things, our need for nature (if not nature itself) cannot be obliterated by human egotism and its fascination with Power." Stieglitz's aesthetic was not just naturalist, like Santayana's; it was simultaneously rebellious. He saw that modern society had

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attempted to choke off and kill both nature and the spontaneous impulses in individuals. He saw a natural alliance forming between human and physical nature, in protest against the toxic, excessive artificiality of modern existence.[175]

We shall see that Mumford took a great deal of inspiration from Stieglitz for his own analysis of the modern condition. For Mumford, as for Stieglitz, modern alienation had much to do with the modern metropolitan residents' loss of contact with nature, a loss that profoundly weakened them. Mumford would strive for a regionalist and naturalist architecture and culture that would restore this lost connection.

The Seven Arts

Van Wyck Brooks, Randolph Bourne, and Waldo Frank were the three most important members of the second, 20th century school of Young Americans, and the principle writers for *The Seven Arts*. Like earlier self-styled Young Americans, such as Melville, they wrote extensively about the crippling divisions they saw in modern society. The most profound division occurred, they thought, between the realms of commerce and industry, which dominated society, and the realms of art and community, which had become marginalized. Brooks, Bourne, and Frank dissented against the Old World of rugged individualism and its genteel cultural facade. The pioneer in this endeavor was Van Wyck Brooks. In his book, *America Come of Age*, Brooks called for some middle ground between the two extremes of crass materialism

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[175] See Edward Abrahams, *The Lyrical Left: Randolph Bourne, Alfred Stieglitz, and the Origins of*

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and abstract idealism. He hoped to bring Royce's "beloved community" down from the empyrean heights of Royce's spiritual absolutism onto solid ground, in the form of an American socialism.[176]

The Young Americans saw Dewey's ideals of participatory democracy as the only positive alternative to the corporate future. But they saw, much more than Dewey, that culture had to be understood and worked with if Dewey's abstract ideals were to be made concrete.

Bourne's essays during World War I attacked Dewey for joining with the Progressive editors of *The New Republic,* Herbert Croly, Walter Weyl, Walter Lippmann, in support for the war. In the process, Bourne presented the first great and broad critique of the statist Progressive intellectuals: their "realism" as well as their automatic identification of benevolence with the State and with the intelligentsia. It can be safely said that Bourne was to these statist Progressives what Veblen was to the Social Darwinists. Both these prodigals came to comprehend and critique the fatal flaws of the traditions in which they had developed their thought.

The statist Progressives saw the state, science and the scientific intelligentsia as benevolent because "neutral." They counseled a "realistic" acceptance of the modern corporate economy as a *fait accompli*, while hoping that a strong state, staffed by scientific experts, would reign in its corrupt excesses. Later, their acceptance of the corporate economy translated easily into an acceptance of America's entry into

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Cultural Radicalism in America (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1988), pp. 93-204.
[176] See Lawson, p. 28.

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World War I. The Progressives hoped that by participating in the war, they could turn it into a "good" war.

Bourne saw such "realism", vis-a-vis the corporate economy and toward the war, as instead a "herd"-like drift toward "adaptation" to the dominant currents toward destruction in modern society and its ruling business class. Drawing upon his readings of Nietzsche and Veblen, Bourne saw the lure of "getting involved" in the war as a trap. This "herd instinct," in the guise of "responsibility," led to irresponsible support for mass fratricide as well as repression of critical thought and free speech. According to Bourne, science and intellect were not automatically benevolent. And superior scientific knowledge was not in itself the guarantor of moral or political superiority. Instead, to be good for society, the intellect needed to be *critical* at *all* times, in order to combat the pull of the "herd."[177]

Bourne attacked the Progressive cult of the modern strong state. In the chapter from *Thus Sprach Zarathustra* entitled "On the New Idol," Nietzsche had written,

> State is the name of the coldest of all cold monsters. Coldly it tells lies, too; and this lie crawls out of its mouth: "I, the state, am the people." That is a lie! It was creators who created peoples and hung a faith and a love over them: thus they served life. It is annihilators who set traps for the many and call them "state": they hang a sword and a hundred appetites over them. Where there is still a people, it does not understand the state and hates it as the evil eye and the sin against customs and rights. . . . every people . . . has invented its own language of customs and rights. But the state tells lies in all the tongues of good and evil. . . ..[178]

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[177] Randolph Bourne, "War and the Intellectuals," *TheRadical Will: Selected Writings, 1911-1918*, ed. Olaf Hansen (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), pp. 307-18.
[178] Friederich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, tr. and ed. by Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Viking Press, 1966), pp. 48-49.

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With its celebration of "creators," of ancient "customs and rights," and its denigration of mass "appetites," this passage may be construed as anti-modernist, looking backward toward the middle ages. Bourne, however, adapts Nietzsche's criticism of the state here to his own, democratic socialist perspective. He critiques the state from the standpoint of a democratic socialist community, not from the basis of feudal, hierarchical "customs and rights." But like Nietzsche, Bourne saw the cult of the State as a false idol, a confusion of the government, made up of a small group in society with their own agendas and interests, with the community of people and its interests. This confusion imparted to the government an almost divine aura, which was belied by the history of their actual policies and interests. Bourne argued that by virtue of their wealth and power, the capitalist class controlled these policies. As Marx and Veblen had argued earlier, because the government is not directly accountable to the community in capitalist societies, its leaders are subject to the enormous fiscal, financial, economic, and ideological power and influence of the capitalist class. Strengthening the (bourgeois) state thus strengthens the corporate capitalist class, protecting and insulating their tendencies to greater exploitation, militarism, and imperialism from popular scrutiny and radical criticism.[179]

"War," Bourne declared, "is the health of the State." Like Veblen, the naturalist philosopher George Santayana, another of Bourne's teachers, had marveled at how, in war, "the private citizen," though "oppressed" by "a maximum of vexation and

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neglect . . . will glow like the rest with patriotic ardor, and will decry as dead to duty and honor anyone who points out how perverse is this helpless allegiance to a government representing no public interest."[180] Developing Veblen's and Santayana's view, Bourne argued that war was the surest device to bind people irrationally to "their" government, and thus to the capitalist class, against dissidents and immigrants whose lifestyles and ideas were different, and thus "un-American."[181]

Though Mumford often allowed himself to be deluded by this myth of the state (especially in the years leading up to World War II), he was also inspired tremendously by Bourne's critique of it, and referred back to this critique throughout his career. Mumford's first book, *The Story of Utopias,* which we will discuss in Chapter 6, richly develops Bourne's insights about the state and the other false idols that Mumford feels underlay it: the luxurious Country House, now embodied in suburbia, the "productiveness" of industrial Coketown, and the Megalopolis.

How could radicals unmask these myths, and gain acceptance for healthier alternatives? In this regard, as well, Bourne left behind some very pregnant ideas.

Bourne, Mumford, and the Problem of Mass Culture

As Bourne grew beyond Dewey's influence, especially during the war, he grew to respect the value of ethnic and immigrant cultures, as had Jane Addams and her associates in the settlement house movement. According to Bourne, these cultures

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[179] Bourne, "The State," *The Radical Will,* p. 355-95. A similar critique of progressivism was made around the same time, in 1918 by Louis Fraina, later known as Lewis Corey, in his *Revolutionary Socialism* (New York: Communist Press, 1918), p. 197.
[180] George Santayana, *Reason in Science* (New York: 1906), p. 171. Cf. Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy* (New York: Pocket Books, 1961), p. 502.

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were the bases in which democracy must develop. Bourne expressed this new idea of such cultures in his essay, "Transnational America." Here, Bourne decried the schemes for cultural assimilation that today are put forward under the banner of "Americanization," and "English First." This "American" culture was nothing but the culture of the business class, of the New England Brahmins. It had little to do with the cultural diversity of the many immigrant peoples of the real United States.

Like Melville and Whitman, however, Bourne also decried the effects of market society upon the potential Bourne saw for a truly desirable and humanistic "trans-national" culture. Bourne's vision of a transcendent, beloved community entailed a harsh critique of the inauthentic cultural rituals, the *pseudo*-community, created by the ruling class to manipulate ordinary people in modern America. For Bourne, "mass culture" was merely another form of assimilation, not an alternative to Brahminism. Bourne thought the market reduced all these cultures to an extremely low common denominator: the dime-store novel. In "Transnational America," he argues that the heart of American culture is the "nuclei" of these Old World immigrant communities: not at their "fringes," as the assmilationists would have us believe. At the celebrated "melting pot," "fringe" layer of American society,

> Those who come to find liberty achieve only license. They become the flotsam and jetsam of American life, the downward undertow of our civilization with its leering cheapness and falseness of taste and spiritual outlook, the absence of mind and sincere feeling which we see in our slovenly towns, our vapid moving pictures, our popular novels, and in the vacuous

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[181] Bourne, "The State," *The Radical Will*, p.355-95.

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> faces of the crowds on the city street. This is the cultural wreckage of our time. . . .[182]

In the long debate concerning the social and political significance of mass culture in the twentieth century, this is a seminal paragraph. It seems to have had quite an influence upon Mumford, among many others. In his contribution, entitled "The City," to the 1922 symposium, *Civilization in the United States*, Mumford writes, in Freudian fashion, that the "dazzle of white lights, the colour of electric signs, the alabaster architecture of the moving-picture palaces, the aesthetic appeals of the shop windows" found on Broadway "compensates" us for the "drab perspectives of the industrial city." Beyond Broadway, Mumford laments,

> The highest achievements of our material civilization count as so many symptoms of its spiritual failure. . . The principal institutions of the American city are merely distractions that take our eyes off the environment, instead of instruments which would help us to mould it creatively a little nearer to humane hopes and desires.[183]

Bourne draws here upon the distinction traditionally made by liberal and republican political thinkers, such as Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau, between "liberty" and "license." For such thinkers, "liberty" was not the same as "license." "License" meant to gratify and to act upon one's mere arbitrary, immediate, frequently irrational and self-destructive whim. "Liberty," on the other hand, was synonymous with genuine freedom, the capacity to determine one's own fate, one's

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[182] Bourne, "Transnational America," *The Radical Will*, p. 255.
[183] Mumford, "The City," *Civilization in the United States*, ed. Harold E. Stearns (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922), p. 9.

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own life. It involved the employment of one's will, of self-control, of intelligence, and morality. For human beings, like it or not, must live in a community.

Republican thinkers such as Montesquieu and Rousseau conceived that the best community, for all concerned, was ideally as egalitarian and as democratic as possible, and that such a society, such liberty, was a goal worth rebelling for against the existing community, if it was hierarchical and oppressive. For in a hierarchical society, the pleasures and benefits possible for anyone was enormously restricted by role-playing and falsity. Friendship and love were the most restricted, if not completely poisoned, of all.

According to Rousseau, the pleasures that were celebrated by the baroque, neo-classical culture of his era were superficial. They were often the means by which coercive, arbitrary power manipulated men into acquiescence: "garlands of flowers strewn to conceal men's chains," as Rousseau said. In such a society, to act upon mere whim, to merely fulfill one's immediate desires (when and where one was wealthy enough to get away with such "luxury") served to strengthen hierarchy and oppression. To act with genuine "liberty," rather than simply "license," meant to act on behalf of the "General Will," to further the freedom, not just of oneself, but of everyone in the society, on behalf of social harmony and universal happiness.

Rousseau's and Bourne's dichotomy of "liberty" vs. "license" does not necessarily exclude the concern of such thinkers as John Stuart Mill that individuals, to mature into free individuals, should be permitted to engage in "experiments in living"—including sexual experimentation—provided such "experiments" do not

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harm anyone else. Bourne was an avid patron of the *Masses,* a radical journal that promoted not just social revolution but feminism and sexual liberation. Rousseau could be moralistic in his notion of "virtue": which, in such works as *The Social Contract,* meant a sacrifice of self-love for love of the republican state. But it should be observed that even he permitted his protagonist Saint-Preux, in *Julie ou la Nouvelle Heloise,* to engage in extra-marital sex with his beloved Julie. He thereby hinted that such sexuality could be deemed virtuous in the stratified, oppressive aristocratic world of his time, when men and women married not out of love, but for the financial reasons of the (patriarchal) families in question, and only within rigid caste lines.[184]

In any case, in these passages quoted above, Bourne and Mumford argue that this modern, big city, market culture, like the "neo-classical" culture which Rousseau criticized in the eighteenth century, seduces men into accepting a package of superficial, vicarious, "spirit"-less, "mind"-less, "vapid," "vacuous" pleasures. They are encouraged to indulge themselves in these, as a false substitute for a genuinely democratic, ennobling culture and society, in which real "liberty" might be genuinely realized and enjoyed.

Liberal centrists such as Gilbert Seldes and Morton and Lucia White, along with Herbert Gans and more recently, Paul Gorman and Richard J. Ellis, have argued that such criticism of mass culture stem from an unconscious elitism among radical

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[184] See Marshall Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity* (New York: Athenaeum, 1970.); James Miller, *Rousseau: Dreamer of Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

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intellectuals. They urge that genuine progressives must accept mass culture as is, and abandon any critique of it if they truly wish to better the condition of the poor. This radical critique of popular consciousness, the liberals argue, derive from the European "patrician" tradition, which should have no place on these democratic shores.[185]

But the radical critique of popular consciousness under capitalism was certainly not unique to American radical intellectuals, any more than was their critique of the mega-city. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte* as well as elsewhere, Marx himself decried the formation of a "*lumpen*-proletariat" in the cities, whom he felt were the natural "tool" for the "reactionary intrigues" of demagogic despots like Louis Napoleon.[186] For himself, Marx also maintained a strict intellectual independence from the usual consciousness of the workers themselves. Marx was passionately concerned with the plight of both the poor and the workers. He saw the working class, under the stress of economic crisis and when organized as a class "for itself," as eventually the agent of the socialist revolution he desired. But he disdained those intellectuals who, Marx felt, romanticized the immediate consciousness of the proletariat as a prop for their own individual political positions. At a meeting of the Communist League's Central Committee in 1850, Marx's colleague Karl Schapper wanted to call for an immediate insurrection and a despotic dictatorship of the

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[185] See Paul Gorman, *Left Intellectuals and Popular Culture*; Richard J. Ellis, *The Dark Side of the Left: Illiberal Egalitarianism in America* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas 1998); Gilbert Seldes, *The Great Audience* (New York: Viking Press, 1951), pp. 250-84; Herbert Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture. An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste* (New York: Basic Books, 1974); Morton and Lucia White, *Intellectual vs. the City*, p. 40, *et alia*.

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German workers over economically backward Germany. Schapper based his call upon the alleged readiness of the Germany proletariat to support such an insurrection and to "chop off a few heads" if anyone got in their way. In response to this demagoguery, Marx said that he cared "nothing for the immediate impulses of the proletariat" as a guide for his own political views. For these "impulses," as opposed to the proletariat's long-term revolutionary tendencies, tended by turns to nostalgia for Jacobin-style authoritarianism, idealism, and nationalism. Elsewhere, Marx also objected to workers' narrow concern for their own individual economic welfare, which arose especially among skilled workers. These "impulses" he saw as an obstacle to the international solidarity he wished to see develop among the working class.[187] The revolutionary militants who followed Marx during the period before World War I complained incessantly, according to historian Eric Hobsbawm, about the "dead weight of passivity and skepticism" they saw among the "great bulk of ordinary working class people anywhere."[188]

Richard Ellis is right to argue, in his well-deserved attack on the authoritarianism of the U.S. Left, that "no political position is strengthened by suppressing or slighting inconvenient facts or covering up weaknesses."[189] But he ought to apply this same attitude to his own willful blindness toward the problems

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[186] Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte," *Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 615.
[187] Marx, "Minutes of the Central Committee of the Communist League September, 1850," in *The Revolution of 1848-9, Articles from the Neue-Rheinische Zeitung*, ed. Bernard Isaacs (New York: International Publishers, 1972), pp. 627-29; and see the discussion of "Class Consciousness," in Tom Bottomore, ed. *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 80.
[188] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (Random House: New York, 1989), p. 141.

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raised by the radical critique of popular culture. What is gained, indeed, when we pretend that, unlike everybody else, poor people are mysteriously blessed with educational development upon their birth? Liberal "realists" like the Whites ridicule the pastoralist myth of the rural "noble savage," the cult of "Natty Bumpoism" which they claim to find almost everywhere in American intellectual history.[190] Yet they adopt the same delusion when it comes to their *own*, mega-urban clientele. Because they are poor, their present culture and consciousness is supposedly not subject to legitimate criticism. But what do the poor really gain when we ignore the obvious fact that they do not normally get the education or the spiritual and cultural development they need in this society to become its collective masters, that capitalism tends to degrade the consciousness and spirit of the poor?

Liberals like Ellis ignore the fact, as liberatory pedagogues Antonio Gramsci and Paolo Freire both argued, that the consciousness and culture of the poor in a society in which they are oppressed is "contradictory," as Gramsci writes, or "divided," as Freire writes. Part of the consciousness of the "oppressed" is solidaristic, rebellious, and potentially liberatory; part of it, as Gramsci writes, has been "inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed." This consciousness, Freire writes, is "manipulated": it represents an internalization of oppression, by which the poor identify with their oppressors. "To keep" the oppressed "passive," Freire writes, the "oppressors deposit myths"—"the myth that the oppressive order is a free

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[189] Richard J. Ellis, *Dark Side of the Left*, p. x.
[190] Morton and Lucia White, p. 230.

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society," or of "the equality of all men," of "private property as fundamental to personal human development"—into the consciousness of the oppressed. The means for doing this is "the mass 'communications' media—as if such alienation," Freire sarcastically remarks, "constituted real communication." The oppressors also encourage "license" among the poor, Freire writes, as by which rebellious impulses are diverted from the possibility of conscious dialogue about oppression and collective militancy against it, into destructive, authoritarian, or individualistic channels. "License," Freire argues, is the unconscious, often destructive effect of oppression: it stems from the oppressed having become "accustomed to oppression." Liberatory intellectuals must respect the poor as equals in the process of critical dialogue. They must acknowledge the right of the poor to become the subjects of their own liberation, rather than treated as objects to be manipulated and taught down to. But intellectuals should not confuse such respect, Freire writes, with the demagoguery of the "liberalist position which would encourage license among the poor." Like Rousseau, Bourne, and Gramsci, Freire insists that liberation must involve self-regulation ("authority") and the development of critical social awareness through dialogue among the poor and with radical intellectuals. Passive acceptance of the myths promoted by mass culture, or acting out of the unconscious destructive impulses resulting from oppression, cannot liberate anyone. By insisting that intellectuals have no right to criticize mass culture, liberals like Ellis in fact foreclose the possibility of radical liberation.[191]

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[191] See Antonio Gramsci, "Philosophy, Common Sense, Language and Folklore," from the "Prison

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As we have seen in this chapter, the social criticisms of Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Bourne, Mumford, and Marx were meant to attack the problems of our present society, not the ordinary people thwarted by it. Despite their paternalistic tendencies, these thinkers were committed to popular empowerment. Their solution to cultural undevelopment and spiritual degradation was more democracy, not less. The people must acquire the means to educate themselves; the radical intelligentsia meant to help them do this.[192] Rather than brand the radical critique of mass culture "elitist," we might better term it, keeping in mind Plato's dialogue the *Meno*, "democratic neo-Socratism."[193] This position neither embraces current mass culture as ideal, nor condemns it as "low-brow" or "middle brow" trash. Instead, the critical position strives always to find that collective quest for "liberty"—aesthetic and sensual pleasure, fulfillment of erotic and existential need, a basic feeling of community and security—underlying mass culture. The radical critic attempts to comprehend how mass culture *perverts* this quest into an acceptance of the status quo, and then, to comprehend how to *redirect* this basic, collective demiurge into struggle for the beloved community. As Waldo Frank, another "Young American" writer for the *Seven Arts*, wrote in *Our America* (1919), what the radical critic must strive for was not his own internal adaptation and

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Notebooks, *An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: Schocken Books, 1988), pp. 333-34; Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1989), p. 179, *et alia*.

[192] See Larzer Ziff, *Literary Democracy: The Declaration of Cultural Independence in America* (New York: Penguin, 1981), pp. 260-79, 230-43.

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acceptance of America's "mechanical civilization." Instead, he must strive to "possess [i.e., gain influence over] a multitude, however small a multitude [initially], who have reverence for life, a margin of energy for living, understanding of the sacrament of life's interpretation." At that point, "we shall beget critics of conscionable taste. And at once, men and women in whom the love of beauty is a creative force will come in at the stage door and complete the work." For Frank, as for Bourne and for Mumford, such a quest never involved a flight from mass culture or from the "streets." Instead, it involved a rush toward them—with the liberatory weapons of cultural, social, and psychological analysis and criticism, in order to unleash the potential energy surging "beneath":

> Let us step out from the American theaters into the streets of American life . . ..
>
> These clamorous buildings drip energy. This iron world is a tissue of complex human wills. Underneath, walks the multitude: colorless, cowed, the abject creature of its creation. But this delirium of stone, for all its seeming mastery, is but a scum on the energies of men. The multitude has better powers. Can it not build higher than these buildings?[194]

Bourne, Waldo Frank, Brooks, and Mumford saw the culture of the modern city as a distorting mirror for the needs and aspirations of ordinary people. Its cheap entertainments soaked up mass energies that might otherwise have flowed into critical opposition. The 2nd generation of Young Americans, following in the footsteps of the first, saw their projects for cultural transformation in much the same

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[193] In the *Meno*, Socrates calls over to the participants in the dialogue a servant boy, and, through his usual question-and-and answer method, teaches the boy a mathematical formula. Plato, "Meno," *Great Dialogues* (New York: New American Library, 1956), pp. 28-68.

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terms as the Freudians saw their psychoanalytic ministrations. The pastimes of the poor and the working class, though "cheap" and depraved, were nevertheless to be analyzed, and the frustrations and desires underlying them were to be redirected. The key for socialist critics was to see culture as "expressive." Mass culture was an expression, however grotesquely distorted and manipulated by the market, of healthy human needs. Socialists had to learn to "tarry with the particular," as Hegel might say, if they wanted to figure out how to redirect mass consciousness toward socialism.

What were the links between popular culture and the democratic socialism which Bourne, Brooks, and Frank championed? Could art and culture become a force by which to reconstruct and humanize society? Could it encourage ordinary people to comprehend their human potential as a community, as opposed to their present destructiveness as supporters of the state and the market? These are the questions that the Young Americans posed to their "younger" disciples among the *Seven Arts* readership. This readership included Mumford himself. Mumford's concept of regionalism was an attempt to apply Bourne's "trans-nationalism": to locate a terrain where a diverse, urbane, yet democratic, participatory, and stable culture might flourish for everyone.

In his all-too-brief career, Bourne wrote an essay, "Our Unplanned Cities," in which he discussed the possibility that architecture might occupy a central place in

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[194] Waldo Frank, *Our America* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1919, reprinted by AMS Press, 1972), pp. 220-21.

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the pantheon of transformative culture. In it, Bourne draws upon, but goes well beyond, Royce's prescription that

> Local pride ought above all to centre, so far as its material objects are concerned, about the determination to give the surroundings of the community nobility, dignity, beauty. We Americans spend far too much of our early strength and time in our newer communities upon injuring our landscapes, and far too little upon endeavoring to beautify our towns and cities.[195]

Bourne bemoaned what he saw as the lack of planning and the ugliness of much of American architecture. He thought it was the unfortunate by-product of our "pioneer civilization." He speculated that there might be a connection between the ugliness of American sprawl and the lack, not only of aesthetic taste in America, but also of civic virtue. In conclusion, Bourne prophesied:

> Until architects and engineers, school-children and the average citizen, begin to think of the town or village not merely as a geographical expression or a business enterprise, but as a communal house to be made as well-ordered and beautiful as the citizen would make his home, social effort will lack a focus, and civic good-will and enterprise be shadowy and unreal.

Bourne then answers an imagined skeptical opponent:

> To preach town-planning in these days of threatened municipal bankruptcy may seem like Utopianism. To emphasize this order and beauty in the face of destitution and unemployment may seem like a case of hyperaesthesia. But let us not be too sure. In Europe town-planning has gone hand in hand with the alleviation of social ills.

He concludes:

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[195] Royce, "Provincialism," *Basic Writings*, p. 1087.

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> From the chaos and ugliness of American cities flows too palpably our economic and human waste. The well-planned city pays immensely from the social point of view. In Europe it has paid immensely from the financial point of view. Perhaps the road out of a bankruptcy for the American city is exactly this Utopia.[196]

Did Lewis Mumford ever read this essay by his brilliant teacher? Probably, since it appeared in one of his favorite journals, *The New Republic*, for which Mumford later wrote frequently. Whether he read it or not, however, it serves as a perfect prologue to Mumford's career as a romantic urban planning theorist.

While Mumford's interests in culture were well rounded, he took a special interest in the cultures of regionalism and architecture. For Mumford, these were perhaps the most important cultural fields in which to work, to create alternate, inspirational popular cultures for social change. In The *Culture of Cities,* he says that architecture is ideally "the essential commanding art." This is because, within the realm of daily existence and throughout society, "architectural form" so ubiquitously "crystallizes," and makes "visible" the dominant ideas of the society. In a passage quite reminiscent of the one we just quoted from Bourne, Mumford wrote that "good building has always embodied, as an essential element in both design and operation, the understanding and expression of organic human purposes."[197]

We will certainly discuss Mumford's ideas on architecture and society in more depth later in this paper. In the next chapter, however, we shall examine the ideas of Mumford's first work, *The Story of Utopias.*

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[196] Bourne, "Our Unplanned Cities," *The Radical Will,* pp. 277-78.

[197] Mumford, *The Culture of Cities,* p. 403.

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CHAPTER 3

THE STORY OF UTOPIAS

One of the most important texts for understanding Mumford's basic approach to social change is his first book, *The Story of Utopias*, which he wrote in 1921-22. In this book, we can see the basic themes and attitudes of Mumford's career developing.

As in all his work, Mumford attempts to plumb the cultural depths of his civilization, in order to challenge radically the complacency of his contemporaries over its present direction. He seeks to wake up his fellows from what he perceives to be their present stupor. There is an old saying, "familiarity breeds contempt": but for Mumford, following the Romantics discussed in the last chapter, the familiarity of everyday living breeds unconsciousness as to the workings and meaning of the present-day culture and institutions which (mis-)shape our lives. Thus, in *The Story of Utopias,* Mumford seems to see his task as akin to that of Freud's psychoanalysis. The Freudian psychoanalyst seeks to bring to light the unconscious fantasies that distort the patient's perceptions and responses to life. So too, Mumford likewise seeks to dig up for scrutiny, out of our present-day *collective* unconscious, the utopias, or, as the case may be, dystopias that have unconsciously shaped and continue to shape our present-day life. These, Mumford asserts consist of the Country House, Coketown, Megalopolis, and the Nation-State. Mumford would employ such terms throughout his writing career: up to and including his concept of the "Pentagon of Power" complex in the 1960s.

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Mumford's concept, I think, is similar to George Sorel's concept of heroic "myth" which galvanizes people into action. But the effect of Mumford's "utopias," as he conceives them, is far more prosaic, yet at the same time, far more deeply felt. They do not inspire revolutions, but instead, our day-to-day activities and institutions. These utopias are cultural complexes composed of images wedded to institutional structures, around which modern culture has crystallized. Thus, they are not the same as Weber's "ideal types,"[1] for they are not eternal; we do not find these particular complexes in every age. They are historically based, unthought-through cultural constructs, lodged today in our minds as well as our social world, our waking unconscious life. As can be seen, Mumford takes the names for these complexes from authors such as Dickens ("Coketown"), or from ordinary language—but attempts to uncover and highlight their deeper, unconscious significance for modern people.

These utopias of today are by and large dysfunctional. If we are to escape the grip of such utopias, we must comprehend not only why they are bad for us, but also why indeed we sought them in the first place. Then we can be free to create and invest our imagination in new, effective and beneficial utopias and institutions.

Perhaps the fact that the book was written in the early 1920s, it is not difficult to comprehend why Mumford felt that the fundamental symbols and institutions of Western civilization were fundamentally flawed. Nor is it difficult

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to understand Mumford's singular animus in this book to the "utopia" of the nation-state. The terrible fratricide of World War I had just ended. Mumford had originally followed many European social democrats and American Progressives in supporting the war, because he felt that socialism could somehow arise out of the collectivist spirit of war mobilization.[2] But as the war dragged on, Mumford, who had been a part of the radical movement of American intellectuals preceding the war and situated on the Lower East Side and in the Socialist Party, the radical IWW, and the *Masses,*[3] turned against it, and against nationalism itself. During the Red Scare, which occurred in 1919-20, however, the American capitalist class managed to beat back the challenge of this avant-garde's anti-war radicalism, and, in fact, routed it.[4] In his 1919 essay in *The New Republic,* "Wardom and the State," Mumford developed upon the theme of his hero, Randolph Bourne, that "war is the health of the state."[5] Though almost every European power that fought in World War I was destroyed by it, the American State grew more powerful. During the subsequent Red Scare, Mumford must have asked himself, "How did the powers that be use nationalism and other illusions to succeed, not only at conducting this terrible war, but at stifling opposition to it? How could their illusions, and thus, their oppressive status quo, be challenged?"

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[1] Mumford's later, 60s-era concept of the social Machine, however, closely resembled Weber's "bureaucratic" ideal type, because it could indeed be found in societies as early as the Egyptian.
[2] See Lewis Mumford, "Essay on Socialism," Unpublished Manuscript, 1915, Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. See chapter 9 for a fuller discussion of this document.
[3] Miller, *Lewis Mumford: A Life,* pp. 96-97.
[4] See Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955).
[5] See Mumford, "Wardom and the State," *New Republic,* October 4, 1919, pp. 303-05.

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These were the concerns that probably preoccupied Mumford when he wrote *The Story of Utopias.*

The seeds of *Story of Utopia* were probably laid during World War I in 1918, to be precise, when Mumford made a visit to England and talked with his mentor Patrick Geddes' writing partner, Victor Branford. Branford emphasized the need to bring mankind's utopian aspirations down to earth, into concrete proposals for social reconstruction.[6] But Mumford actually started writing the book upon the encouragement of a boyhood chum, Jerry Lachenbruch, in a letter, dated July 15, 1921, which Mumford described as one of the most important he had ever received. From the fiction Mumford had previously sent him, Lachenbruch had deduced that his friend Mumford would never be a novelist: he was a sociologist, although a very imaginative one. So he encouraged Mumford to write a book about the world both as it is now, and as Mumford imagined it should be.

It was not only from Lachenbruch that Mumford got such encouragement, however. His friends Van Wyck Brooks and Gerald Robinson also saw this very same utopian potential in Mumford. On February 26, 1921, Robinson had written him that Mumford's sociological essays would do very little good unless Mumford offered "solutions to the muddles they disclose." Thus, in December of 1921, Mumford embarked upon his first major, book-length writing attempt, in order to lay the "foundations of the New Jerusalem," a theme he had been

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considering ever since he had contributed to the Harold Stearns symposium on (the lack of) *Civilization in the United States.* In January 1922, according to Miller, "Mumford approached the publisher Horace Liveright with an idea for a book 'not of the actual deeds of men but of their underlying ambitions and wishes." Liveright offered him a contract and an advance of $300, and the rest is history—the history of Lewis Mumford's career-long attempt, through writing, to reconcile the present-day chaotic social environment with the subjective aspirations of men.[7]

In *The Story of Utopias,* Mumford definition of "utopia" is far broader (and far more charitable to utopians like himself) than the definition promoted by the realists (whom we discussed in our introduction). According to Mumford, "utopia" is not just "another name for the unreal and the impossible." Instead, Mumford defines it as our "dream" of that which we desire but have not yet made real. For Mumford, the utopian is not necessarily the irrational. It is only because the world has become divorced from our desires, because we are currently powerless to change the world, that "we have set utopia against the world," so that utopia seems and is defined as "impossible." But

> As a matter of fact, it is our utopias that make the world tolerable to us: the cities and mansions that people dream of are those in which they finally live. The more that men react upon the environment and make it over after a

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[6] Donald Miller, *Lewis Mumford: A Life* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), pp. 125-27.

[7] Miller, pp. 155-57. According to Miller, the various letters cited can be found in the Lewis Mumford Collection of the Van Pelt library at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, along with an autobiographical fragment written by Lewis Mumford in October 1971.

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human pattern, the more continuously do they live in utopia. . . .

Utopia, then, is a vital, important part of human reality. It is the fundament of social change and human fulfillment. It is only when "there is a breach between the world of affairs and the otherworld of utopia," that "we see our utopia as a separate reality" that stands apart from us, an indulgence that we should ignore as an infantile fantasy.[8]

Dewey and the Young Americans had called for a harmonious relationship between the human subjective self and its objective environment. For Mumford, Utopia is at the heart of this relationship. In Mumford's hands, this becomes an historical exploration of utopias, past and present. The book is divided into three parts: a critique of old utopias for their abstract quality, a critique of objective reality as itself the product of failed utopias, and a proposal for a practical utopianism for the contemporary period.

Utopia occupies broadly the world of ideas in general, or what Mumford calls the "idolum," his word for the realm of ideas: "what the philosophers would call the subjective world, what the theologians would perhaps call the spiritual world, . . . all the philosophies, fantasies, rationalizations, projections, images, and opinions in terms of which people pattern their behavior." Disagreeing with the crude materialist view, Mumford goes on to say that though this "world of ideas . . . sometimes has a rough correspondence with what people call the world;

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[8] Mumford, *The Story of Utopias*, (New York: Viking Press, 1962), p. 11.

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. . . it is important to note that it has contours of its own which are quite independent of the material environment."[9]

We can only speculate as to why Mumford uses this particular term, "idolum." Note that it is related, not only to "idea," but also, to the words "ideal, and, "idyll." These terms connote meanings related to the concept of utopia: which can connote, as Mumford later discusses, an ideal world, or an idyllic retreat. With the term, "idolum," it would appear that Mumford wishes to suggest that our subjective realm spans a continuity between subjective ideas, ideals, idyllic fantasies, and utopias.

Mumford distinguishes between two forms of utopia, which are defined by their different purposes. On the one hand, human beings construct an idyllic utopia of "escape": "a substitute for the external world . . . a sort of house of refuge to which we flee when our contact with 'hard facts become too complicated to carry through or too rough to face." On the other hand, we construct an idealistic utopia of "reconstruction," by which "the facts of the everyday world are brought together and assorted and sifted, and a new sort of reality is projected back again upon the external world." The one

> seeks an immediate release from the difficulties or frustrations of our lot. The other attempts to provide a condition for our release in the future. . . . The first leaves the external world the way it is; the second seeks to change it so that one may have intercourse with it on one's own terms. . . .[10]

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[9] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

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In more scientific terms, the utopia of escape

> represents, . . . a very primitive kind of thinking, in which we follow the direction of our desires without taking into account any of the limiting conditions which we should have to confront if we came back to earth and tried to realize our wishes in practical affairs. . . .

The problem with the realists' view, Mumford implies, is that they ignore the rationality of the utopia of reconstruction. This "may likewise be colored by primitive desires and wishes," and the realist employs these aspects to posit that *all* utopias are irrational. But the utopia of reconstruction should not be so dismissed, Mumord insists, because within it, as opposed to the utopia of escape, "these desires and wishes have come to reckon with the world in which they seek realization. . . ."[11]

This view is significantly different from Freud: at least, the pessimistic Freud of *Civilization and Its Discontents,* if not of his earlier, more hopeful writings. While he challenged the crude empiricism and sexual repressiveness of his own day, and while he certainly had his playful, subversive side, Freud seems ultimately to have accepted the pessimistic idea that an impassable gap always yawns between popular desire and reality. For the later Freud, fantasy, art, and science were, respectively, regressive, creative, and adaptive: but not often or ever "reconstructive." They were diversions from and compensations for the harshness of reality, conceived as an inevitable burden. Psychoanalysis, and science in general, was perhaps the most useful deflection, because it could

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[10] Ibid., p. 15.

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gradually bring about a more "mature," sober *acceptance* of the reality principle. Such acceptance could be expected, however, only from a scientific elite, not from the man-in-the-mass, who required more libidinous, childish compensations to get along. As Freud writes in *Civilization and its Discontents,* desire and reality were fundamentally opposed. The "pleasure principle," which

> dominates the operation of the mental apparatus from the start. . . . is at loggerheads with the whole world. . . .There is no possibility at all of its being carried through; all the regulations of the universe run counter to it. . . . the intention that man should be 'happy' is not included in the plan of 'Creation'.[12]

Freud's thought on this subject is dualistic and pessimistic. Elsewhere, he admitted that his later thought, far more conservative than his earlier, radical views on sexuality, might be taken for that of Schopenhauer's.[13] That self-allusion may itself be something of an exaggeration: for Freud never hated people and life like Schopenhauer did. Nevertheless, it has some accuracy. In contrast, Mumford brought Dewey's notion of that it was just possible for the human idolum to "reconstruct" reality itself, and achieve happiness. While Mumford's "escapist" utopias certainly resemble Freud's notion of fantasy as invariably regressive, his notion of a positive, reconstructive utopianism challenges Freud's pessimism.

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[11] Ibid., p. 21.
[12] Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents," *The Freud Reader,* pp. 728-29.
[13] Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis,* (London, 1949, originally published 1933)), p. 139, cf. David Boadella, *Wilhelm Reich: The Evolution of His Work* (New York: Dell, 1973), p. 51. Boadella's work features an excellent discussion of Freud's conservative turn, as criticized by Reich.

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The conflict underlying these two divergent positions on utopia concerns the relationship between Subject and Object, Mind vs. natural and social Reality. The fundamental stance of Mumford's mentor Dewey was to see Mind as a functioning part of Reality. There existed a natural continuum between the two in Dewey's conception, and a strengthening of that connection was the natural and pleasurable impulse of the human Mind. For Dewey, human subjectivity was fundamentally rational and adaptive to its environment—not evasive and irrational. Fantasies, dreams, even psychoses, were the result, not of a failure of the Reality Principle to master the Pleasure principle. Instead, they are themselves a response to a traumatic social reality. As Dewey writes: "They go back to such things as pettings and coddlings, personal rejections, failure to win recognition and approvals, fear of those in authority, frustration of hope and desire by social conditions."[14]

This social-environmental conception of fantasy lies at the basis of Mumford's positive view of utopia. Yet he quite obviously retains Freud's notion that not all impulses from the id are rational and realizable.

> What man has not had this utopia from the dawn of adolescence onwards—the desire to possess and be possessed by a beautiful woman [or man]?
>
> Perhaps for the great majority of men and women that small, private Utopia is the only one for which they feel a

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[14] Dewey, "The Unity of the Human Being," *Intelligence in the Modern World*, pp. 824-25. We can see here a more "Freudian," albeit still social-environmental, approach to the problem than in the previous passage quoted from Dewey. In this passage, Dewey is not reducing Mind completely to the status of environmental adapter: he admits the possibility of intractable conflict between Desire and Environment, where the social environment traumatizes the human individual. The "withdrawal" is not simply a rest and review period, as previously.

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> perpetual, warm interest; and ultimately every other utopia must be translatable to them in some such intimate terms. . . . . They leave their bleak office buildings and their grimy factories, and night after night they pour into the cinema theater in order that they may live for a while in a land populated by beautiful, flirtatious women and tender lusty men. . . . . In a sense, this is the most elementary of utopias; for, on the interpretation of the analytical psychologist, it carries with it the deep longing to return to and remain at rest in the mother's womb—the one perfect environment which all the machinery and legislation of an eager world has never been able to reproduce.[15]

While these infantile impulses are exacerbated by social frustration, they also seem, in Mumford's neo-Freudian view, to be simultaneously intrinsic to a trans-historical human nature. And whether or not such impulses are or ought to be ultimately realizable, in the here and now, it is important to remember that they might lead to "escapism" rather than "reconstruction."[16]

After a few summary reviews of such utopias as Plato's Republic, More's Utopia, etc., etc., we get into the really important parts of *The Story of Utopias*. These begin with an exploration of what he terms the "utopias" which legitimate our present social reality. Once again, Mumford's view flies in the face of the standard, "realist" analysis, which brands the reconstructive utopian "escapist," and sees our present reality as "rational." Mumford disagrees profoundly with this view. Our present reality is irrational; and it is borne up by a web of "escapist" fantasies.

The Culture of the Status Quo as a Utopian Hall of Mirrors

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[15] Mumford, *The Story of Utopias*, pp. 18-19.

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In analyzing the ideological basis for the present system, Mumford expands upon the analyses of the cult of the modern nation-state by his mentors Marx, William Morris and Randolph Bourne. For Morris as well as Marx, the culture of nationalism was a facade, an abstraction which divided the workers from each other and united them with their own "national" capitalists, and which legitimated bureaucratic control and repression of the workers by the capitalist state. According to Morris, in the transition from feudalism to the modern era, "political, as distinguished from natural, nationalities were being hammered together for the use of that [new capitalist] bureaucracy, which was itself a necessity to the new system."[17]

As we discussed in Chapter 1, for Bourne, the "State" was an abstract mythical entity, a result of confusion among the people, who lived in their communities, about the intentions and nature of the government. The State was a confusion of patriotism toward one's own local community with loyalty to the government, such that people accepted that government as automatically benevolent, rather than the bastion of capitalist exploitation, social oppression and militarism that it actually was. This myth, this confusion, was deliberately fostered by the class it served: the ruling class.

Mumford digs deeper, to answer the vital question not posed by Bourne. Why do people accept this myth? This acceptance is based upon the utopian idola

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[16] For a discussion of similar views of Ernst Bloch and Herbert Marcuse, see Vincent Geoghegan, *Utopianism and Marxism* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), pp. 87-112.

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that fostered the development of the present system. The "State" is itself a utopia—but a fairly abstract one. By its very abstract nature, it is out of touch with those "intimate, private" utopias, those basic human strivings and needs, at which Mumford hinted earlier.

Mumford argues that the "State" utopia is supported by the more tangible, appealing fantasy of the "Country House." This is the pastoral private retreat, originally built by aristocrats and then the bourgeoisie in Britain during the Renaissance, and then exported here in America as the modern suburban fantasy.[18] "The Country House's passionate demand for physical goods" created a consumer market for industrial production. Thus the Country House was the basis for the *dystopian* horrors created by the bourgeoisie in the city. This dystopia eventually became "Coketown": the factory town.[19] And at the center of the "State" itself is the "Megalopolis." Its powerless inhabitants tend to accept social conformity and the modern fantasies of national military power and technological and monumental glory. In the situation of powerlessness and frustration that the citizens of the bourgeois-ruled metropolis find themselves, these fantasies tend to become vicarious substitutes for the pleasures and power of empowered citizenship, to be found in the commune or garden city that Mumford promoted.[20]

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[17] William Morris, "Gothic Architecture," *Art and Society*, ed. Gary Zabel (Boston: George's Hill, 1993), p. 149.
[18] Mumford, *Story of Utopias*, p. 201.
[19] Mumford, p. 211.
[20] Of course, neither Mumford nor I would argue that this tendency is inevitable among the citizens of Megalopolis. But it does prevail as long as the citizens are powerless. A workers revolution, which Mumford advocated, as in the Paris Commune, would empower the citizenry and thus reverse this tendency. As we discussed earlier, these newly empowered inhabitants,

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Recall my earlier gloss on Mumford's choice of the term "idolum," as related to words such as "idea," "ideal," "idyll." Another word, which is related even more closely, would be "idol." Borrowing the title from one of Nietzsche's works, Bourne wrote an article, attacking the failure of liberals like John Dewey to challenge America's entry into WWII, which was titled "Twilight of the Idols."[21] Bourne's concept of the "State" was that of a false idol, a concept he borrowed, as I discussed in Chapter 1, from the "On the New Idol" chapter from Nietzsche's *Thus Sprach Zarathustra.* This is exactly the way in which Mumford deals with the Nation-State, as well as these other dystopias, the Country-House, Megalopolis, and Coketown. They are false idols, reifications and deifications of human constructs, like the "golden calf" statue from the story of "Exodus" in the Bible. They are created by human beings—yet worshipped as if they were divine. They do more harm than good, even though most people accept and believe in them without question. Their very existence is not consciously recognized: they occupy instead the "twilight" world of our modern cultural unconscious. In his second *Untimely Meditations,* entitled, "Of the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life," Nietzsche attacked Hegel for his "idolatry of the factual," which leads to a "Yes" to "every power, be it a government,

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however, in Mumford as well as Engels' vision, would now recognize the ultimate irrationality of Megalopolitan life, and thus decentralize themselves into smaller, more livable centers.

[21] Randolph Bourne, "Twilight of Idols," *The Radical Will* (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), pp. 336-47.

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public opinion, or a majority of numbers."[22] Mumford's false idols underlie and organize the present factual world, without most people even being conscious of their existence as idols.

The "golden calf" in the Bible was a substitute for worship of Yahweh, the only true God for the Hebrew people. These false idols Mumford discusses all gain an unthinking legitimacy because they fill the vacuum in people's lives, created by a lack of *community*. It is in our potential for popular, democratic, community, Bourne and Mumford argued, and not in these false idols, that we should place our faith, upon which we should place our aspirations, inspired by which we should base our present political ideas and activities. Perhaps this is a good point to go into depth about the kind of community Mumford wanted. In formulating what is to follow, I do not limit myself to Mumford himself, but to the ideas of the radical tradition to which he contributed.

Mumford did not accept the realist view of community, with us since at least of Roman imperial administration, which defines "community" as merely people occupying the same territory. Such a view holds forth no real ideal of community, so the realist can ignore the great lack of community in present society.

With Whitman and Bourne, and many other radicals, such as Marx and Paul Goodman, Mumford thought that we could and should have something better than

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[22] Nietzsche, "Of the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life," *Untimely Meditations*, 1873, as quoted in Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 149.

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mere mutual occupation of territory. Man is a gregarious, social animal, therefore, for these radicals, the "beloved" community, as we have discussed in chapter 1, was a human need, or rather, embodied a bundle of vitally necessary needs. These include:

- the freedom to assert oneself and have one's self nurtured, mirrored and recognized as important;
- education for the development of that self in knowledge, morality and technical and aesthetic skills;
- a basic sense of physical and economic security, emotional and cultural belonging, and common purpose; and
- a sense of collective immortality: i.e., the sense that one's achievements and ideas will live on in the community long after one has died.

To my knowledge, Mumford never concretely and rigorously defined the ideal of community he promotes. One gets a sense of what Mumford is after in hints and snatches. Other radicals are more explicit, however. In his work, *The Idea of Fraternity in America* (1973), Wilson Carey McWilliams argues that "fraternity" is necessary for the good society and for good personal development. His definition of "fraternity" is one that might also be employed for "beloved community." For McWilliams, fraternity

1. Is a bond based on intense interpersonal affection, and,
2. Like all such bonds, is limited in the number of persons and in the social space to which it can be extended; that it
3. Also involves shared values or goals considered more important than "mere life," and

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4. Is closely related to the development of "ego identity," since it
5. Includes a recognition of shortcomings and failure in the attainment of ultimate values, but
6. Provides the emotional encouragement and sense of worth ("assurance of identity") which make it possible to endure such tensions without betraying one's own values, and finally,
7. Implies a necessary tension with loyalty to society at large.[23]

Radical communitarians like Mumford and McWilliams define their ideal of genuine community in terms of face-to-face meetings and associations, friendships, romantic love. As we discussed in chapter 1, in the "beloved" community of Morris, Marx, Peirce, and Bourne, people view each other and their relationships as ends-in-themselves rather than purely as means to their own selfish ends, or as obstacles in the way of one's own consumption. Relationships are free rather than coercive. Thus, people feel a basic sense of security and freedom, as McWilliams argues, and as Marshall Berman argues in *The Politics of Authenticity,* about "unveiling" themselves to each other. They would feel comfortable about developing their "authentic" selves before others; in turn, feeling recognized themselves, they would feel comfortable about recognizing others' selves and achievements. Such recognition and self-assertion, however, should not be confused with the mere self-promotion and empty celebrity as well as blind loyalty to charismatic and corrupt political officials that we see so much of today. To develop a self worthy of recognition, the citizens of a good community must be able and be encouraged to internalize and develop in their

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[23] Wilson Carey McWilliams, *Idea of Fraternity in America*, pp. 7-8.

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own individual way the knowledge, moral values, and skills of their community. As McWilliams asserts, the good community involves some measure of personal responsibility, the expectation that its members aspire to "grow up," to become competent in one's skills and at one's tasks, to be ethical and compassionate toward one another, to mature emotionally. Responsibility entails accountability; thus, as Berman argues, the individual would be evaluated and rewarded for his achievements, in the technical or political fields, as a result of genuine achievement, not celebrity. This would further the educational development of the individual, and ensure that the community of their admirers would truly be benefited (rather than scammed). For example, people are elected to public office (including factory management, in a democratic socialist society) because they are really the best for the job, not because a wealthy special interest paid for their PR.[24] A similar community of mutual evaluation could be created for the aesthetic realm. While complete freedom of aesthetic production would be guaranteed to everyone, the public is educated aesthetically, and aesthetic criticism is institutionalized and respected. Thus standards of good, meaningful art, which all the citizens may attempt to create, are understood and accepted; schmaltz, kitsch, and noise are critiqued (but not censored).

To ensure such a process of opportunity and accountability, in the political, economic, technical, and aesthetic realms, universal communication and criticism

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[24] Marshall Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity*, especially the section "Children of the Future: Community Through Individuality," pp. 177-83, and the chapter entitled "A New Politics: The Authentic Citizen," pp. 200-28.

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must be institutionalized. The beloved community must constitute a democratic public, by socializing the means of production and democratizing the media and the academy.

Thus mirrored, nurtured, educated, the citizens would also feel far more comfortable about sacrificing their own individual egoism to participate in mutual discussion, labor and collective achievement. As we discussed in Chapter 1, this was the hope of both Marx and Morris; and we can see a hint of it, in Mumford's comment in *The Culture of Cities*, about the possibility that "the curve of the individual career may be ultimately harmonized with that of the community."[25] The beloved community develops the self. But the beloved community, in turn, develops out of the collective selves of all its members.

A mentality of emotional "abundance" rather than "scarcity" would thus obtain. The common feeling would be that there is plenty of recognition, worth, and collective labor to go around. One need not try to hoard it all to oneself, in stingy fashion; rather, we can afford to be generous with our esteem and our efforts.

Ultimately, the genuine "beloved" community rewards its members more than they could ever invest in it. For it gives them the basic, intensely gratifying sense, as Mumford himself wrote about in many places, that their selves have not just a secure home, but an extension beyond mere biology: beyond their own physical bodies, in time as well as in space. Their subjectivity achieves broader

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[25] Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, p. 383.

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manifestation through their achievements, through the give and take of politics, through the memories of the lovers and friends they leave behind, through the common culture and architecture of the community. They participate in this creation of and recreation of this culture. Thus it both nurtures and reflects their own tastes, ideas, and achievements.

This idea of community does not need to be purely local. For Bourne, Marx, and Mumford, the "beloved community" is already present, in embryo form, in modern society. Though it is limited by the harshness and violence of class struggle, the working class represents a potential community of shared economic interests and common struggles: a powerful agency for social change. But such a "community" can only really actualize itself for such change in smaller associations in which meaningful dialogue and deliberation can take place: union locals, factory councils, and soviets, for example. If and when such associations are prohibited from taking place, then the working class does not really form a genuine community, and cannot learn its real interests, give voice to them, nor fight for them. It is atomized instead, easily subject to manipulation by bosses, corrupt trade union bureaucrats, and political "representatives": it is still a class "in itself" rather than "for itself," to borrow Marx's Hegelian language.[26]

In Mumford's view, the modern "idolum" is a complex package of illusory compensations for the frustration of such communal needs. It is also sort of a hall

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[26] See Karl Marx, "Civil War in France," *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 627-36. We will discuss Mumford's ideas on radical democracy in a later chapter. We will specifically discuss his articles

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of mirrors. Each of these utopias/dystopias offers a partial satisfaction denied by the others, and thus represents refuges from each other. Let's take a tour through the modern hall of delusions, in order to flesh this out.

The mythical center and historical basis of this complex of partial utopias/dystopias is The "Country House." This was portrayed as a utopia of abundance, which seemed to operate without strife or toil. That was because the laborers who make the place go were ignored, as Raymond Williams also discusses in his *Country and the City*.[27] This reach of this utopian idyll extends far longer than the eighteenth century: its heyday. According to Mumford,

> While the Country House was in the beginning an aristocratic institution, it has penetrated now to every stratum of society; and . . . it is responsible, I believe, for the particular go and direction which the industrial revolution has taken. The Country House standards of consumption are responsible for our Acquisitive Society. . . . the chief pattern by means of which the medieval order was transformed into the modern order. . . .[28]

As Mumford writes further, the Country House, like the later suburban ideal, is fundamentally opposed to the ideal of political involvement or social concern; it is egocentric in the extreme:

> The Country House is concerned not with the happiness of the whole community but with the felicity of the governors. The conditions which underlie this limited and partial good life are political power and economic wealth; and in order for the life to flourish, both of these must be obtained in almost limitless quantities. The chief

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in the *Dial:* "The Status of the State," July 26, 1919, pp. 59-61; "Wardom and the State," October 4, 1919, pp. 303-05.

[27] Raymond Williams, *Country and the City*, 13-34.

[28] Mumford, *The Story of Utopias*, p. 201.

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> principles that characterize this society are possession and passive [consumption].[29]

As the ruling class lays up more private wealth for itself, "the common possessions of the community dwindle." While the inevitable result is a loss of humanity, for everyone, this private escapism has a domino effect throughout the society, culminating at last in the dead end of the working-class suburban tract. For after the ruling class runs off with the loot to their Country Houses, "there remains no other community than a multitude of anarchic individuals. . . " Thus every individual does

> his best to create for himself a Country House, notwithstanding the fact that the net result of his endeavors—this is the drab tragedy and the final thing to be said against it—is perhaps nothing better than six inadequate rooms at the end of nowhere in a Philadelphia suburb.[30]

As Robert Fishman has written in his work, *The Bourgeois Utopia*, suburbia was itself a form of utopian decentralization. It differs from the decentralists (Howard, Kropotkin, and Geddes) Fishman discussed in his first major work, *Urban Utopians of the Twentieth Century*, in two important respects:

(a) it was not created by visionary dissenters from the bourgeois order. Rather, it was created by the British and the U.S. bourgeoisie themselves

(b) it "succeeded" in at least becoming realized, whereas these other utopias "failed"—at least in this regard.

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[29] Ibid., p. 202.
[30] Ibid., pp. 210-11.

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Therefore, comparatively speaking, we have very little idea whether or not these other utopias will ever work. We at least know, as Fishman and Mumford both agree, that suburbia did *not* work. As I wrote in my introduction, for Mumford, the suburb was not ideal utopia: it was culturally sterile, a-political, and a "formless" and unplanned as the modern big city[31]: "In the distorting mirror of the Country House, Coketown itself takes on a utopian dimension. For despite its wretched misery, the industrial factory town is the source of much of the commercial splendors of the Country House."[32]

Simultaneously, the "Country House" offers a refuge from the ugliness and misery of "Coketown." But the "Megalopolis," also the product of Coketown, and even the dystopian "Coketown" itself, offers far more a sense of productivity, excitement, and power than the crushing boredom, isolation, and sterility of the "Country House."

The myth of the national State is the "connective tissue" between Coketown and the Country House. It is the "social myth, the collective utopia," "manufactured" to delude the workers of Coketown (a "utopia" whose degrading spirit, as Marx and Engels would agree, increasingly pervades all of modern society, including much of Megalopolis itself[33]) into thinking they have a stake in

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[31] See my conclusion for a more complete discussion of Mumford's animus toward suburban development. Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); and his *Urban Utopias of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass, 1982).
[32] Mumford, *The Story of Utopias*, p. 211.
[33] Neither Marx, nor Engels, nor Mumford argued, however, that such degradation was the workers' fault: an interpretation that the Whites, who view Mumford as a genteel patrician, might have made. It was a product of capitalism, and thus, as with the delusions of megalopolis, its prevalence within society could be reversed through revolution.

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producing the goods hoarded by the rich in their "Country Houses."[34]

The spiritual capitol of the "National State," according to Mumford, is yet another escapist utopia: "Megalopolis." Through its excitement and its entertainment, through its systematic substitution of paper, bureaucracy, and spectacle for individual diversity, community, and natural connection, Megalopolis simultaneously lures and drums people into conformity, into forgetting their basic far more rebellious and natural instincts and desires, to be satisfied with less. And the suburban Shangri-La surrounding megalopolis is the gold watch at the end of the Coketown travail. It is the Country House for everybody—everybody, that is, who makes it into the middle class and can save up enough to afford their own smaller version of the old, completely sterile, monotonous bourgeois ideal. In Mumford's words, Megalopolis is "a paper purgatory which serves as a medium through which the fallen sons of Coketown, the producer's hell, may finally attain the high bliss of the Country House, the consumer's Heaven."[35]

Here, in Mumford's exploration of the structure of the nationalist utopia, we have perhaps one of the first expressions of what would be Mumford's guiding concern for this part of his career, culminating in *The Culture of Cities*. That concern is how and why the ruling class organizes social space to serve its own ends: ideological and political as well as economic. For Mumford, following Bourne, the "nation" is a dangerous abstraction, an "imaginary community."

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[34] Mumford, *Story of Utopias*, p. 221.
[35] Ibid., p. 230.

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Economically and militarily, it destroys the possibility of building real community, as defined by Bourne, Mumford, McWilliams, or Berman.

For such community, according to Bourne and Mumford, the "nation" substitutes abstract "national space." This is abstract, not because it is territorially widespread--so is the working class--but because its relationships are phony, *purely* abstract rather than personal or local. The relationships of the nation, though touted as "universal," are based primarily upon a tremendous concentration of power, power which props up economic exploitation. Far from basing itself upon local or even regional communities, group loyalties, or working class interests, the "nation" has evolved in fact by crushing these instead.[36] Nationalism thrives upon the vacuum created by an atomized society. The national fantasy compensates people for the absence or repression of such community in modern society with the illusion of community between workers and their exploiters, as well as with the vicarious thrill of "national" military and technological power.

Mumford writes,

> There is a sense in which we may look upon the National State as a fact; but that great philosopher of the National State, Mazzini, realized that the National State has continually to be willed; and its existence lies plainly, therefore, on a different plane from the existence of a bit of territory, a building, or a city.

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[36] An exception might be made for the French Revolution of 1789, which was based supposedly upon the communes, the "people": but the Jacobins, like their Bolshevik descendants, soon turned against this popular democracy and stamped it out! See Daniel Guerin, *Class Struggle in the First French Republic: Bourgeois and Bras Nus, 1793-1795,* tr. Ian Patterson (London, Pluto Press, 1977).

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True, the nation-state is not an incorrigible "fact," as many people seem to believe. But are these other things—especially, a "city"--mere "facts"? Doesn't a city need to be "willed," ultimately? What Mumford perhaps means by this is that these other things, and the meaning surrounding them, are more tangible, serve everyday human social purposes. One needs to live in a building, come together with others in some kind of urban social space, or "city." What ordinary purpose does the concept of "nation" serve, however? That is the difference. Mumford remarks further that, unlike these other historic things, "it is only by the persistent projection of this [national] utopia for the last three or four hundred years that its existence has become credible."[37]

Further, the concept of nation negates more historical and useful associations. Mumford remarks that, "for all the minute descriptions which the political historian gives to the National State, its origins and its institutions and its people, read a good deal like" the story of the Emperor's New Clothes. He argues that the reality of human population is that of regional and local community, not of nationalism nor its basis in abstract individualism:

> In each of these human regions we find that the population does not consist of a multitude of atomic individuals: on the contrary, when the geographer plots houses and buildings on a topographic map, he finds that people and houses cohere together in groups of more or less limited size, called cities, towns, villages, hamlets. Normally, a vast amount of intercourse takes place between these groupings . . . [and this] has been a part of Western European civilization since Neolithic times, at least. . . .

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[37] Mumford, p. 221.

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In contrast,

> Instead of recognizing natural regions and natural groups of people, the utopia of nationalism establishes. . . a certain realm called national territory, and makes all the inhabitants of this territory the members of a single, indivisible group, the nation. . . .
>
> The chief concern of the national utopia is the support of the central government, for the government is the guardian of territory and privilege.

This "chief concern" of the nation state is quite obviously the selling point of this myth for the privileged classes. What of the lower classes? For this purpose, the nationalist utopia is brought in to play. By "constantly playing up the dangers of rivalry from other national utopias, the State . . . persuades the workers in Coketown that they have more in common with the classes that exploit them than they have in common with other groups within a more limited community."[38] In other words, "we" have to protect what's "ours" from the nationalist Enemy-an Enemy which includes foreign immigrants and racial out-groups, whom we might otherwise might see as our allies against Capital.

This abstraction from real life and real community is profoundly authoritarian and encourages conformity to rather than criticism of capitalist Coketown and its political, social, and military imperatives. Mumford imagines the "perfect citizen" required by these irrational, insane imperatives: a completely perverted "ideal" of perfection that no one in his right mind would really want to be. Such a "citizen" is at the farthest remove from Mumford's democratic,

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[38] Ibid., p. 224.

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humanist ideal of the autonomous man. He is instead a blindly obedient robot. If we all became this "ideal," "we would never let anything come between us and our loyalty to the State."[39]

The Paucity of Prior Socialist Utopias

Mumford's next topic in *The Story of Utopias* is the penchant of many socialist intellectuals to merely mirror the escapist "utopia" of the existing bourgeois reality, rather than fundamentally challenge it and offer a genuinely "reconstructive" alternative.

First, Mumford swipes at his socialist predecessors, chiefly Marx, for attempting to "compartmentalize" modern society and then confusing the part with the whole, for asserting that "the only fundamental problem in the modern world was the labor problem—the problem as to who should control industry, who should profit by its advances, and who should own the complicated instruments by which it was conducted. . . ."[40]

Although Mumford would repeat this charge against Marx, Engels, and their followers throughout his life, it is based upon a caricature. Marx never

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[39] Ibid., p. 231. As Martin Carnoy summarizes Poulantzas' theory on the subject, "The nation, as developed in the capitalist State, together with its territory, tradition, and language, is a form of unification of people divided by capitalist production into classes—segmented, separated, individualized and isolated—into a new concept of space and time, a concept that is intended to keep the dominated class from realizing who and why it is. Instead, members of that class focus on the new individual's consciousness, on the commonality each has (under the State) with other members of the people-nation; he or she is *inside* the same territory, has the same historical goals, and is engaged in the same process of change as all the other members of the people-nation." See Martin Carnoy, *The State and Political Theory* (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 1984), p. 121. Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, tr. By Patrick Camiller (London: New Left Books, 1978), pp. 105-07.

[40] Mumford, *The Story of Utopias*, p. 240.

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argues that the "labor problem" is the "only fundamental problem" of modern society. Rather, he argues that our fundamental problems, of which there is a plethora, are *rooted* here, in the question of who controls the means of production, i.e., in the mode of production.

Further in the chapter, however, Mumford steps upon more solid ground. Marx was quite explicit about his unwillingness to imagine what socialism would be like after the working class seizes power. He wanted to defer to the triumphant workers themselves on such matters. He wanted to avoid the kind of compulsive attention to details of so many utopias (streets shall be 30 feet wide; ceilings 8 ft. high, etc.) that would simply get in the way of genuine, flexible socialist planning.[41] This circumspection, however, was a net loss for socialism. It made the socialists—according to Mumford, anyway--just as bereft of imagination as the American "muckrakers" Mumford would later deride in "The Golden Day":

> if [the socialists' negative] attitude towards the past performances of industrialism was sound, their gesture towards the future, and their attitude towards the whole milieu, was little less than indifferent. There were to be certain gains in money wages, in political control, in the distribution of products, and so forth; but the realization of these gains was never projected in any very vivid way—a vague fellowship in peace and plenty under gay red banners was all that was left over when the current efforts to "educate the masses," "revise the constitution," or "organize the revolution" were taken for granted.[42]

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[41] See Vincent Geoghegan, *Utopianism and Marxism* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), pp. 22 - 34.
[42] Mumford, *The Story of Utopias*, p. 242.

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What distinguishes the previous socialist style of organizing from Mumford's "reconstructive" approach is Mumford's belief that "Men will indeed work for an idea . . . but sooner or later the spirit must be made manifest in the flesh, and if it never comes to birth, or at best is an abortion, the idea is bound to wither away."[43]

As with Mumford's attack on John Dewey for his purported lack of an aesthetic dimension, however, this is terribly unfair and tendentious. Visionaries attuned to the "spiritual" and poetic dimension—Heinriche Heine, for just one example--have abounded in the pantheon of socialist thought. Marx talked about the "poetry of the future." But let's once again ignore Mumford's annoying and continual penchant to put down his predecessors in order to emphasize the importance of his own work. Whether or not his socialist predecessors shared his view, Mumford is right to insist that there has been a strand of socialist thought which has dismissed the need for such vision, which has asserted that abstract ideas are enough. But according to Mumford, the masses must be invited to participate in the imagination of and planning for the future, in the concrete.

> our radical programs have had simply a sentimental interest: they moved people without giving them a specific task, they stirred them emotionally without giving them an outlet, and so, at best, they are but partial utopias of escape, using the powers of organization, collective meetings, and pronunciamentos to take the place of the emotional stimuli which the avowed utopia of escape, like [William Morris's utopian novel,] News from Nowhere, supplies by introducing a beautiful girl.

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[43] Ibid., p. 244.

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This, I think, is less of a complaint against Morris for putting the girl in than upon those socialists and progressives who leave the girl, and the sexuality, out. Mumford continues,

> . . . . Socialism, Prohibition, Proportional Representation, and the various other abstract "isms" are the fetishes of the partisan: they are attempts to make some particular instrument or function of the community stand for the whole. . . . it is easier to concentrate on the use of liquor or the ownership of machinery and land than upon the totality of a community's activities. It is easier indeed; but it is fatal; for the . . . society fails to undergo any fundamental change.[44]

Besides this "fetishism," Mumford detects another weakness in the socialist movement: its "externalism."

> Men like Rousseau, Bentham, Godwin, Fourier, and Owen [shared a] belief in human nature. They looked upon human institutions as altogether external to men; these were so many straitjackets that cunning rulers had thrown over the community to make sane and kindly people behave like madmen; and they could conceive of changing the institutions without changing the habits and redirecting the impulses of the people by whom and for whom they had been created.[45]

Mumford argues instead that

> Our programs for reconstruction that have not reckoned with the perpetual cussedness of human nature and have no method for exorcising it are as shallow as those older theologies which sought to make men live in grace without altering the social order in which they functioned.[46]

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[44] Ibid., pp. 244-46.
[45] Ibid., p. 247.
[46] Ibid., p. 251.

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This problem of externalism is related to the previously mentioned problem of monomaniacal fetishism. Here, the institutions are fetishized as the problem and the solution, while human nature in all its complexity is left alone. Mumford's use of term "perpetual cussedness" here is obviously ironic—since he simultaneously proposes to "exorcise" it. But what he is arguing is that the selfishness, egotism, aggression, and immaturity we see around us today will not simply disappear once our institutions are radically modified. Nor can they be radically modified without, in the process, transforming this "cussedness." Both need attention, if either is to be changed.

Needed: The Practical Reconstruction of Science and Art to Build Utopia

The sort of people needed to create Mumford's "reconstruction" is just the opposite of the fetishist, unwilling to deal with anything outside of his *idée fixe*. The reconstructionist is broad-minded, flexible, self-critical, much like Bourne's ideal of a critical radicalism:

> What has perhaps been . . . conspicuously lacking has been people who are accessible to the existing knowledge, people whose minds have been training to play freely with the facts, people who have learned the fine and exacting art of co-operating with their fellows; people who are as critical of their own mental processes and habits of behavior as they are of the institutions they wish to alter.[47]

Heretofore, utopians

> placed desire above reality; and so their chief fulfillment has been in the realm of fantasy. . . . It is time to bring our utopian idola and our everyday world into contact. . . . The first step in reconstruction is to make over

[47] Ibid., p. 250.

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> our inner world, and to give our knowledge and our projections a new foundation.[48]

"The existing knowledge" needed by the reconstructionist in order to bring this about includes science and art; but both these realms must be reconstructed as well. The most important problem with these realms is that they have been so thoroughly separated. Mumford asserts that this is only a recent development, relatively speaking.

The arts, humanities, and social sciences formerly occupied, in Aristotle's time, the paramount position; the natural philosophies, a secondary one. In the modern world, however, this hierarchy has been reversed. The physical sciences have become all-important; everything else is secondary. "Hence," Mumford argues, "there is a great gap between the more external part of the world which has been affected by science, and that part, nearer to man and man's institutions, which has yet for the greater part to be conquered."[49]

While there is some advantage, as Veblen pointed out, to the fact that the basis of science in "idle curiosity," Mumford argues,

> the divorce of science from the daily life of the community is not altogether an advantage. . . . when the sciences remain disparate and unrelated to the other, they tend to pass over from a public world to the private world of the specialist; and the knowledge which obtains in that world can with difficulty be brought out again to irrigate the common life of the community. . . .

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[48] Ibid., pp. 267-68.
[49] Ibid., p. 273.

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According to Mumford, this "loss of contact" transforms science from a beneficial practice to one that is "highly dangerous":

> A community which cultivates chemical science to the point at which it is able to wipe out a whole city by a few explosions of poisonous gas is in a pretty treacherous situation. If the science that it possesses has not helped to found a eutopia, it has at any rate provided the foundations for a kakotopia, or bad place: in short, for a hell. . . . When science is not touched by a sense of values it works—as it fairly consistently has worked during the past century—towards a complete dehumanization of the social order. The plea that each of the sciences must be permitted to go its own way without control should be immediately rebutted by pointing out that they obviously need a little guidance when their applications in war and industry are so plainly disastrous.[50]

The development of atomic weapons, genetically engineered food, killer viruses, biologicl experiments upon live, unwilling or unwitting human subjects by both the U.S. and Nazi governments since Mumford wrote this merely confirm the truth of his statement. If anything, Mumford is understating the case here—perhaps ironically. But in my opinion, it is not sufficient for science, or rather, individual scientists, to merely be "touched by a sense of values," that they need "only a little guidance." Unlike Edward Teller, his colleague, J. Robert Oppenheimer, was an ethical man. Yet the science that both men developed led to the creation and the immediate use of the atomic bomb to murder hundreds of thousands of individuals. What is required is democratic political control over the technological results of science. While Mumford does discuss the need for such

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[50] Ibid., p. 276.

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democracy throughout his career, such a discussion fails to make its appearance here, unfortunately.

Mumford gets close to the democratic mark, however, when he argues that the solution to this irresponsibility is for science to become both grounded in the community and comprehensive of the entirety of scientific knowledge:

> If the sciences are to be cultivated anew with respect for a definite hierarchy of human values, it seems to me that the sciences must be focused again upon particular local communities, and the problems which they offer for solution. . . .
>
> On one hand, science must be in contact with the whole idolum of scientific thought—with that vast overworld of scientific effort which is the product of no single place or people or time. On the other hand, it must be related to the definite local community, limited in time and in space, in which its researches and its speculations will be realized and applied.[51]

It is at this point that Mumford introduces a discussion of Geddes' "Regional Survey" idea, as his means of integrating the specialized sciences with each other and with the local community, so as to assure their accountability and relevance. He discusses this idea in terms very similar to Dewey's chapter in *Democracy and Education* on "The Significance of Geography and History," which we discussed in Chapter 1:

> The aim of the Regional Survey is to take a geographic region and explore it in every aspect. . . . it is . . . a survey of the existing conditions in all their aspects; and it emphasizes to a much greater extent than the social survey the natural characteristics of the environment. . .in addition to the development of natural and human conditions in the

[51] Ibid., p. 277-78.

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> historic past. . . . In short, the regional survey attempts a local synthesis of all the specialist "knowledges."
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> . . . . the result is a complete description of the community's foundations, its past, its manner of working and living, its institutions, its regional peculiarities, and its utilization of physical, vital, and social resources. Each of the sciences draws upon its general body of knowledge to illuminate the points under observation; and when problems arise which point definitely to the lack of scientific or scholarly data, new trails are opened and new territory defined.[52]

But it is not only the case that the sciences become grounded in the local community through the use of the survey. The local community, the majority of its inhabitants, becomes grounded in science: it becomes immediately accessible to them. At Geddes' Outlook Tower,

> The knowledge embodied in the Regional Survey has a coherence and pithiness which no isolated study of science can possibly possess. It is presented in such a form that it can be assimilated by every member of the community who has the rudiments of an education, and it thus differs from the isolated discipline which necessarily remains the heritage of the specialist.

What makes the survey knowledge comprehendible is its interrelatedness:

> Above all, this knowledge is not that of "subjects," taken as so many water tight and unrelated components: it is a knowledge of a whole region, seen in all its aspects; so that the relations between the work aspect and the soil aspect, become fairly simple and intelligible. This common tissue of definite, verifiable, localized knowledge is what all our partisan utopias and reconstruction programs have lacked; and lacking it, have been one-sided and ignorant and abstract. . . .

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[52] Ibid., p. 279-80.

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The regional survey unites not only science to social concerns, but also the scientist with the workers. Science thus becomes a democratic concern.

> Regional survey, then, is the bridge by which the specialist whose face is turned towards the library and the laboratory, and the active worker in the field, whose face is turned towards the city and region in which he lives, may come into contact; and out of this contact our plans and our eutopias may be founded on such a permanent foundation of facts as the scientist can build for us, while the sciences themselves will be cultivated with some regard for the human values and standards, as embodied in the needs and the ideals of the local community.[53]

This, then, is Mumford's program for the reconstruction of science. By itself, however, such a reconstruction is "not enough" for him: for, as Mumford writes, "Knowledge is a tool rather than a motor." What motivates men is not their knowledge, but "their instinctive impulses and by such emotionally colored pattern-ideas or idola as the dreamer is capable of projecting." As Mumford argues in the beginning of the book, men's dreams, fantasies, and their embodiment in art are the means by which "we enlarge the environment, so that our behavior is guided by the conditions that we seek to establish and enjoy in an imaginary world." To reconstruct the world, we must reconstruct this "idolum" itself. We must reconstruct, in other words, the world of art.[54]

Mumford considers now the role of art and how it has changed from the pre-modern to the modern era. In a portrayal that prefigures his *Culture of Cities,* Mumford claims that

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[53] Ibid., pp. 280-81.
[54] Ibid., p. 282.

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> At the height of the Middle Ages, as in fifth century [B.C.] Athens, the arts formed together a living unity. . . . drama and music and architecture and painting and sculpture were united for the purpose of ringing changes on the emotional nature of men and converting them to accept the theological vision of otherworldly utopia.[55]

It is not, of course, this otherworldliness or the manipulation that Mumford finds ideal here about the medieval community's aesthetic. Rather, it is the fact that art was a part of everyday, public, popular existence. But as modern capitalism develops, the classes polarize and separate, art becomes a private luxury for the rich. Thus, like science, art becomes narcissistic:

> The divorce of the art of the cultivated classes from that of the whole community tended to deprive it of any other standards than the artist himself was content to erect. Here again the comparison with science is curiously pertinent. The world of art is in a sense a separate world, and it can be cultivated for a time without reference to the desires and emotions of the community out of which it has sprung. But the motto "Art for art's sake" turns out in practice to be something quite different—namely, art for the artist's sake; and art which is produced in this manner, without any external standard of performance, is frequently just an instrument for overcoming a neurosis or enabling the artist to restore his personal equilibrium.[56]

"Art for art's sake" was a phrase originally coined by the American painter, Whistler (author of *Whistler's Mother).* It is a phrase usually ascribed to what its opponents, and then its adherents, called the "Decadent" school, originating with Baudelaire and led later on by Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater, and Verlaine. These

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[55] Ibid., p. 285. Mumford, in raising 5th century Athens as an ideal for the aesthetic vocation, ignores the harsh political conflict of the era in which artists frequently got involved as partisans and consequently lost their lives or their rights as citizens within Athens.
[56] Ibid., p. 286.

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had a profound influence, first as a model, then, as a foil, upon 20th century modernists such as James Joyce, William Butler Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound. As we shall see shortly, Mumford celebrated Yeats' work. His criticism of the "Decadents" here shares these modernists' criticisms of the "Decadents" as going along and celebrating, rather than combating, the "decadence" of modern society.[57]

Once again, however, Mumford is being tendentious with his critique. It is certainly the case that such solipsism was a tendency in the late nineteenth century. But to dismiss the worth of the entire genre in this fashion is unfair. At the very least, "art for art's sake" encouraged the artist to express his alienation against bourgeois society in new and powerful ways. Mumford's animus toward this school seems to motivate, and is motivated by, a strange reversal of cause and effect. According to Mumford, the self-indulgence he decries among these artists was neither a symptom nor a protest against the lack of imagination in bourgeois society. Instead, according to Mumford's view, this art itself produced a private aesthetic of the "picturesque,"[58] while the world itself lost its "beauty." Thus, according to Mumford, it is the fin-de-siecle artist, and not the bourgeoisie against which he protested, who robbed us of the capacity to imagine a better, more beautiful world.

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[57] See Richard Ellman, "The Uses of Decadence," *a long the riverrun: Selected Essays* (New York: Vintage, 1990), pp. 3-17.

[58] With his notion of the private aesthetic of the "picturesque," Mumford does not mean the sweeping, picturesque public art of, say, a landscape architect like Frederick Law Olmsted. He

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Mumford concludes:

> The greater part of the creative dreaming and planning which constitutes literature and art has had very little bearing upon the community in which we live, and has done very little to equip us with patterns, with images and ideals, by means of which we might react creatively upon our environment.[59]

Here again, Mumford places too much responsibility upon the artist, too little upon the alienating social order in which we all live. He continues:

> Yet it should be obvious that if the inspiration for the good life is to come from anywhere, it must come from no other people than the great artists. An intense social life, as Gabriel Tarde pointed out in his fine utopian fantasy, Underground Man, has "for its indispensable condition the esthetic life, and the universal propagation of the religion of truth and beauty." The common man, when he is in love, has a little glimpse of the way in which the drudgery of the daily world may be transmuted through emotional stimulus; it is the business of the artist to make the transmutation permanent, for the only difference between the artist and the common man is that the artist is, so to say, in love all the while. It is out of the vivid patterns of the artist's ecstasy that he draws men together and gives them the vision to shape their lives and the destiny of their community anew.[60]

Perhaps that is all true. But at this point, Mumford devolves from the radical critique of modern art by William Morris to the rather conservative cult of the Great Artist. Mumford's model here was W.B. Yeats, who believed that art is so powerful that the Great Artist can save civilization. He can reconstruct art, the

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means the quest of the "Decadent" artist to create a private beauty out of the minutiae of the contemporary modern urban environment.

[59] Ibid., p. 290.

[60] Ibid.

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"idolum," and the "nation, the race, and the individual man."[61] While Yeats seemed at the time to be especially interested in regionalism and social transformation, he moved toward fascism or at least profound conservatism later on.[62]

It might be offered in Mumford's defense that he could not know this, at the time that he wrote *The Story of Utopias*. But what he might have realized is that what he offers here is a continuation of precisely the bourgeois form of modernity he aimed to critique. This is another example of Mumford's ambivalence about bourgeois modernity. As is typical, he has problems with the narcissism, individualism, and elitism of bourgeois modernity. He has a strong inclination toward democracy and socialism. Yet, elsewhere in these passages, he expresses a real fear of "art for the public's sake"[63]: of a socialist aesthetic, which he identifies with a potential repression of the individual artist. So we are left with Yeats as Mumford's aesthetic vanguard instead—as if these extremes were the only possible alternatives![64]

In *The Dark Side of the Left,* Richard Ellis shows that this cult of the great artist was by no means purely a European product. It is also, quite literally, a

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[61] Ibid., p. 296.
[62] See John R. Harrison, *The Reactionaries* (New York: Schocken, 1967). If Mumford needed an Irish visionary, why didn't he look at James Connolly's socialist utopian writings, which reach back into the Irish past as much as they do toward a liberatory future? See the edition of his writings edited by P. Berresford Ellis, *Selected Writings* (London: Pluto, 1988). Or what about the plays of Sean O'Casey? Casey never had any patience for the kind of mystical nationalism Yeats was into, Instead Casey recognized that the "workers," even the Irish workers, "have no country," and still made great art out of it. See Maureen Malone, *The Plays of Sean O'Casey* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969).
[63] Mumford, *The Story of Utopias*, p. 292.

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product of "Young America." Mumford's desire, as Ellis describes it to "await the next" mystical and aesthetic "genius who could interpret and transform American life" began with nineteenth-century "Young Americans" like Whitman, and continued with Mumford's 20th century "Young American" mentors, editor James Oppenheim and writers Brooks and Frank (albeit not Bourne). As Ellis writes, this cult, in the minds of writers otherwise so democratic, creates a dangerous contradiction. As I wrote in Chapter 1, Ellis descends into simplistic anti-intellectualism when he attacks these democratic radicals as elitist, simply for critiquing the culture of the "common people" as inadequate, as manipulated by elites. But his critique of the authoritarian tendencies of their cult of "genius" is a good one:

> Democratic deliberation and active participation give way to passively waiting for artistic inspiration and charismatic leadership. The common people recede until they are no more than a faint glimmer in the brilliant eyes of the genius. And those eyes are locked on an idealized future uncomplicated by real people.[65]

Certainly, the professional artist has a role to play in the process of reconstruction, just as does the professional scientist, the politician, and the revolutionary. Certainly, no one, least of all the artist and visionary, should be subject to repressive standards of always having to be "socially relevant." Certainly, the artistry of Yeats and co. was remarkable: there are aesthetic geniuses out there. But it is not a good idea to design a program of social change

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[64] Ibid., p. 293.

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around the hope that a) they will show up b) they will be on the Left c) everyone will recognize their genius d) their aesthetics will have a magically transforming, leftward moving effect upon everybody else. *As Mumford himself writes in the section on science,* ordinary people must be involved in the process of social reconstruction if reconstruction is going to work. To merely hope that they will be merely swept up into "the vivid patterns of the [great] artist's ecstasy" is simply not enough. It does not make the "great" artist accountable, nor educate or empower the ordinary citizen.

As M. David Samson reveals, his German architect friend Walter Curt Behrendt shared Mumford's faith in the social efficacy of an aesthetic vanguard. This adversely affected their encounter with modernist architecture. Early in the 1920s, Behrendt, along with his circle of architects, artists, and intellectuals, the *Werkbund,* sought to create a new architectural "vernacular," "organically" grounded in traditional forms and meant to foster a human-scale culture in decentralized communities, outside the great city. Later on, however, he adopted a more rationalistic and authoritarian modernism, whose emphasis was no longer upon humane community but upon the "elite leadership," as Samson puts it, of the modernist architect, in command of modern technology, regardless of the social context in and for which he designed his buildings. From attacking the cult of the Machine, from attempting to harness science to meet human ends and create human community, Behrendt and the *Werkbund* began to view technology

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[65] Richard J. Ellis, *The Dark Side of the Left: Illiberal Egalitarianism in America* (Lawrence,

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itself as, in *Werkbund* political scientist Ernst Jakh's words, "the modern expression of human creativity and spirituality." Mumford, burdened by his own myth of the heroic aesthetic vanguard, failed to confront and criticize his friend's new attitude. Instead, he embraced the *Werkbund's* celebration of the technological "New Era." Thus, "Mumford became far less rigorous, almost indiscriminate" in the late 1920s "in his analysis of Modernism. He was equally enthusiastic," Samson writes about architecture that celebrated technological power, and buildings that actually created community for the people who lived in them. As Samson writes, "The two men thought they were preparing the industrial world for a new rule by nature and the heroic, democratic artist. Instead, the Modernism they embraced in the late twenties coordinated nature, regional planning, and creativity *in the name of the machine"* (my emphasis).[66]

Ironically, as C. Wright Mills noted in his 1958-59 essay "The Cultural Apparatus," the heroic "myth of the intellectual" as creator of culture was fast becoming obsolete, anyway. Far from the "inherently and necessarily free man" of the past, and even as their work was becoming "increasingly of central relevance" to bourgeois society, the "cultural workman" was losing control over his production and becoming just another alienated worker. This condition of

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Kansas: The University of Kansas Press, 1998), p. 81, *et passim*.

[66] M. David Samson, "Unser Newyorker Mitarbeiter: Lewis Mumford, Walter Curt Behrendt, and the Modern Movement in Germany," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, vol. 55, no. 2 (June 1996), pp. 126-39. Ironically, though he had adopted this, perhaps proto-fascist, belief in elite leadership and technology, Behrendt had to leave Germany when Hitler rose to power because he, like his friend Mumford, was Jewish.

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simultaneous power and alienation of the cultural worker is the real condition with which we, as intellectuals, have to deal, Mills argued.[67]

Mumford does not deal with this reality very well by rehashing the old myth of the aesthetic savior here. Later, however, as we shall discuss in the chapter on his 1931, unpublished essay, "Preface to Action," Chapter 8, Mumford would develop a strategy for intellectuals that hewed far closer to this contradictory reality.

Mumford's celebration, in *Story of Utopias,* of Yeats' mystique of the "great artist" as the crucible of a new national mythos is contiguous with passages found in *The Culture of Cities*. There, like his mentor Geddes, Mumford writes of literary regionalism as if it was or could become a progressive political and economic force, in its own right:

> Regionalism . . . begins with a revival of poetry and language: it ends with plans for the economic invigoration of regional agriculture and industry, with proposals for a more autonomous political life, with an effort to build up local centers of learning and culture.[68]

I think this is a dangerously vague formulation. Certainly, cultural regionalism can play such a positive role in contemporary history. But attention must be paid to the political character of such cultural movements. Specifically, to whom are such movements allied, to the capitalist class or the working class, in their fundamental struggle with one another?

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[67] C. Wright Mills, "The Cultural Apparatus," *Power, Politics and People* (New York: Oxford University, 1963), pp. 406-14.
[68] Mumford, *The Culture of Cities,* p. 359.

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As Michael Denning, in his recent work, *The Cultural Front,* has documented, the Popular Front of the United States encouraged an attention to regionalism as well as "social realism" in many of the authors it supported. Authors, when writing about strikes, would be certain to let the reader know about the regional culture—Southern, Midwestern, etc.--in which the strike took place—his story about the strike had a definite regional flavor. Here was a cultural regionalism is allied to the working class, as in which Mumford himself participated, as a member of the Popular Front's League of American Writers. Such regionalism can serve a powerfully progressive function, appealing to the cultural energies, memories, and local loyalties and solidarities, won through labor struggles, of poor and working people, allied to middle class intellectuals. In his *Prison Notebooks,* Gramsci wrote against Paul Nizan's "avant-garde sense" that "a new [socialist] literature has to identify itself with an artistic school of intellectual origins, as was the case with Futurism." Instead, the new literature must "sink its roots into the humus of popular culture as it is, with its tastes and tendencies and with its moral and intellectual world, even if it is backward and conventional."[69]

But cultural regionalism can also be used by the capitalist class, in the form of nationalism, to delude the workers, poor, and especially their middle class allies, to stifle such solidarity, poison it, and transform it into militarism and

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[69] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 102; Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front* (London: Verso, 1996), p. 134, et alia.

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fascism. To call upon the "great artist" to become the center of this regional movement, rather than the workers and poor in their struggle with Capital (or, at the very least, the whole *class* of *artists* and other *intellectuals*, *plural*) is particularly scary in its potential for such right-wing authoritarianism. This is why Marx and Engels were very wary of such movements toward cultural revivalism. As J.L. Talmon has written, while Marx and Engels sought to "direct . . . the revolutionary dynamism of the oppressed nationalities striving for freedom . . . into channels of social revolution," they had no "sympathy for the aspirations of the small oppressed peoples to perpetuate their culture, revive their often dead or half forgotten languages and cultivate folkloristic customs . . . "[70]

Thankfully, this was not the last word from Mumford on strategies for social transformation. Between science and art, there is social planning. The radical movement of working-class tenants and architects for public housing and livable communities in the early 1920s later inspired Mumford to consider a more democratic and realistic alternative to aesthetic genius as the agency of social change. By the time of his response to the caricature of regional planning presented by realists Thomas Adams and the RPA in the late 1920s, Mumford had discovered that the realm of planning was the most important avenue to social reconstruction. Our discussion of these topics must wait until chapter 7, however.

See also Benedetto Fontana, *Hegemony and Power: On the Relation between Gramsci and Machiavelli* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

[70] J.L. Talmon, *Political Messianism, vol. II: The Romantic Phase* (New York: Praeger, 1960, 1968), p. 283

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In the meantime, let's explore the crisis of megalopolis, and Mumford's response to it.

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CHAPTER 4

THE CONTRADICTIONS OF MEGALOPOLIS

In the last chapter, we discussed Mumford's initial treatment of the Megalopolitan "utopia" in his first book, *The Story of Utopias*. In this chapter, I would like to fully discuss the critique of Megalopolis developed by Mumford and his romantic urbanist school, a critique which profoundly motivated Mumford's search for alternative urban arrangements. Before we explore Mumford's critique, I would first like to examine the "realists" defense of Megalopolis from critics like Mumford. In *The Story of Utopias,* Mumford considered Megalopolis to be one of the great dysfunctional, unconscious "utopian" images characterizing the modern era. I would like to show here that Megalopolis' major defenders in the 1950s and 60s, Robert Moses, the Whites, and Jane Jacobs employ just such "idols" in order to skirt the essential question about Megalopolis raised by Mumford in his critique: does Megalopolis constitute a good community for human beings?

The Realist Position in Support of Megalopolis: Moses, the Whites, Jacobs

To skirt the question of whether or not Megalopolis is actually good for people, Robert Moses employs the escapist idyll of suburbia, which, as we saw earlier, was the contemporary version of the old "Country House" utopia. Moses was the "power broker" who built, among other things, the highways, parkways, and expressways that facilitated the massive suburban exodus out of New York

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City, a development from which Moses reaped enormous personal gain. Mumford developed an intense rivalry with Moses as he watched Moses promote mega-urban congestion, suburban sprawl, and, in general, urban decay. Moses argued that the suburbs excused the problems Mumford and other critics found with New York's high levels of congestion:

> The cultures, amenities, and attractions of cities, suburbs, exurbs, and open country are manifestly different but complement each other. The sanest, best-balanced people are those who spend part of the year in each area and do not stay continuously under urban pressure. [1]

Moses' notion here was incredibly callous, however. He ignored the fact that only a wealthy minority of the mega-urban population, the sector that Moses favored, but definitely not the people who suffer most from its problems, can afford to seasonably migrate in this fashion. Moses was also playing the hypocrite, for he ignored the fact that he himself had a) discouraged the building of low-cost mass transit to the suburban areas he developed b) designed the ceilings of the tunnels leading to his "exurban" parks to be extremely low, prohibiting buses from entering. Thus Moses himself discriminated against the poor, who found it easier to use buses and trains, than to buy cars. His suggestion, therefore, that the "sane, best-balanced" people use suburbs and parks was much-like Marie Antoinette telling the poor to eat cake. He also ignored the role that such suburban sprawl, and thus, he himself, played in fatally reducing the tax base

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[1] Moses, p. 54.

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of the modern city center, so as to exacerbate its problems enormously; and indeed, to bring about what Caro called the "fall of New York."[2]

Even for its residents, are the suburbs themselves really an alternative to Megalopolis, as Moses argues? Along with Jean Gottman (who accepted the whole thing, in "realist" fashion, as a *fait accompli*[3]), Mumford defined the suburbs as very much an integral part of the modern "Megalopolitan" complex that he hated. For Mumford, the sprawling, culturally stultifying suburb was no alternative, only "a temporary breathing space," "at whatever sacrifice of time and social opportunity" from "the intolerable congestion" of the mega-urban center. But Mumford never spared suburbia his intense criticism. As early as 1922, in his article for the Harold E. Stearns symposium, *Civilization in the United States,* Mumford took the term, "suburban," in its literal, normative sense. The suburbs were, in terms of cultural amenities, "sub-urban." Though it offered an escapist fantasy, the suburb was merely the flipside of the congested mega-urban center, equally unplanned, and in its own way, equally unsatisfying.[4] For Mumford, "suburban" meant "less than urban"; or rather, less than urbane, less than satisfactory for an ideal human social life. Therefore, as he wrote in his contribution to *Civilization in the United States,* "The City," (1922), for

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[2] See Robert Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), pp. 901-19, 492

[3] Jean Gottmann, *Megalopolis: The Urbanized Northeastern Seaboard of the United States* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1961).

[4] Mumford, "A Brief History of Urban Frustration," *The Urban Prospect* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), p. 219. For Mumford's criticism of Gottmann's work, in an article in

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Mumford, the mega-urban center qualified just as much for the label "sub-urban" as did the "distant dormitories" into which "the metropolis throws vast numbers of people." In suburbia proper, Mumford readily asserted, "by and large, life is carried on without the discipline of rural occupations and without the cultural resources that the Central District of the city still retains in its art exhibitions, theatres, concerts, and the like." But the quality of social life with in the metropolitan centre was itself "inferior to that which a city with an adequate equipment and a thorough realization of the creative needs of the community is capable of producing."[5]

Far from overlooking suburbia as an ideal alternative to the "modern metropolis," as Moses seems to imply, Mumford saw suburbia as a metropolitan *product.* He saw these two phenomena—suburbia and megalopolis—as merely an antinomy, as two sides of the same destructive coin. As he wrote in *The Culture of Cities* (1938),

> The development of a central district devoted to business, finance, and the accessory industries has its typical by-product: the dormitory suburb. The rapid growth of metropolitan districts in the twentieth century has been mainly a suburban growth: migration (encouraged by land speculators) to cheaper land, open spaces, temporarily more decent living conditions. In the obsolete mono-nucleated type of city this decentralization and dispersal of the main functions of urban living merely increases the extent of the waste and human wear-and-tear.

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which he reveals his usual animus toward suburbia, see his "Megalopolis as Anti-City," *Urban Prospect,* pp. 128-41.

[5] Mumford, "The City," *Civilization in the United States, by Thirty Americans,* ed. Harold E. Stearns (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1922), p. 35.

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In Mumford's opinion, while *both* the old mega-urban centers and the suburbs held their relative advantages, *neither* of these were livable solutions. If he had his choice, Mumford preferred the metropolis, however. In "The City," he writes of his hope (in hindsight a vain one) that recent population trends, indicating a disproportionate rise in urban vs. rural population, might actually be "a good sign," for "It may indicate the drift to Suburbia is on the wane." Nevertheless, Mumford considered the metropolis and the suburb both to be parts of the same problem, and that they fed into and upon each other. For suburbia existed only as an appendage to and an escape from megalopolis, not a rational response or alternative. As he continued in *The Culture of Cities,* "As the crowding became more universal during the next three centuries, the demand to get away became more imperious: if one did not leave on one's own initiative the doctor's orders would prescribe it."[6]

But Mumford saw that the biggest problem with this escapist "solution" to the ills of urban life was its socially exclusive tendency:

> it was a segregated community, not merely set apart topographically from the central areas of a city: but its occupants were laterally segregated from other economic classes. Except for a small detail of tradesmen and handymen, the suburb was a one-class community: it boasted, in fact, of its "exclusiveness"—which means, sociologically speaking, of the fact that it was not and could not become a city. [7]

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[6] Mumford, *Culture of Cities,* p. 211.
[7] *Ibid.,* p. 215.

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When the workers finally were able to claim their "right" to the same "solution," this didn't amount to much:

> the very popularity of this move to escape partly robbed it of its success. Land values went up on the outskirts of every town, sometimes in sound agriculture territory[8], in expectations of suburban developments. By the time the impulse reached the lower middle classes and the manual workers, the form of the suburb had changed, too, into a derisive caricature: rows of cramped cottages. . [9]

Fundamentally, suburbia was a ruse, for most of the population. Congestion within the megalopolis expanded because of suburban development, and suburban development almost inevitably became so congested as to become indistinguishable from the megalopolis itself—requiring even further suburban expansion.[10] At best, Mumford valued suburban development merely as a portent for his own decentralist schemes for the building of garden cities. Mumford might be faulted for being too naive, early in his career, in estimating the dangers that suburbia would become the *only* form of decentralization, and therefore underestimated how the need for genuine decentralization in this society might be co-opted and thwarted. But he never thought that suburbia offered the kind of urban cultural amenities he was looking for, any more than he thought that megalopolis could offer such amenities in the quality and quantity he thought necessary for human society. The bourgeoisie developed the suburban idyll as a means of avoiding rather than resolving social problems and the poor: "the

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[8] The horrendously destructive suburbanization of the once lush agricultural region of San Fernadino Valley by Los Angeles had yet to occur.
[9] Lewis Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 214.

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romantic suburb was a collective attempt to live a private life: an effort to make the appearance of Coketown tolerable to the possessing classes by enabling them to profit by its goods and avoid its evils, to have the best of both worlds."[11] The "individualism" promoted by suburbia

> was in effect a confession that the proud philistines of the period had neither the intellectual penetration to analyze their condition nor the courage and the imagination to transform it. The suburb was a pharisaic way of passing by on the other side: leaving the civic organism itself in the gutter.[12]

It would probably be difficult to find a more scathing indictment of suburbia than this. Yet for all its faults, suburbia, or at least the illusion it produced, did have something to offer the movement for decentralization:

> After all the suburb was a first semi-collective attempt to create for the middle classes, if not for the whole community, a biological environment on an urban basis. That was a rational purpose. These new houses were more spacious as a rule and more open to the sun than the dingy rows that lined the streets of the town; and this new setting, with its trees and lawns and gardens, was more sweet to the eye and ear and nose than were the city's pavements. . . In short, the suburb was nearer to providing a balanced round of activities—outside daily work—than the paleotechnic city.[13]

The suburb was in important first step in the direction of crafting "a biological environment on an urban basis." But that's about it. After writing this brief bit of praise, however, Mumford resumes his scathing critique. The

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[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 214-15.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 215.
[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 215-16.
[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 216-17.

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"builders of the suburb "failed to take account of the need for a more adequate social environment." Suburbia " started a de-politicizing process that has been steadily spreading as the suburb itself has been spreading throughout our civilization." It "lacked the necessary elements for extensive social co-operation, for creative intercourse, for an expansion of the social heritage as a whole. . . . Mumford agrees with anti-suburban writers such as Jane Jacobs, Richard Sennett, and Marshall Berman that "the stimulus of variety, the shock and jostle and challenge of different groups," is the valuable aspect of any good, healthy city. This is precisely what is "largely absent from" suburban "life." And suburbia, by its very nature, robbed this positive element from the metropolitan center that it surrounded, as well:

> For the inhabitants of the suburb lived divided lives. Their purses were in the central city; their domestic affections were concentrated one or two hours away, in the villa. Neither side of their lives could be wholly active, wholly efficient. The necessary routine, with its daily shuttling between home and workplace, between nest and market, undermined life at both extremes.

The metropolitan regime included suburbia and thus shared in its failure to provide: "spatial concentration," which "has an essential part to play in" providing a "focus" for cultural life and "psychological" development.[14]

Mumford valued the original impulse represented by suburbia, for a much greater proximity to nature, but decried the lack of public and cultural facilities in suburbia, as well as the bourgeois escapism and irresponsibility underlying it. In

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itself, for Mumford, suburbia was by no means a solution to the problems of the modern city. Instead, suburbia was an integral part of the problematic Megalopolitan system.

There were other mega-urban realists who disagreed with Moses about suburbia completely. These included Morton and Lucia White, part of the post-war "centrist" school discussed in Chapter 1. The Whites certainly acknowledge the threat posed by suburbia to their urban-centered welfare state and their public housing projects. Instead of idolizing the suburban escape, however, as Moses does, the Whites idolize Megalopolis itself. Their argument "for" the big city is in reality an Inquisition against those intellectuals, like Lewis Mumford, who criticized their idol. They either deny that the big city has serious, insoluble problems, to begin with, or they blame such problems on the suburban exodus. They proudly label themselves "pro-urban," and label anyone who dislikes or criticizes contemporary metropolitan life as "anti-urban" or a "suburban booster."[15] They blame the utopians, like Mumford, for allegedly encouraging people to move out to the suburbs and thus for destroying the cities—even

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[14] *Ibid.*, p. 217.

[15] In doing so, these liberal realists hark back to the primal animus in Western and particularly American culture, which portrays "civilization" and civilized virtues purely as urban. The divine mission of civilization, as conceived by this ideology, is to "tame" a primitive "wilderness," along with its "romantic" admirers and "infidel" or "savage" inhabitants. See Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Dell, 1966), pp. 160-61; Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Wesleyan: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).
As I see it, in the contemporary liberal imagination, the mega-city, imperiled by suburban development, becomes the last bastion of civilization, while suburbanites and their alleged utopian allies become, respectively, the savages and the savage-loving traitors to civilization--as with the

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though, as we have just seen, Mumford explicitly rejected suburbia as an alternative.

The Whites also failed to see that the suburban exodus, as Mumford and the RPAA recognized long ago, is the natural *product* of the problems of mega-urban development. In flight from the problems of the urban center, most people in American society who can afford to have chosen to live, and often times work, in the suburbs. With so many people leaving the urban centers in the latter half of the twentieth century, can we really view this exodus as purely irrational? This exodus, according to Robert Fishman, was originally begun by the bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century to escape the "ecological crisis," the squalor their exploitation created among the poor, which was making the "urban core" a "crowded, dirty, noisy, and unhealthy" place to live. In the nineteenth century, this squalor increased, as the bourgeoisie built their factories within the city limits, and increasingly, lived outside. [16] In the mid-twentieth century, another motive for the bourgeoisie presented itself: their desire for an atomized work force, to get away from the increasingly militant organized unions that workers were more able to form in the big city. This decentralization of industrial production was sponsored and subsidized by the government in World War II when it built war plants in the countryside out of fear of enemy bombing and in

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old category of "Indian-lovers" or "half-breeds" on the frontier. We shall discuss this ideology in greater depth in the first chapter.

[16] Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), pp. 21-23; 73-102; See also Friederich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in*

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order to take advantage of the greater space available there, needed for the new assembly line production systems.[17]

The mass exodus of the middle and working classes began, however, not in the 1950s, but in the latter part of the nineteenth century, according to novelist Booth Tarkington. According to Tarkington, this mass exodus was *primarily* in response to the "soot" and "filth" of the modern metropolis. As sociologist Herbert Gans and historian Richard Pells have argued, the suburban exodus in the 1950s was caused far more by the real problems of urban congestion in the 1940's, and the middle and working classes' desire for more spacious housing, than either middle class racism or pastoralism.[18] Thus the Whites' claim that this exodus was instead the product of "pastoral" ideology or of "patrician" snobbery on the part of a tiny band of utopian and other, almost universally ignored, American *intellectuals,* is quite dubious.[19]

The Whites' charge of patrician snobbery seems to be based upon an unstated assumption that the great city is the natural locus, the natural choice, of

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England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), especially Chapter 2, "The Great Towns," pp. 36-86.

[17] See Dennis R. Judd and Todd Swanstrom, *City Politics: Private Power and Public Policy* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), pp. 179-214.

[18] Booth Tarkington, *The Magnificent Ambersons* (New York: Avon Books, 1960. Orig. published in 1918 by Doubleday), p. 196-98; Herbert Gans, "Urban Vitality and the Fallacy of Physical Determinism" *People and Plans* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), pp. 29-30 (published originally as a critical review of Jane Jacobs *Death and Life of Great American Cities,* as "City Planning and Urban Realities," *Commentary* 33 (February 1962), pp. 170-75); Richard Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), pp. 196-200.

[19] See Morton and Lucia White, pp. 209-30; Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Vintage, 1978), pp. 294-312.

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the people, as well as the apex of progress, for the benefit of the people.[20] Therefore, anyone, like Mumford and his associates, who criticizes Megalopolis is an "enemy of the people," and against Progress.

For example, in a summary of their book which they wrote for the 1963 anthology *Paths of American Thought,* the Whites accuse John Dewey of 'reverting to the localism of Jefferson" because "instead of taking the [mega-]city as a model *for* the progressive school, he almost speaks as though the urban community should be modeled *on* the progressive school." [21] Progress, the People, and the City, in the White's formulation, become intertwined, and Megalopolis becomes sacrosanct. One must have no other "progressive" idols before Megalopolis: let alone attempt to critique and to change It in the name of some other, less congested, more "localistic" model of social life. If one does so, one is automatically "reverting" back to a less civilized, less democratic state: even if the critic is John Dewey himself, the foremost democratic progressive of

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[20] This is the best I can make out of the assumptions underlying the Whites' demagogic argument. The Whites themselves never state these assumptions—they merely a) attack intellectuals for being "patrician" or "pastoral," and then b) declaim against American intellectuals for not "loving" the big city. Why exactly it is that such "love" is important, and what connection the lack of such "love" has to the Whites' charges of "pastoralism" or "patricianism," is never stated. While they present themselves as followers of Dewey, advocates of clear reasoning and communication, the Whites demagogically employ accusations against their opponents and rely upon unstated, unexamined emotional reactions and sentiments in their audience, rather than upon logical, coherent arguments in *favor* of that which they argue for—the big city. Therefore, critics of the Whites' position, such as myself, must interpolate in order to criticize their arguments, an interpolation that may indeed be inaccurate. But that, I would submit, is not my fault: it is the Whites', for failing to communicate their assumptions clearly.

[21] Morton and Lucia White, "The Intellectual vs. the City," in *Paths of American Thought,* edited by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and Morton White (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1963), p. 265.

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the twentieth century, and even if he does so in order to civilize and democratize Megalopolis!

Here are two more idols—People and Progress—upon which to build the myth of Megalopolis. Recall Mumford's idea that Megalopolis was the central focus of the nationalist, "Nation-State" myth, that dissent from the utopia of the "Nation-State" also constitutes treason. Recall Bourne's and Mumford's idea that this nationalist myth was a confusion of the people, in their actual or potential democratic communities, with their [bourgeois] government. Recall, as well, the "Coketown" idol, which confused market and industrial expansion with progress: with advancement and benefit for everyone. So, too, Mumford might have further argued, "Megalopolis" results from a similar confusion of the People and of Progress, with the overly congested, polluted big cities in which they find themselves today. The "People" and "Progress" are fictional bases for both of these "utopias," because the question of whether the ordinary human beings who make up the "People" freely chose or benefit (derive progress) from these political and urban arrangements is never considered. Given a free choice, would the masses choose the great city? Does Megalopolis really offer the most progressive, beneficial alternative? Presented with the vision of garden cities by radicals like Mumford and co.—a discussion which the Whites themselves seem determined to *suppress*—might not the masses choose something radically different?

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Perhaps the Whites assume that the masses of urban Americans came to the big city for the same reasons that the Whites like it—because it is intellectually stimulating. This would probably be a difficult point to argue, however. Most people were and are not intellectuals. And at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when land was still freely available, the same sort of people who eventually ended up in big cities, in the twentieth century, went West and staked out farmland on the prairie, instead. Perhaps that is why the Whites never even bring the question up, let alone examine concretely the history of the reasons for the exodus of farmers as well as immigrants to the great American cities. But it was the concentration of ownership on the land and the mechanization of agriculture, in this country and elsewhere, that was largely responsible for the urbanization of the U.S. population in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries—not the free choice of those who went there.[22] In response to these pressures, many of the young people moved away from their farms to the big cities. Their families were losing the land. Or perhaps not: perhaps they had been to a trade school, college, etc. and wanted to take advantage of the career opportunities they saw in the big city. Would so many have done so, however, if a conscious plan had been implemented at the time (by a socialist government) to develop industry and urbanize *on a balanced, decentralized basis*, in the towns and near the land where they had grown up and where their families still lived?

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[22] See, for example, David Gordon, "Capitalist Development and the History of American Cities," *Marxism and the Metropolis: New Perspectives in Urban Political Economy*, eds. William K.

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Millions of immigrants also came from Europe, fleeing poverty and famine, and they moved to the cities, in hopes of a better iife. Here, too, however, the question begs—*were these immigrants given a real choice*—since the big cities, at that point (after the frontier had ended and the West had been settled), were the only real choice open to them?[23]

Even if you think the masses were given a free choice, why try to stop Mumford and his associates from offering them a *different* choice? Here lies the difference between the liberal democracy that the Whites profess, and the centrist demagoguery they actually practice. Demagoguery is anti-intellectual. It celebrates the worst feature of the masses—their *passive, unthinking acceptance* of the conditions in which they live and of the "mass" culture with which they are manipulated by ruling elites. When the Whites demand that Mumford and his associates "love" these conditions and culture, what they demand is a silencing of radical criticism. They demand an anti-intellectual conformity to the conditions and culture created by the ruling class, in the name, falsely, of the masses upon which these conditions and culture have been imposed. They demand that such radicals cease to engage in critical solidarity with the poor, and instead adopt these centrists' own paternalistic strategy of "serving" the poor in order to quiet them down.

Tabb and Larry Sawers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 25-63; Judd and Swanstrom, *City Politics*, pp. 29-32.

[23] See Sherwood Anderson's novel, *Poor White* (New York: Viking Press, 1920); Judd and Swanstrom, pp. 34-40.

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Democracy, on the other hand, at its heart, is as pro-intellectual as it is pro-popular. Democracy, as I argued in Chapter 1, does not confirm the masses in its received prejudices, does not purely celebrate their lives today, does not demand conformity or "love" of the existing conditions from intellectuals. To genuinely *rule* (the definition of "democracy": *demos* = people; *kratia* = rule) the masses must think, criticize these conditions and culture, and base their choices upon an awareness of the alternatives, upon the criteria, not of how they live now, but what is *best* for them. This is a decision that genuinely radical intellectuals do not propose to make *for* the masses—as the Whites imply--but in consultation *with* them. Mumford and his associates sought to encourage the poor and the working class themselves to become *active political discussants and agents alongside themselves,*[24] rather than passive recipients of welfare and mass culture. They hoped to persuade the masses to join them in building popular social movements to *radically transform* their mega-urban conditions and *radically different conditions and alternatives,* which we will examine later.

To the Whites' ridiculous charge that radicals like Mumford were elitist, I counter that the Whites' gradualism was and always will be a waste of time, a snare, and the "love" they professed for the poor was patronizing, phony and self-serving. Their ideology was a product of the Whites' association, socially,

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[24] For an in-depth discussion of the radical project of transforming men from dehumanized, passive objects subjects active in their own liberation, and of the attempt by patronizing liberals, like the Whites, to thwart this through a "paternalistic social action apparatus" and educational system which attempts to "adjust" the poor to the System rather than transform the System itself, see Freire, p. 60, et alia.

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politically and economically, with the "expert officials," as Hawthorne termed them nearly a century earlier, who make a living from what in his day was called "charity," in our day, welfare.[25] As a result, as more recent social critics like Paul Goodman and Paolo Freire have written, such liberals tend to patronize the poor, as children who need to be protected and flattered. They want to convince them that they can always solve their problems within the System, rather than as equals and as allies, to be engaged in the kind of critical, radical dialogue that Goodman, Freire, and Mumford and his associates advocated. As intellectual historian Wilson Carey McWilliams comments, these liberals' "charity [has] ceased to be a mark of love or of concern to improve and [has] become no more than a buttress of smugness." The Whites attack upon Mumford as an elitist was in reality a defense of the elitist System, which *oppresses* the poor.[26] As Freire wrote, quoting Simone de Beauvoir,

> the interests of the oppressors lie in "changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them";[27] for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated. To achieve this end, the oppressors use . . . a paternalistic social action apparatus [by which] they are treated as individual cases, as marginal men who deviate

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[25] Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Outside Glimpses of English Poverty," *Atlantic Monthly* XII (July 1863), pp. 42.

[26] Wilson Carey McWilliams, *The Idea of Fraternity in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 322; Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd*, pp. 54-55. See also Bob Ross, "Notes on the Welfare State," *Where It's At: Radical Perspectives in Sociology*, eds. Steven Deutsch and John Howard (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 444-60; Robert Brenner, "The Paradox of Social Democracy: The American Case," *The Year Left I*, ed. by Mike Davis, Fred Pfeil, and Michael Sprinker (London, Verso, 1985), pp. 36-37; and C. Wright Mills, "The Labor Leaders and the Power Elite," *Power, Politics and People*, p. 108.

[27] Simone de Beauvoir, La Pensee de Droite, Aujord'hui (Paris), as quoted in Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1989), p. 60.

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> from the general configuration of a "good, organized, and just" society. The oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these "incompetent and lazy" folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality."[28]

As I quoted them in my introduction, the Whites use virtually the same language. They argue that the "great problem of the American city is to demonstrate" that it "can educate the millions of people who are entering its gates" and thus "absorb the Negro and the Puerto Rican . . . into its economy and the democratic process"; and that it can "foster individuality" and "human communication" there.[29] For the Whites, it is not the oppressive Megalopolitan situation that is the problem, but instead the failure of the present (oppressive) System to "absorb" the poor into its allegedly democratic "process." Mumford and his friends, with their radical, frank "ruthless critique of everything existing" threaten to disrupt this "absorption," threaten to engage the poor in the "critical dialogue," as Freire writes, which "unveils reality." Freire writes that reality must be unveiled because the System "attempts, by mythicizing reality, to conceal certain facts which explain" men's present misery.[30] As I quoted them earlier, in Chapter 1, the Whites, at the beginning of their book, explicitly bewail the lack of a pro-metropolitan "mythology or mystique" in American intellectual life.[31] The Whites attack Mumford and his associates because they threaten to "spill the beans," to tell the truth about the oppressive conditions created for the poor by the

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[28] Freire, *ibid.*
[29] Morton and Lucia White, p. 238.
[30] Freire, p. 71.

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fundamental, objective logic of Megalopolis itself (which we will discuss in a moment). Mumford and co. refuse to go along with the Whites' comfortable liberal myth that all's right with the modern, fast-paced, exciting big city. Thus Mumford and co. must be marginalized and silenced.

As I mentioned earlier, besides the People, there is another idol upon which the Whites seem to draw—the myth of Progress. For the Whites, Megalopolis represents the best possible city for the betterment of the People. Why? Because it is the biggest and the latest, it must be the best: the apex of democratic civilization and progress. In Chapter 1, we discussed the tendency of post-war centrism in America to unthinkingly adopt and intensify the Western animus toward the natural and the "savage," as the enemy of "civilization." At the heart of the White's book, there exists, not a genuine concern for the plight of the poor, but the authoritarian fatalism, and the fatal arrogance, of the cult of Progress. This becomes quite clear at the end of *The Intellectuals vs. the City,* when the Whites offer the following, Orwellian paraphrase on Shakespeare, a bizarre paean to Megalopolitan sprawl and environmental destruction: "All the world's a city now, and there is no escaping it, not even in outer space."[32]

In other words, Megalopolis, quite literally, uber alles. Though quite disturbing, taken literally, the statement is patently ridiculous. Where did the Whites feel that humanity was obtaining its food supply, if this statement were

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[31] White, p. 1.
[32] Morton and Lucia White, p. 239.

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indeed true, or rather, where did they think we will obtain our food supply, if it becomes true, as the Whites seemed to hope? More likely, the Whites were instead saying that the only "world" in which most of us human beings will live was the present Megalopolitan one. In the present era, only 3% of the population have land upon which they can farm. The rest of us must depend upon the present "factory-farm" system, a system in which most of the work is done by fossil-fuel consuming machines, toxic pesticides, artificial fertilizers, etc. If this is what the Whites are trying to say, they assume that our society can continue to survive in this way. They assume that our present agricultural system, in which most of us are completely divorced from the countryside, from agriculture, from nature, in which nature is exploited, as it were, by remote control, is sustainable. As I will attempt to show later on in this paper, such an assumption is extremely doubtful. Our modern agricultural system is *not* managing nature successfully. It is destroying our natural environment, the basis for our food and our very survival on this planet. As so many environmental scientists, philosophers, and activists are trying to tell us, we have to learn much better how to live in and with nature. If we are to survive as a species, we have to fundamentally reject the way in which we have dealt with nature in the past: the alienated, antagonistic, exploitative, destructive attitude which the Whites celebrate as inescapable ("no escape"), as inevitable, as Progress.[33]

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[33] See Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America* (New York: Hearst, 1977), Friederich Engels, *On the Housing Question*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979), Murray Bookchin, *The Modern Crisis* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1987); See also the recent collection of articles on the

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The ideology behind this final sentence, "All the world's a city now. . . ," is that of the post-war centrist animus toward nature and the Social Darwinism we discussed in Chapter 1. Nature here is seen as something to be obliterated to make way for (bourgeois) "civilization"; at best, nature, if it is allowed to exist, should be emptied of human inhabitants; exploited and managed by remote control. Nature, in the Whites' view, is obsolete. It is the mega-city, as they claim a few pages earlier, which is really "natural,"[34] which has or should take nature's place. This is not Dewey's idea of democracy, where people are directly consulted as to where and how they want to live. Instead, it is Park's and the Chicago School's Social Darwinism. This is a notion that big cities and most if not all other institutions of modern bourgeois society are the best of all possible social institutions, because they arose "naturally," via a process of social evolution, driven by the consumer demands implicit in the free market and by scientific expertise. Thus, the greater the development and expansion of bourgeois institutions like the mega-city, the better. The more we obliterate or exploit nature, the more civilization and progress we will attain.

And acceptance of this dangerous notion becomes a mark, no longer of insanity, but instead, strangely enough, of maturity. Earlier in their book, the Whites had quoted a passage from Melville's *Pierre,* in which Isabelle, her brother Pierre, and her friend Delly, first arrive from the countryside, into the

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relation of the crises in agriculture and environment, entitled "Hungry for Profit," in *Monthly Review* vol. 50, no. 3 (July/August, 1998), pp. 60-71.

[34] Morton and Lucia White, p. 234.

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great city. Though Isabelle and Delly had been desperately poor in the countryside, they are distressed by the "coldness" they see here. They miss the old "green sward" to which they are accustomed. Isabelle fearfully remarks, "I like not the town. Think'st thou, Pierre, the time will ever come when all the earth shall be paved?" To which Pierre replies, "Thank God, that can never be!" Isabelle's fear was understandable—it seemed to her that the rapidly expanding modern city would blot out access to nature, and with it, natural beauty. Pierre's response is a sensible one—how can men ever completely pave over the earth and survive? Yet this passage was used by the Whites as evidence, purportedly, that Melville was "patrician," and "anti-urban."[35] This final sentence of the Whites' book, "All the world's a city now. . . .," can be seen as a (stupidly arrogant) response to Isabelle's understandable fear and Pierre's ecologically sensible assurance. Not only do the Whites seem to welcome such "paving," but they imply that those who fear it and would resist it are immature, engaged in an "escapism" that is infantile.

In his criticism of the book for the *Nation,* bookseller E.S. Wilentz pointed out that the Whites, in supporting megalopolitan expansion, were the real "anti-urbanists." They supported the "urban cancer" that was destroying not just the city, but human society itself:

> The Whites are neither pro-city nor anti-city: they belong to that new category—the supporters of the non-city. In the name of building cities, they would 'citify' the

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[35] Whites, p. 39; Melville, *Pierre or the Ambiguities* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), pp. 321-22.

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> entire countryside, so that in the "Utopian" climax the American landscape will be one unending project, or lines of look-alike "cities," populated in their entirety, by good middle-class, non-bohemian types.
>
> This is simply authoritarian nonsense disguised as "planning." We of the city must work to protect our wilderness areas, beaches, villages, and towns from these new-day disciples of Robert Moses, for the very sake of city living. And we must fight off so-called urbanists who would turn cities into joyless and lifeless non-cities—virtuous projects surrounded by grass, but which breed not virtue but dullness of spirit, which prohibit growth and individuality, which close the door of spontaneity and change, and which carry man further down the path of dehumanization.[36]

Wilentz was right to argue that, besides being foolhardy, destructive, and arrogant, this Social Darwinist logic is authoritarian. In effect, the Whites demanded "love" for the great city, simply because its power to shape our lives was allegedly total, was ubiquitous, right now. As a logical statement, this was equivalent to the demand of the rulers of the nightmare world of Orwell's *1984* that hero Winston Smith "love" Big Brother," a demand to which he was ultimately forced to comply. The logic of both demands is really that might makes right, that we ought to bow down and worship present reality as Progress because it is "real," now. This "logic," however, is illogical, irrational. Once again, despite the obvious talent the Whites had for scholarship, their project is fundamentally anti-intellectual and conformist. For neither the great city nor Big Brother are themselves brought before the bar of Reason, never made to justify their power over our lives, before intellectuals are commanded to "love" them.

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The Whites never evaluate whether the great city is *worth* "loving." We are to love it, we are to assume that it is the best possible world and that it should expand to encompass our entire world, because we are, allegedly, stuck with such an expansion—not because it is or could become a good community.

During the same period that the Whites wrote *Intellectual vs. the City,* another pair of urban public policy thinkers emerged: Nathan Glazer and Jane Jacobs. Unlike the Whites, Glazer and Jacobs were critical of bureaucratic New Deal urban planning, especially of public housing projects and urban renewal. To solve contemporary urban ills, Glazer and Jacobs were more interested in the private sector: rent subsidies for private real estate investment and an expansion of small business commerce.

Glazer eventually ended up a prominent neoconservative in the 1970s and 80s.[37] In his 1958 attack on slum clearance and public housing, in an article for *Architectural Forum* entitled "Why City Planning is Obsolete," Glazer questioned whether the cure—the crime-ridden, bureaucratic ugly projects—were not worse than the disease. This had also been pointed out by radical housing advocate Catherine Bauer, Mumford's associate and former lover (See Chapter 9) a year earlier, in her article "The Dreary Deadlock of Public Housing," also for *Architectural Forum.* Bauer argued that the problems were due to the timidity of the liberal programs, to the fact that they allowed themselves to be hemmed in

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[36] E. S. Wilentz, *Nation*, December 8, 1962, p. 408-09.
[37] See Peter Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives: The Men Who Are Changing America's Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), pp. 44-48.

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and hamstrung by conservative real estate interests. Thus she called for a renewal of the movement of the 1930s, based on the militant labor movement of the time, for a comprehensive, democratically controlled housing program, a movement she herself had done much to lead.[38] Glazer, however, sought to discourage any further state intervention to solve these problems. Instead, he echoed Park's earlier notion that the "bohemias and hobohemias" of the modern city were "natural" when he argued that "a city needs . . . even slums (the Bohemians must live somewhere)."

In a policy paper for ACTION, Inc., a year later, Glazer argued merely for government subsidies to private developers. Glazer argued that the solution to the problems of "low income city dwellers" is that they should "find it possible" to move to the suburbs. Glazer left it to the reader's imagination how this would happen, exactly; perhaps he meant government rent subsidies for the suburbs. But as Herbert Gans asserted, "earlier attempts to scatter low-income housing in other ways" had been "rejected by the recipient," "middle class areas."[39]

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[38] Catherine Bauer, "The Dreary Deadlock of Public Housing," *Architectural Forum*, May 1957, pp. 140-42, 219, 222. For a discussion of Bauer's important leading role in the Labor Housing Committee movement of the 1930s, see Donald Miller, *Lewis Mumford, A Life* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), pp. 332-33, Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), pp. 224-25, Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 182-83, and chapter 9 of this paper.

[39] See Park, "Sociology, Community and Society," p. 198; Nathan Glazer, "Why City Planning is Obsolete," *Architectural Forum*, July 1958, p. 96-98, 160, and "Housing and the Consumer," in *Metropolis: Values in Conflict*, p. 183, excerpted from *The Consumption of Housing and the Urban Community* (New York: ACTION, Inc., May 1959, Policy Background Paper No. 3, from the Newark Conference on the ACTION program for the American city); Gans, p. 32.

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In her 1963 work *The Death and Life of Great American Cities,* Jane Jacobs attacked the insensitivity and wastefulness of current public housing development, urban renewal, and slum clearance. She traced these problems to the insularity and power of a "handful of authorities and huge builder barons."[40] Presumably the latter group included Robert Moses.

Jacobs' animus toward bureaucratic housing programs led her to lead the campaign by Greenwich Village residents, the Committee to Save the West Village, in 1961 to prevent urban renewal there. Under Jacobs' leadership, CSWV stopped the NYC Housing and Redeveloping Board from designating their neighborhood a "slum," from clearing the area of their homes, and from constructing new fourteen- and twenty-one story "low rise," "Mitchell-Lama" towers in their place.[41] At the time, Mumford praised Jacobs' attacks upon such "redevelopment" as akin to "a fresh, offshore breeze." The picture Jacobs painted of official arrogance in "displacing large neighborhood populations to facilitate large-scale rebuilding" was "dramatic but not distorted," according to Mumford. Mumford praised Jacobs for "pointing out a fact to which many planners and administrators had been indifferent—that a neighborhood is not just a collection of buildings but a tissue of social relations and a cluster of warm personal sentiments, associated with . . . familiar faces. . . ."[42]

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[40] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 331.
[41] See Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 308-09.
[42] Mumford, "Home Remedies for Urban Cancer," *Urban Prospect,* p. 185.

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As I wrote earlier, Catherine Bauer had previously criticized these public housing disasters, in 1957. Almost a decade earlier, Mumford had done so himself, in a heated exchange with Robert Moses in November 1948 in Mumford's "Sky Liner" column for *The New Yorker,* over Moses' Stuyvessant Town project. No matter how much green space surrounded Stuyvessant's buildings, Mumford argued, the project crowded too many people together in the buildings towering over that green space, at "slum densities."[43] The "green" space was not exactly green, either, but instead "given over to completely asphalted playgrounds, surrounded by spiky iron fences and paved walks, that offer none of the natural resources or the implements for any kind of play, except the most mechanical and organized. . . ." For Mumford, "green" space should have consisted instead of "hedges and windscreens for mothers and infants, digging pits and water pools for the toddlers, and trees and bushes for hide-and-seek and provision for games of make-believe for still older children. . ". Mumford also complained of the fact that

> this community of twenty-four thousand inhabitants will not have, within its walls, a school or a library, a church or community room, a motion-picture theatre or an auditorium, a clinic, a lying-in home, or a hospital, or any of the other essential facilities for its population.[44]

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[43] Lewis Mumford, "Stuyvessant Town Revisited," *The New Yorker* 24, November 27, 1948, pp. 65-72.

[44] Mumford, "Prefabricated Blight," *New Yorker* 24, November 13, 1948, pp. 49-55. Yet despite these earlier critiques by Mumford and Bauer of these bureaucratic disasters, Jacobs, following Glazer, had the unmitigated gall to accuse them and their co-thinkers and mentors of *providing the intellectual basis for such disasters!* In "Why Planning is Obsolete," Glazer blamed such decentrist thinkers as Ebenezer Howard and Clarence Stein for the bureaucratic, crime-ridden disasters that liberal public housing projects (also sponsored by Robert Moses in New York City) had led to. In her 1963 work, *Death and Life of Great American Cities,* Jacobs cited Glazer's

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As Marshall Berman has written in his *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, as a result of the criticism she leveled at these bureaucratic disasters in *Death and Life,* Jacobs has become a hero to a "widespread and enthusiastic" movement, in which "masses of Americans have worked steadfastly to save their neighborhoods and cities from the ravages of motorized modernization."[45] The style of this "modernization"—the "urban renewal" programs of mid-century--was set by skyscraper advocate and architect Le Corbusier, in the late 1930s. In his "Voisin Plan for Manhattan," Le Corbusier proposed to clear away the remaining brownstone rowhouses, walk-ups, and low-rise tenements" of Manhattan as so

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article approvingly, expanding and developing upon his facile analysis of architectural history. Jacobs even purported to trace the intellectual foundation of Moses' ideas, Le Corbusier's "tower-in-the-park" schemes, to "Decentrists" Howard, Geddes, Mumford, and Bauer—a dubious notion indeed, since the two schools not only developed on different continents, but simultaneously (the early 1920s) and as *intellectual rivals.* (See Plunz, pp. 122-63, 184-85). But for Glazer and Jacobs, because Stein and Le Corbusier, Mumford and Moses all praised the value of "green space" around their housing, they were virtually indistinguishable from another. Mumford and his fellow RPAA members were to be held accountable for the failures of their opponents, the advocates of skyscrapers. Despite the above-mentioned critiques made by Mumford and Bauer of these developments, they not only allegedly failed to confront the problems of Stuyvessant Town and other Moses-inspired projects, according to Glazer and Jacobs; they originated this disastrous high-rise trend, in the first place! (See Glazer, "Why City Planning is Obsolete"; Jacobs, pp. 16-25.)
For Mumford's response to this nonsense, see his "Home Remedies for Urban Cancer," *Urban Prospect,* pp. 182-207. Though Mumford begins the article by praising Jacobs' attacks upon urban renewal projects of the time, the original title of his article was "Mother Jacob's Home Remedies for Urban Cancer." Perhaps this was somewhat caustic, but it is an indication of the—justifiable--ire produced in Mumford by Jacob's "wild characterization" and "bulldozer"-like attacks upon his and his fellow Decentrists' ideas. What must have particularly galled Mumford was the fact that before she wrote the book, Jacobs requested and received Mumford's blessing! (See Robert Fishman, "The Mumford-Jacobs Debate," *Planning-History Studies,* Vol. 10, nos. 1-2.)

[45] Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), pp. 170-71.

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much "debris."[46] In the early 1960s, Berman writes, Jacobs pointed out the value of these "vestiges" of nineteenth century urban "community," vestiges which still remained despite Le Corbusier's and his followers' destructive vision. In Berman's words, Jacobs argued that what so annoyed Le Corbusier about these "vestiges," their "congestion, noise, and general dissonance" "kept contemporary urban life alive." These vestiges were "in fact marvelously rich and complex." Therefore, they were to be preferred to and championed against the "mechanical, reductive, and shallow" forms of, bureaucratic modernity that had gained prevalence when Jacobs wrote *Death and Life.*[47]

Jacobs' ideas, favorable to the preservation and restoration of existing slums and for shorter buildings, has had quite an effect upon urbanists, community and public housing advocates and programs over the last three decades.[48] The legacy Jacobs provided to this neighborhood community movement, however, was not without its limitations. As Mumford argues, Jacobs' ideal of community is backward, not forward-looking. This stance is seldom recognized, however, by those urbanists who reflexively celebrate Jacobs' work today. For example, few urbanists, especially the public housing advocates in her camp, remember that, despite the legacy of neighborhood social movement she created, Jacobs herself was *against* public housing, just as much as her mentor,

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[46] Charles Edward-Jeanneret (Le Corbusier), *When the Cathedrals were White,* ed. Francis E. Hyslop (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), p. 191 cf. Witold Rybczynski, *City Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), p. 159.
[47] Berman, p. 170.
[48] See Plunz, p. 327-330.

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Glazer. She dismisses altogether the notion that the government should be in the business of building, owning or managing housing projects. According to Jacobs, the government needs to provide rent subsidies for low-income tenants: the private real estate market should do the rest. Jacobs noted, obviously with approval, that "the government does not take over the landlordship or ownership or management of subsidized farms or subsidized airlines. . . . museums. . . . or. . . .voluntary community hospitals," as if she believed that such a policy were contiguous with the divinely mandated, natural order of things. From this (historically conditioned) fact, Jacobs concludes that, "the notion that the fact of a subsidy required that these [low-income] people be housed by someone other than private enterprise and normal landlords [sic!] was an aberration in itself."[49] Jacobs thus implies that because such an (enlightened) housing policy deviated from the (bourgeois) "norm," it was wrong. There is (or rather, should be) no alternative to the present order of things.

Here Jacobs displays her considerable ignorance of politics, and of the actual history of struggles for public housing. There were certainly good reasons in the 1930s for housing advocates like Bauer and Mumford to champion such reforms at that time. The market, whether or not rents were subsidized, did not provide the necessary housing for working and poor people.[50]

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[49] Jacobs, p. 324.

[50] See Mumford, "The Shortage of Dwellings and Direction," Part III of the Housing Study Guild Mayer series, "New Homes for a New Deal," *New Republic,* February 28, 1934, pp. 69-72; Plunz, pp. 1-87.

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Consider, too, Jacobs's attitude toward welfare: hardly communitarian. In her later work, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations,* Jacobs characterizes "welfare programs with" the aims of "building for the ill-housed, feeding the hungry, overcoming poverty and fear of poverty" as "transactions of decline," which eventually must act as "voracious feeders" and a net "drain" upon the economies of "prosperous city regions."[51]

The title of the later, 1984 work, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations,* as well as much of the text of that book, reveals Jacobs' affinity for the economic philosophy of Adam Smith and his later followers. Particularly, Jacobs accepted Smith's basic belief that the laissez-faire capitalist economy is natural and proper to human society, and that statist intervention should therefore be kept to a minimum.[52] As Robert Fishman writes, this was also her view in *Death and Life:* here, too, Jacobs' "view is strangely similar to Adam Smith's model of the economy. In [Jacobs'] city, people are always . . . seeking their own individual ends, and yet the "invisible hand" of the city somehow reconciles and accommodates all of them. . . " And "as with the laissez-faire economists,"

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[51] Jacobs, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations: Principles of Economic Life* (New York: Random House, 1984), pp. 191-93.

[52] While Jacobs pretends to examine the thought of Smith's rival, Marx, in this work, her account of him is laughable, though probably not uncommon among bourgeois economists, political and social scientists. She styles him a "demand-side economist," (p. 14), whose critique of capitalism was merely that "the wage earners who produce the goods and services can't afford, in the aggregate, to buy all they produce," (ibid.), and that a sustainable economy "would only be a matter of effectively distributing purchasing power." (p. 193). This would be news indeed to Marx, himself, though not a view distasteful to Keynes. As anyone who has actually read Marx knows, Marx, while not hostile to the expansion of welfare or working class purchasing power, did not believe that this would solve the problems of the modern capitalist economy. Only a social

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Fishman continues, "Jacobs is unwilling to look carefully at the question of" the already entrenched "power" of the capitalist class. . She is interested only in attacking the alleged "power of the planners. If only these busybodies would stop their meddling, she implies, cities would be self-governing and self-healing."[53]

Like Smith, Jacobs views the capitalist economy as a machine that, left to itself, naturally creates "wealth" and prosperity. For Jacobs, this economy not only spontaneously creates wealth, but also, when it is allowed to flourish in cities, creates culture. As she writes in *Death and Life,*

> Commercial diversity is, in itself, immensely important for cities, socially as well as economically. . . . wherever we find a city district with an exuberant variety and plenty in its commerce, we are apt to find that it contains a good many other kinds of diversity also, including variety of cultural opportunities, variety of scenes, and a great variety in its population and other users.[54]

Note the imagery of garden fecundity—"exuberant variety and plenty"—Jacobs lovingly employs with regard to commerce. For Jacobs as well as Smith, "commerce" can do no wrong; there can never be any instances when it could have a detrimental effect. As Fishman writes, Jacobs, like Smith, ignores the existence of a "powerful" capitalist ruling class which arises through the market, controls the market, and through this control, exploits, harms, and thwarts the aspirations and lives of the rest of us in this society. No, for Jacobs and Smith,

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revolution by the working class, by which they gained collective control of the process of *production,* would do that.

[53] Robert Fishman, "The Mumford-Jacobs Debate," *Planning History Studies*, vol. 10, nos. 1-2, p. 8.

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capitalism has an almost divine quality to it. Its "invisible hand" omnisciently guides human affairs for the best; its divine will, therefore, must never be questioned. Conscious, statist interference with this bountiful natural economic machine must be kept to an absolute minimum. Our role, as human beings, is to foster commercial development—not challenge its sway over our lives. Jacobs' solutions, or as Mumford laconically described them, "home remedies for urban cancer," are simply schemes to attract business. She tells us, for example, how boros such as Brooklyn can use its "assets"—its old buildings--to attract manufacturers back, out of the suburbs;[55] how the streets of New York ought to be doubled, and the parks shrunken, to make room for more stores and shops.[56]

Thus Jacobs skirts Mumford's question about whether Megalopolis constitutes the good community by envisioning Megalopolis as the best incubator for "commerce," which is her god, her "utopian" idol. Like the advocates of the "Coketown" utopia discussed by Mumford in *Story of Utopias*, Jacobs assumes that Commerce will always and everywhere produce progress for human society. But Jacobs' identification of marketspace chaos with human community is simplistic and demonstrably false. As Witold Rybcyzinski outlines in his history of American urban life, *City Life,* it was the *market,* the "unleashing" of "commercial forces," that "produced a dynamic urbanism." Commerce built the skyscrapers that motivated Le Corbusier to come here and to glamorize them and

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[54] Jacobs, *Death and Life,* p. 148.
[55] Jacobs, pp. 196-97.
[56] Jacobs, pp. 178-86.

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build more of them. Commerce fueled and motivated the bureaucratic, insensitive program of urban renewal. When Le Corbusier talked about the old brownstones and tenements as if they were nothing but contemptible "debris," the explosion that made them mere debris was the very same *market* that Jacobs looks to as their *savior!*[57] Jacobs ignores the fact that the "handful of authorities and huge builder barons" responsible for the horrors of urban renewal, wielded their power, ultimately, on behalf of the market, of the capitalist ruling class.

In her introduction, Jacobs refers to a discussion she has with a banker who is supporting slum clearance. He does not support it, in order to expand the profitability and power of Capital, however. He expands it, according to Jacobs, anyway, solely because he has come under the influence of the "same intellectual sources as the planners," intellectual sources which automatically condemn vital urban neighborhoods as "slums" which must inevitably be cleared.[58] If only she can talk him out of it, he might change his mind. It is perhaps for this reason, Jacobs hints, that she wrote the book—to win over the financial establishment to invest in slums rather than promote slum clearance instead.

Jacobs wants to include bankers in her political coalitions against urban renewal. Given the choice, she'd rather lobby them, and build her coalition on a citywide business, among the upper middle and wealthy classes, than to build strong organizations in working class neighborhoods, which she finds ineffectual

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[57] Rybczynski, pp. 149-72.
[58] Jacobs, pp. 11-12.

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and parochial. Her ideal of an effective coalition does not include them; her "neighborhood" consists of "special interest communities and pressure groups" among the middle and wealthy classes who are in the know and can pull the levers of power:

> When William Kirk of Union Settlement and Helen Hall of Henry Street Settlement, miles apart in New York City, get together with *Consumers' Union*, a magazine located still other miles away, and with researchers from Columbia University, and with the trustees of a foundation, to consider the personal and community ruin wrought by loan shark-installment peddlers in low-income projects, they know what each is talking about, and, what is more, can put their peculiar kinds of knowledge together with a special kind of money to learn more about the trouble and find ways to fight it.[59]

I do not mean to imply that community organizers should never solicit foundation money. What I wish to point out here is that Jacobs favors such a strategy *at the expense* and *to the exclusion of* organizing strong "grassroots" neighborhood movements and communities. Her language-- of "special interest communities and pressure groups"--is that of the 1950s "elite pluralist" model of politics and political organizing promoted by political scientists such as Seymour Martin Lipset or David Truman. This model—as Michael Paul Rogin pointed out

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[59] Jacobs, pp. 118-19. I do not mean to imply that such "money," from foundations, should never be procured. But what I wish to point out here is that Jacobs favors such a strategy at the expense and to the exclusion of organizing strong "grassroots" neighborhood movements and communities. This bias complements the animus she expresses in the book against ideals of local, neighborhood urban community, and for solutions which do not challenge the expansion of marketspace or the impoverished conditions of slums. Thus Jacobs' ideology is 180 degrees apart from socialist and anarchist thinkers, from the artisans of 1848, to the Communards, to Marx, Kropotkin, or more recent figures like Mumford, Murray Bookchin or Manuel Castells, who see that organizing to solve urban problems must begin at the local level and must embody ideals of

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in his essay, "Nonpartisanship and the Group Interest" (1970), obscures rather than addresses the question of whether the leaders of such, so-called "public interest" groups truly "represented" the best interests of "their constituents."[60] Jacobs' exclusive appeal to such influential, wealthy "special interest communities and pressure groups" rests upon the dubious assumption that such foundations perform their philanthropic functions on the basis of goodwill, rather than for a far more selfish, limiting motive—to pacify or forestall popular unrest among the poor.

If there are many neighborhood activists of the past few decades who saw anything in Jacobs' work as an inspiration for building successful community movements, beyond her rightful animus toward technocratic bulldozer-planners like Moses and Le Corbusier, this was based on a misunderstanding. Jacobs is a lobbyist and a small-business promoter, yes, but certainly not a theorist of grass-roots neighborhood organizing. For, when it comes to *ideals* of urban community for which to fight, on which to build, at the heart of Jacobs' work there yawns a deep void. In Jacobs' vernacular, commerce is synonymous with community—all the while taking its place.

While Berman and other Jacobs fans seem to have no problem with such confusion of community with *laissez-faire* commerce and consequent urban

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urban community rather than fix-it solutions engineered on-high. I believe it is important, in understanding Jacobs' legacy, to understand that her thought runs directly

[60] Michael Paul Rogin, "Nonpartisanship and the Group Interest," *Ronald Reagan, The Movie, and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, p. 116.

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chaos, I do. However "rich," and "complex," and however preferable to the sterilities of corporate modernity, the "congestion," "noise," "dissonance," and "chaos" of nineteenth century urban commercial life, do not constitute, in my opinion, an *ideal* urban communal life, whatsoever. And no one, to my knowledge, least of all Jacobs, has ever explained or could explain how they could be. When one talks about ideals of urban existence, one speaks, as have thinkers throughout history, from Plato to Mumford,[61] of the possibilities of self-expression, love, and friendship, and these ideals embodied in culture. In an urban life filled with "congestion," "noise," "dissonance,' and "chaos," these ideals may be slightly more obtainable, in the cracks, so to speak, than in a bureaucratic setting. Indeed, such a setting has far more "cracks" in it than the seamless, conformist contemporary bureaucratic corporate environment. But that is the most one can say in favor of it. No one should pretend that such an urban *dis-*order is *ideal,* because, our ideals of self-expression, love, friendship, and culture cannot really be nurtured there.

To confuse such chaos with the "ideal city" is to take a step back, rather than forward, in our understanding of ideal urban life. It is to revive the eighteenth century ideology of Voltaire, Addison, and Steele. This is the ideology of "urban uplift" and of the joys of the detached, middle class urban spectator, the perpetual connoisseur. I discussed this ideology in Chapter 1, as a strategy of *denial: denial* of the evils of present urban life, of its lack of real community, of

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[61] See Irving Howe, "The City in Literature," *Commentary,* May 1971.

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the pain and suffering of one's fellows. It is one's duty as an intelligent, communal being to "negate the negation," as Hegel and Marx would say--to critically examine the fundamental, intractable problems of present urban existence and formulate a livable alternative. Instead, one chooses simply to dwell in what Hegel called "sense-certainty"—to numb oneself with cultural stimuli, simply to cope, as a passive individual.

Jacobs encourages us to "look, listen, linger, and think about"[62] the "dense cities" which she "likes best and "cares most about."[63] Like Addison and Steele, Jacobs prides herself on her spectatorial talent, which she as well as they urges us, her readers, to cultivate as well, for our own good. This is a valuable talent, as far as it goes. But there are also drawbacks, to which Jacobs seems blind. If one continually remains in the role of urban spectator, one tends to reduce the city to a mere spectacle. It becomes a field of opportunity merely for one's own entertainment, edification, or career advancement. Melville noticed this in his satires of the spectatorial discourse of the eighteenth century.[64] In the modern era, this discourse tends to degenerate into a knee-jerk, unthinking apologetic for keeping the basic mega-urban structure—the "dense" nature of present-day "cities"—the way it is.

As we shall discuss, the mega-city poses fundamental contradictions for humane as well as urbane existence. The spectatorial style, however, encourages

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[62] Jacobs, p. xi.
[63] Jacobs, p. 6.
[64] See Wyn Kelley, *Melville's City*, pp. 60-70.

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us to ignore these contradictions. Instead, we are urged to celebrate it (the mega-city) and them (its chaos) as something to "like" and "care about." As long as the mega-urban carnival is fun to watch, as long as there are plenty of new and exciting sights, sounds, and tastes for the individual voyeur to enjoy--well, then, what is there to criticize, worry, or get depressed about? Like her eighteenth-century predecessors, Jacobs denies the existence of fundamental problems with modern urban life because for her, as well as for her predecessors, the good life is a purely individual affair. She doesn't need real community; therefore, no one else should, either.

Certainly, in the anarchy of free-market, mega-urban society that Jacobs celebrates, one can pursue a very limited form of self-expression. If nobody cares, then one can say quite a lot that is "marvelously rich and complex," as compared with a bureaucratic environment, where one can get away with saying very little. On the other hand, however, in the society of "strangers" that Jacobs celebrates, such expression *counts* for very little. If know one cares whether one's neighbor lives or dies, and the neighbor feels the same way about me, who cares what either of us say? And since the basis of self-development is community, as thinkers from Plato, to Marx, to Dewey have pointed out, how can our self-expression, our selves, ever really develop, if we basically ignore each other? How can our *common culture* ever become truly and "marvelously rich and complex"? The product of such a society will probably not be very much self-expression or self-development. Instead, for most people, there will be plenty of

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anomie, neurosis, psychosis, poverty, misery, and mediocrity. The result might be said to be "marvelously rich and complex," if one is a clinical or social pathologist, or an alienated artist--but hardly ideal.

Berman writes, as if gladdened, that "in spite of everything that old moving chaos has kept—or perhaps has renewed—its hold on a great many of us"—through, above all, the work of Jane Jacobs.[65] But those "many" urbanists who follow Jacobs are encouraged to dismiss any consideration of such ideals, of the need for a new, democratic socialist ordering of this "chaos." Jacobs' nuts and bolts approach, her celebration of the marketspace and the Profitable City, ultimately and ironically comes at the expense of the neighborhood community her followers fought for. (That is why, I would argue, urbanists should reexamine the work of romantics like Lewis Mumford, Henry Wright, Clarence Stein, and Catherine Bauer, rather than dismiss their work, as Jacobs *explicitly* tells them to do.)

For Jacobs, the basic problem of the city is not the problem of building the good community. It is instead the problem (sound familiar?) of "barbarism" vs. "civilization."[66] Her chief "preoccupation", which "is almost an obsession," as Mumford correctly argues, is "the prevention of criminal violence in big cities."[67] To stop crime, Jacobs values the physical presence of neighbors, of watchful

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[65] Berman, p. 170.
[66] Jacobs, p. 30.
[67] Mumford, p. 190.

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"eyes."[68] . In Jacobs' ideology, the only thing society seems to be good for, as Mumford says, is its "eyes," to prevent crime. Jacobs' ideal is the busy street, with lots of commerce, or a small park surrounded by busy streets, as in New York's Washington Square (which Jacobs, to her credit, did much political organizing and lobbying to defend, against NYU's bulldozers) or Philadelphia's Rittenhouse Square. Such areas also had lots of "eyes" surrounding them with which to watch out for potential criminals.

Jacobs' ideal society is literally, the nightwatchman society. As Berman writes, "her ideal street is full of strangers passing through." This is only an ideal situation, however, if these strangers are provided with urban institutions that *allow and encourage them to become friends.* But Jacobs has no interest in building a city where this happens. Her ideal city is a marketplace, where people watch and watch over each other, but rarely if ever befriend each other. This is a city of voyeurs and vendors--not lovers, citizens, comrades, and communards.

Jacobs touches on the problems of social alienation, injustice, and inequity, only to forswear any discussion of them. She writes, "Deep and complicated social ills must lie behind delinquency and crime, in suburbs and towns as well as in great cities. [But] this book will not go into speculation on the deeper reasons." Instead, Jacobs' "starting point," which becomes, by default, her

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[68] Jacobs, p. 35.

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ending point, "must be . . . to strengthen whatever workable forces for maintaining safety and civilization do exist—in the cities we do have."[69]

In so doing, however, Jacobs accommodates herself to the "deeper," social evils, and even accept them as a positive good. While Jacobs admits that the "anonymity" of present-day "great" cities has something to do with crime, she presents this "anonymity" as inevitable-- "cities," she writes," are, by definition, full of strangers."[70] This however, according to Jacobs, is as it *should* be. "Cities are full of people with whom, from your viewpoint, or mine, or any other individual's, a certain degree of contact is useful or enjoyable; but you do not want them in your hair. And they do not want you in theirs either."[71] Thus, strangely enough, in Jacobs' realist logic, anonymity moves from what would normally be considered a problem, to the realm of the inevitable, and beyond that, to become, as far as Jacobs is concerned, ideal.

Jacobs' notion that cities *ought* to be places where people can merely be left alone effectively blots out alternative, more sensitive and compassionate, albeit more radical, ways of viewing urban problems and solutions from our awareness. By blotting out the genuine ideals of human community, the problems of modern life can be transmuted into (false) ideals. Her rhetoric is repressive: "libertarian" rather than liberating. Instead of helping us figuring out what we really want and how to get it, *all* of it, Jacobs defines for us what we should *not*

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[69] Jacobs, p. 31.
[70] Jacobs, p. 32.
[71] Jacobs, p. 56.

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legitimately want or expect. Since the present urban arrangement can (allegedly) give us privacy but not community, we should not seek community. We should accept what we already got: the "privacy" to which we are allegedly privileged in modern society. This sleight of hand leads us to ignore the vital questions. Is anonymity the same thing as privacy? Do poor people living in contemporary crowded slums and apartments have privacy? Do we really want the *level* of anonymity (or rather, anomie) we get in our contemporary urban environments? Does the alienation and anomie of such arrangements have anything to do with the problems of "delinquency and crime" and the "deep social ills" that Jacobs admits but refuses to discuss at any length? Can we have community as well as privacy? Instead of merely wanting everybody else out of our "hair" except as mutually observant "eyes," Wouldn't it be far better if the city was designed to encourage strangers to become intimate and compassionate toward one another, *as well as* designed to foster a realm of individual privacy?

Urban community advocate Clarence Perry had conceived the idea of self-enclosed neighborhoods, which would exclude or greatly restrict automobile traffic within its borders. Henry Wright, an architect and member of Mumford's Regional Planning Association of America, had added to this his concept of "superblocks," which would consolidate four city blocks into one, exclude auto traffic, provide the adjoining residents with a green, public commons. Such innovations would expand the realm of neighborhood association beyond the commercial street. They would give the neighborhood an intimacy, a sense of

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security and safety for children, the beauty of green space upon which to walk, in *addition* to the associations to be found on the sidewalk of a busy commercial street. But for Jacobs, the street, commerce, traffic are not only idols, but also, jealous gods. Nothing must get in their way.

> Whatever city neighborhoods may be, or may not be, and whatever usefulness they may have, or may be coaxed into having, their qualities cannot work at cross-purposes to thoroughgoing city mobility and fluidity of *use,* without economically weakening the city of which they are a part.[72]

Jacobs argued for drastically revising or abolishing existing zoning restrictions to foster more commerce, everywhere. She wanted to shorten the length of city blocks and the size of parks by driving new streets through them and developing more commercial space on them.[73] She sought to create a greater "mixture" of "primary uses," by placing not only shops, but also factories, theaters, and trucking facilities in residential neighborhoods, for example. Though such facilities might be extremely noisy, foul-smelling, and increase traffic problems for residents, day and night, this last feature was precisely their (rather dubious, as far as I am concerned) advantage, according to Jacobs. Since they would operate at all hours of the day and night, there would always be plenty of "eyes" to watch the street and prevent crime.[74]

As Mumford noted, these simplistic solutions would probably exacerbate both the one problem Jacobs does want to talk about at length—crime—and the

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[72] Jacobs, p. 114-17.
[73] Jacobs, Chapter 9, "The need for small blocks," pp. 178-86.
[74] Jacobs, Chapter 8, "The need of mixed primary uses," pp. 152-77.

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ills she refuses to discuss. For such reforms would have resulted in greater congestion, a *loss* of neighborhood community and playspace for youth, as well as greater noise and air pollution. These in turn would lead to even greater anomie, delinquency—and crime.[75] Mumford writes, "Mrs. Jacobs most original proposal"—a proposal with which he obviously does not agree—"is to turn its chronic symptom of disorganization—excessive congestion—into a remedy, by deliberately enlarging the scope of the disease."[76]

Instead of looking upon congestion and disorganization as problems, Jacobs confuses them *with* community. Thus, in her own mind, if not in the real world, they replace the planning necessary to remedy these evils and thus build genuine community. "The street," Mumford writes, is Jacobs' "patent substitute for the more adequate meeting places which traditional cities have always boasted. . . ." Mumford then mentions the "new street system" Jacobs proposes in *Death and Life,* which would have the City cut new streets through existing blocks, creating "twice the number of intersecting north-south streets" Mumford insists that this "would do nothing to give visible reality to the social functions of the neighborhood—those performed by school, church, market, clinic, park, library, tavern, eating house, theater." Mumford concludes that "Mrs. Jacobs has no use for the orderly distribution of these activities or the handsome design of

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[75] Lewis Mumford, "Home Remedies for Urban Cancer," *The Lewis Mumford Reader,* ed. Donald Miller, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), pp. 196-97.
[76] Mumford, "Home Remedies," in p. 194.

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their necessary structures; she prefers the hit-and-miss distribution of the present city." [77]

Jacobs is willing not only to sacrifice the "social functions of the neighborhood." She is also quite willing to sacrifice the aesthetic qualities possible through planning. To those who would complain that the present, unplanned city is ugly, she brusquely replies, "A city cannot be a work of art." Recall the Whites' similar unfeeling arrogance toward the fear felt by Melville's character, Isabelle, that the pavements of the great city would swallow up all natural beauty. Sarcastically, Mumford replies, "The citizens of Florence, Siena, Venice, and Turin will please take note!"[78] Such citizens had better give up their historic, centuries-long civic beauty and pride, sacrificing this at the altar of Jacobs' idol, Commerce, if they want to fulfill Mother Jacobs' patent remedy for great city "life."

As for the children in Jacobs' vision, if they do choose to go outside the apartment, Jacobs advises them to play on the sidewalk, or go hang out at the corner store. Jacobs rejects the idea of having large playgrounds, where children might be able to run around freely, because, unlike the street, people would have to be paid to watch over them and prevent crime. Paid park and playground supervisors, along with any other public sector functions, mean greater taxes upon the middle class and upon their commerce. If there isn't much space for youth

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[77] Mumford, p. 190, 193,
[78] Jacobs, as quoted in Mumford, p. 194.

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beyond the commercial street, if there is a danger that children might get run over by a car should they run after a ball into the street, at least there are plenty of strangers' "eyes" there that may (or may not) watch out for them.[79] Here Jacobs, once again, displays her amazing talent for transforming social problems into virtues. In her eyes, youth can be better "assimilated" into adult culture when they learn to dodge traffic on the celebrated streets, while playing sidewalk stickball.[80] Is this a recipe for genuine maturation, however—or for "growing up absurd," as Paul Goodman titled his famous critique of adolescence in advanced capitalist America?

Jacobs insinuates that planners, even radical planners like Mumford and Bauer, do not know how to "look and listen" to what is going on in the streets around her. She seems curiously to have missed the following observation by Goodman of big city life for children:

> The very space has been crushingly preempted. The cars in New York seem finally to have discouraged many of the ball games; we see boys going a mile to find a Sunday-deserted parking lot to play stickball which previously they played on their own street with the small children chosen in.[81]

It is quite true that Jacobs would like to see the sidewalks of New York City greatly expanded.[82] But would such a proposal really avoid the danger of the ball going out into a street with heavy automotive traffic, and the child running

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[79] Jacobs, p. 56.
[80] See Jacobs, *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, pp. 74-140.
[81] Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized Society* (New York: Random House, 1960), p. 75.

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after it? It is true that many people have grown up playing on the sidewalk. But can the sidewalk, no matter how expanded, ever offer the advantages of safety and spatial freedom offered by an adequately supervised playground?

Fundamentally, as Goodman writes, the mega-urbanism which Jacobs celebrates throughout her book destroys the growing child's, and the grown adult's, connection to nature, work, and community:

> There is probably a point of complexity at which, cut off from the country, the city ceases to advance beyond country backwardness; it becomes impractical and begins to induce its own kind of stupefaction and ineptness. The endless city-spread of suburbs makes the real farming and open country unavailable. The city becomes the only world, getting duller as one leaves the center, through first the inner ring of blight and then the deadly dormitories and suburbs.
>
> Within the big metropolises at present, industry and commerce are shut off and concealed. . . . The automobiles make the streets dangerous.[83]

For Goodman, juvenile delinquency is rooted in the "absurdity" of modern capitalist/metropolitan/suburban existence, which provides no useful role to play for the adolescent.

> As our system becomes more tightly organized and highly urbanized, it is the poor city kids who are squeezed out. We no longer have a neighborhood tradition or small after-school jobs—fewer shops make occasional deliveries; to deliver for the chain-stores is a full-time job (except perhaps on Saturdays); messengers are hired full time; there are no lawns to mow, there is no snow to shovel; there are fewer news routes in the city; baby-sitting is a middle-class business. . . .[84]

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[82] Jacobs, p. 87.
[83] Goodman, pp. 74-75.
[84] Goodman, p. 204.

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The causes of juvenile delinquency, consequent drug addiction, petty crime, anomie, etc. do not lie in too many large playgrounds. Instead, as Paul Goodman wrote in that same book, it is caused by the lack of meaningful employment and community. Contemporary society lacks *laboring community*, where skilled adults train children in the use of their hands as well as their minds *as they work and play together*. Contact with unspoiled nature is also extremely important—not merely because it soothes the savage adolescent beast, but precisely because it allows the growing child to play freely, to express his aggressive, even violent urges, safely. The ideal place for such employment and community for youngsters is not the street, but the enclosed neighborhood, with its playgrounds, parks and common gardens.[85]

As Jim Sleeper has more recently written, in *The Closest of Strangers* (1990), the neighborhood is far more intensely valuable to child development as well as adult social life than is the commerce celebrated by Jacobs. This is precisely because the neighborhood *protects* children, as they develop, *from* the "chaos, dissonance, and congestion" *created* by commerce and celebrated by Jacobs and Berman. Neighborhoods, for Sleeper, act

> as refuges from the clamor and anonymity of the great urban market and as places of preparation to meet its challenges—launching pads for the urban young. . . . Neighborhoods that "work" manage to filter the hard knocks and sheer dissonance of the city. They keep alive

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[85] Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd*, chapters on "Aptitude" and "Patriotism," especially pp. 74-76; 107-111.

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> some appropriate balance of relaxed play and obligation within which social commitments can flower and be shared.[86]

To grow up unprotected from the market by neighborhood community, to confuse neighborhood community *with* "dissonance," is nonsensical. That is like treating a child "like a shrub that chance had caused to be born in the middle of a path and that the passers-by soon cause to perish by bumping into it from all sides and bending it in every direction": a strategy for child-rearing deplored by Jean Jacques Rousseau deplores on the first page of the first Book of his *Emile* (1762). Unlike Jacobs, but like Rousseau, Goodman and Mumford, Sleeper is conscience of the *antagonism* between communal nurturance and spontaneous social contacts, on the one hand, and market "dissonance," on the other:

> To children, especially, a good neighborhood life offers a wealth of spontaneous but manageable challenges and contacts beyond the front stoop or apartment door. When it works, neighborhood life introduces youths to the satisfactions of roles which the urban market rewards only indirectly, if at all: nurturer, defender, uplifter, communicant, teammate, lover, friend.

Furthermore, according to Sleeper, and contrary once again to Jacobs' compulsively cosmopolitan worldview, adults may indeed find

> satisfactions in other, nonspatial networks, but to an extent surely underestimated by the more cosmopolitan among us, New Yorkers of all ages find them at least partly in neighborhoods, at the local parish hall or synagogue and in the early tavern, diner, community center, or park. [87]

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[86] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, or *On Education*, tr. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 37.
[87] Jim Sleeper, *The Closest of Strangers* (New York: Norton, 1990), p. 123.

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Such neighborhood social institutions, according to Ray Oldenberg's *The Great Good Place* (1989), actually encourages a vital social life. For such places provide a realm of informal, relaxed, spontaneous contacts, in which strangers, contra Jacobs' aversion, actually can get to "know" each other and become friends.[88] As we shall see later, Mumford placed a great deal of importance, in formulating his garden city and neighborhood vision, in fostering such casual intimacy: in what he calls a public, Buber-esque "I-and-Thou" relation.

Finally, this adult participation, according to Sleeper, makes the neighborhood doubly desirable for child development. As Sleeper writes, "In our idyll, it is neighborhood adults, after all, who become role models for the young."[89]

The strong neighborhood and community life that Sleeper, Mumford, and I envision, the sort of community we believe is necessary for the good life for human beings, especially youth, requires conscious planning, state intervention and ownership of land and building stock, and wholesale community redevelopment. It requires the community to democratically decide exactly what stores, community centers, craft workshops as well as (modern, clean, quiet) factories, cafes, park space, gardens, playgrounds, etc., will best facilitate it, and to develop these facilities. What is required is not *laissez-faire,* but comprehensive social planning. For Mumford and his associates, to create an

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[88] Ray Oldenberg, *The Great Good Places: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts and How They Get Through the Day* (New York, 1989).
[89] Sleeper, pp. 123-24.

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intensive, popular neighborhood community as well as to ensure greater contact with nature, the primary task of such planning would be to repopulate the countryside with garden cities. This would ensure that the urban neighborhood in which most children live would be far closer to nature. Such a plan will also allow us the space, in the new as well as the old, newly depopulated urban centers, to intensively plan for community rather than for mere commerce (which would be granted its own, albeit, far more limited, space).

Let's turn now from these realists' literary efforts, to Mumford's far more comprehensive understanding of urban realities. They are well grounded, not just in present-day realities, but also, in the philosophy of what it means to be a human being, and what city life should be. For Mumford, unlike these opponents, begins his analysis by considering the fundamental question: what makes up a good urban community, and does Megalopolis measure up?

Mumford's Urban Ideals

As with all radical political theory, we must begin with the basic view of human nature, and its ideal relation to the natural and social environments, upon which this critique is based. Mumford's view is summarized by the following passage from his speech, "California and the Human Horizon": "man's great mission is not to conquer Nature by main force but to cooperate with her intelligently and lovingly for his own purposes."[90] This dovetails nicely with

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[90] Lewis Mumford, "California and the Human Horizon," *The Urban Prospect*, p. 8.

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Marx and Engels' more systematic statements on man's relation to nature and to man's own society. As a way of getting to Mumford's more developed critique of Megalopolis, let's first discuss the work of Marx and Engels.

For Marx, writing in his *Economic and Philosophical Mss.* and elsewhere, human beings were, in the first place, fundamentally dependent upon their external natural environment, for their sustenance as well as for their aesthetic fulfillment. The mode of interaction between man and nature was social labor, broadly conceived. Man needs to work upon nature collectively in order to sustain his society. In the process, his society with his fellow men becomes vitally important to him in its own right, giving birth to new social, emotional, intellectual, cultural, and spiritual needs. Men can only fulfill these needs in a society where they equally share social, economic, and political power: a democratic socialist society. Otherwise, when such powers are concentrated in the hands of an exploitative ruling class, the majority of men are "alienated" from their powers. Thus, they are alienated from nature, from the product of their collective labor, from themselves, and from each other. Thus, Marx wrote in the "Estranged Labor" section of the "Economic and Philosophic Mss., "Man *lives* from nature, i.e., nature is his *body*, and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die. . . . man is a part of nature."[91] Further on, Marx writes, in terms which Mumford would certainly understand, that the ideal human society

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[91] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," *Early Writings* (New York: Vintage, 1975), p. 328.

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and civilization, far from being antagonistic to nature, are instead the place where men and nature unite, through art, architecture, and labor:

> The human significance of nature is only available to social man; for only to social man is nature available as a bond with other men, as the basis of his own existence for others and theirs for him, and as the vital element in human reality; only to social man is nature the foundation of his own human existence. Only as such has his natural existence become a human existence and nature itself become human. Thus society completes the essential unity of man and nature, it is the genuine resurrection of nature, the accomplished naturalism of man and the accomplished humanism of nature.[92]

Such a notion might seem contrary to other passages in Marx and Engels that seem to offer a different perspective on the proper relation between man and nature. In *The German Ideology,* for example, Marx and Engels rejected Feuerbach's view that nature, though the primary determinant of human thought, existed somehow outside of human activity and society. In response to Feuerbach, Marx and Engels wrote that

> nature, the nature that preceded human history, is not by any means the nature in which [modern man] lives, it is nature which today no longer exists anywhere (except perhaps on a few Australian coral-islands of recent origin) and which, therefore, does not exist for [us].[93]

The "metropolitan socialists of Europe," as Raymond Williams has discussed, have tended to crudely interpret this passage as dismissive of environmental concerns. They have not only taken it to mean that humankind can

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[92] Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Writings," *Selected Writings,* ed. Dave McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 90.

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bring Nature under scientific control. This is obviously true, and obviously what Marx and Engels meant. But the "metropolitans" have gone further than this, to interpret Marx and Engels as purveyors of their own *scientific, technological hubris*, what Williams describes as "an unreflecting celebration of . . . man's mastery of nature—as if the exploitation of natural resources could be separated from the accompanying exploitation of men." They seem to argue that, even after a successful socialist revolution, man can safely deal with nature tyrannically and without concern for future consequences. For these interpreters, man has somehow become completely *independent* from Nature and thus should not fear that the chaos he creates in nature might create catastrophes for human civilization as well.[94]

But the fact of the matter is that both Marx and Engels were greatly sympathetic, rather than hostile, to such environmentalists concerns. When taken in context, this passage reveals a different interpretation. For immediately preceding this dismissal of the notion of nature apart from man, we find another dismissal: of the antipodal notion of Feuerbach (and of Williams' "metropolitan socialists"), that "man [should be] considered to be distinct from nature."[95] For Marx and Engels, man and nature were *inter*-dependent.

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[93] Karl Marx and Friederich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), p. 63.
[94] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 36-37.
[95] Ibid.

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In his *The Dialectic of Nature*, Engels put this human need and capacity for civilized harmony with nature in more concrete terms:

> Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victories over nature. . . The people who, in Mesopotamia, Greece, Asia Minor and elsewhere, destroyed the forests to obtain cultivable land, never dreamed that by removing along with the forests the collecting centres and reservoirs of moisture they were laying the basis for the present forlorn state of those countries. . . . . Thus at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature—but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly.

Engels is not anti-science or anti-technological, by any means. But if humans are to succeed at creating a livable world with science, they must employ science in order to evaluate the consequences of the decisions they make vis-a-vis nature. They must not be deluded by the Christian notion that God has given the human race some sort of magical immuity from the environmental devastation that, with every technological advance, the human race becomes more capable of creating:

> In particular, after the mighty advances made by the natural sciences in the present century, we are more than ever in a position to realise, and hence to control, also the more remote natural consequences of at least our day-to-day production activities. But the more this progresses the more will humanity not only feel but also know their oneness with nature, and the more impossible will become the senseless and unnatural idea of a contrast between mind and matter, humanity and nature, soul and body, such as

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> arose after the decline of classical antiquity in Europe and obtained its highest elaboration in Christianity.[96]

Unless human society truly aims to unite man and nature, Engels is arguing here, catastrophes will occur.

Mumford develops upon this picture of human society as the "unity of man and nature" by presenting an ideal of man's social organization. The basic unit of this unity, the institutional form in which, historically, man has sought to simultaneously fulfill his social and natural needs, for Mumford, was the city. In arguing this, Mumford follows one of the founders of sociology, Comte, who wrote that in the healthy social organism, the basic "organs can only be cities, the root of the word being the nucleus of the term civilization."[97]

Here is Patrick Geddes and Victor Branford, following Comte's insight:

> The central and significant fact about the city is that the city . . . functions as the specialized organ of social transmission. It accumulates and embodies the heritage of a region, and combines in some measure and kind with the cultural heritage of larger units, national, racial, religious, human.[98]

As with Comte, Geddes and Branford, so with Mumford, the city is the principle means to human social interaction. It is the "focal meeting place. . . ."[99] Its

> essential task . . . is to provide the maximum number of favorable opportunities for large populations to

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[96] Engels, *Dialectic of Nature* (New York: International Publishers, 1940), pp. 291-93.
[97] August Comte, *System of Positive Polity* (London: Longmans Green, 1877), Vol. 2, pp. 223-6.
[98] As quoted by Mumford in *Culture of Cities*, pp. 6-7. The two authors collaborated on two books, *The Coming Polity* (1917) and *Our Social Inheritance* (1919).
[99] Mumford, "Yesterday's City of Tomorrow," *The Urban Prospect*, p. 119.

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> intermingle and interact, to interchange their human facilities and aptitudes as well as their economic goods and services, to stimulate and intensify by frequent contact and collaboration many common interests that would otherwise languish.[100]

Thus, the cities "other essential function" is "as a container of human culture," so as to "transmit" this culture "from generation to generation." Both the fixed structures and the manifold meeting places found in the ideal city serve this purpose:

> part of this heritage is carried forward in institutional and symbolic form, represented by buildings, archives, records, libraries, for which the city serves as permanent storehouse; and an even larger part of it is transmitted directly through human agents, by daily face-to-face transactions and conservations, by direct observations and imitations, and by chance encounters as well as deliberate meetings.[101]

In his *Culture of Cities* (1938), Mumford calls the city the stage for culture, conceived in Comte's Romantic terms as a "social drama," for the fundamental cultural meanings of a given society:

> The city, as we find it in history, is the point of maximum concentration for the power and culture of a community. It is the place where the diffused rays of many separate beams of life fall into focus, with gains in both social effectiveness and significance. The city is the form and symbol of an integrated social relationship: it is the seat of the temple, the market, the hall of justice, the academy of learning. Here in the city the goods of civilization are multiplied and manifolded; here is where the human experience is transformed into viable signs, symbols, patterns of conduct, systems of order. Here is

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[100] Mumford, "Megalopolis as Anti-City," *The Urban Prospect*, p. 128.
[101] Mumford, *ibid.*, p. 137.

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> where the issues of civilization are focused: here too, ritual passes on occasion into the active drama of a fully differentiated and self-conscious society.[102]

The city is not just a passive "stage" for culture or social interaction, however. It intensifies and expands the opportunities for individual fulfillment, as well as for cultural development for the individual and the society in which he lives. For Mumford, cities are indeed unique in their seemingly magical capacity to concentrate social interaction. Sounding like Henri Bergson, Mumford argues that this has an effect upon time itself. Cities are indeed "the products of time," as Mumford says. But rather than merely the passive determinations of a reified "history," "cities actively manifest, solidify, shape, and transcend time itself":

> They are the molds in which men's lifetimes have cooled and congealed, giving lasting shape, by way of art, to moments that would otherwise vanish with the living and leave no means of renewal or wider participation behind them. In the city, time becomes visible: buildings and monuments and public ways, more open than the written record, more subject to the gaze of many men than the scattered artifacts of the countryside, leave an imprint upon the minds even of the ignorant or the indifferent. Through the material fact of preservation, time challenges time, time clashes with time: habits and values carry over beyond the living group, streaking with different strata of time the character of any single generation. . . .[103]

Cities are the concentrators of social interaction, of social space and social time. They are thus the citadels of modernity: of possibility, both individual and social.

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[102] Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, p. 3.
[103] Mumford, *ibid.*

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> By the diversity of its time-structures, the city in part escapes the tyranny of a single present, and the monotony of a future that consists in repeating only a single beat heard in the past. Through its complex restoration of time and space, no less than through the social division of labor, life in the city takes on the character of a symphony: specialized human aptitudes, specialized instruments, give rise to sonorous results which, neither in volume nor in quality, could be achieved by any single piece.[104]

Drawing upon the classical tradition of Plato and Aristotle, Mumford writes that cities arise out of necessity, yet lift men out of the realm of the necessary, the parochial, and the traditional:

> Cities arise out of man's social needs and multiply both their modes and their methods of expression. In the city remote forces and influences intermingle with the local: their conflicts are no less significant than their harmonies. And here, through the concentration of the means of intercourse in the market and the meeting place, alternative modes of living present themselves: the deeply rutted ways of the village cease to be coercive and the ancestral goals cease to be all-sufficient: strange men and women, strange interests, and stranger gods loosen the traditional ties of blood and neighborhood.[105]

Thus, in Mumford's view, the city is connected fundamentally with art, in both its dramatic and utopian aspects. It not only preserves and shapes past time. It also opens up vistas upon the ultimate mysteries and the meanings of a civilization: "Now the collective sharing of experience, and the stimulus of rational criticism, turn the rites of the village festival into the more powerful

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[104] Mumford, *ibid.*, p. 4.
[105] Mumford, *ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

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imaginative forms of the tragic drama: experience is deepened, as well as more widely circulated through this process."[106]

"Experience is deepened" not only because men are exposed to different and novel ways of life, but because, in the process, they speculate and debate upon what they consider to be man's ultimate "destiny." These differing conceptions are recorded in, and encouraged by, the city's architecture itself. As Protagoras and Aristotle recognized, the "polis" completes what language begins: to make man fully human, a giver of value, a participant in collective purpose, a discussant of what makes for the good life:

> The city is a fact in nature, . . . But it is also a conscious work of art, and it holds within its communal framework many simpler and more personal forms of art. Mind *takes form* in the city; and in turn, urban forms condition mind. For space, no less than time, is artfully reorganized in cities: in boundary lines and silhouettes, in the fixing of horizontal planes and vertical peaks, in utilizing or denying the natural site, the city records the attitude of a culture and an epoch to the fundamental facts of its existence. The dome and the spire, the open avenue and the closed court, tell the story, not merely of different physical accommodations, but of essentially different conceptions of man's destiny. The city is both a physical utility for collective living and a symbol of those collective purposes and unaninities that arise under such favoring circumstances. With language itself, it remains man's greatest work of art.[107]

In much of the past, the "destiny" to which urban architecture pointed was otherworldly. But even in the religious iconography of the medieval "spire," men

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[106] Mumford, *ibid.*, p. 5.
[107] Mumford, *ibid.*

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were pointing with their urban architecture toward their real conception of what the good life might be. In its very essence, the city is philosophical and political: utopian. Though its division of labor and its squalor may oppress, its capacity to concentrate experience and meaning encourage its inhabitants to conceptualize new possibilities and aspire for better things. Or as Mumford says, "The mark of the city is its purposive social complexity." This means that the "art" that is the city is a lyrical, utopian art. In opening up a window to the ultimate meaning and ideals of our civilization, the city opens up a vista upon our collective possibilities, on our future. It points us, I would argue, (and Mumford himself often explicitly argued) toward socialism. For it is here, in the ideal city, that the kind of need-fulfilling, humane, cooperative civilization that Mumford as well as Marx envisioned could flourish; and it is here, in the present city, that the working class achieves sufficient social power, organization, education, and discipline to effect socialist revolution.

But there is a third requirement for the city to fulfill. This is as much a self-imposed limitation as it is a task. In providing the physical institutions necessary for facilitating and intensifying human society and art, the city must also be careful not to obstruct the individual's basic need to connect to nature, and to permit his urban social environment to connect harmoniously and healthily with the natural organic environment, the biosphere. As Marx and Mumford both agree, man is a natural being: he is only the conscious "part of nature." Cut him off from natural sunlight, fresh, pure water and clean air, richly oxygenated by

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unpolluted vegetation; cut him off from the aesthetic pleasures of natural sights, sounds, smells, and touch—and man's emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and physical health suffers.[108] Thus the task of the city to retain for its citizens their connection with nature is integrally related to its cultural mission. Without his connection to the beauties, sensual pleasures, and sanative fresh air, water, and sunlight provided by nature, man's culture inevitable suffers; it becomes sterile. Agreeing with Marx, Mumford argues that it is as much man's task to naturalize himself as it is to humanize nature. The ideal city, the nucleus of the ideal society, is the locus of a meeting, not just between human beings, but between culture and nature.

Mumford gains this insight from his greatest mentor: the environmental thinker and urban planner, Patrick Geddes. But he also got it from the artist, Alfred Stieglitz. As I mentioned in the last chapter, Stieglitz's photography often reveals this natural yearning that men have for a fresh connection with the natural environment, unobstructed by the ugliness, toxicity, repression, and artificiality of

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[108] Two authors who make a good case for this recently are David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Random House, 1996) and James Howard Kunstler, *Home from Nowhere* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.) As Kunstler argues, nature, like good works of art, is "charming" and imparts "aliveness" to its human observers, because it involves "patterns" of "complex relationships" in which we are "invited" to participate. (p. 82); patterns which, as Abram argues, resonate with us psychologically and biologically, and thus are more fundamental to our human ontology than the "abstractions" of contemporary Western technological culture. This is not to say, in vitalist or primitivist fashion, that the latter is bad and must be rejected, but simply that our need for access to nature must not be obscured or obliterated by our technological culture. A complementary relationship between the former and the latter must be established.

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modern urban existence. He shows how the modern city itself, despite itself, reveals its natural background.[109]

The city allows us to transform man and his civilization for the better. Thus, for Mumford, it is the responsibility of the present generation, living amidst the present crisis, to "grasp. . . . the role of the city and . . . transform . . . the basic means of communal existence."[110] Otherwise, if we do not act, the crisis will only get worse: "When the city ceases to be a symbol of art and order, it acts in a negative fashion: it expresses and helps to make more universal the fact of disintegration."[111]

What are the basic structures required of the city if it is to fulfill these essential tasks: to facilitate social interaction, and thus to intensify culture and transmit it through the generations?

> If our civilization is worth while maintaining, with all its vocational differentiation and cultural variety—historic, scientific, religious, humanistic—two urban conditions must be laid down: one, a many-dimensioned container capable of maintaining this richness and complexity and of distributing, over wider areas in space and time and over larger populations, the cultural wealth that urbanization both stores and helps to increase. The other condition is the creation of highly attractive focal-points—cities in the historic sense, striking in form and character—where a diversity of organizations, institutions, associations, along with primary family and neighborhood groups, necessary to maintain this complex social order, can come together and profit by the constant give-and-take.[112]

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[109] Mumford, "The Metropolitan Milieu," *The Human* Prospect (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), pp. 146-77.
[110] Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, p. 7.
[111] Mumford, *ibid.*, p. 6.
[112] Mumford, "Megalopolis as Anti-City," *The Urban Prospect*, p. 137.

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Further developing on this second theme of the need for urban "nuclei," Mumford speaks of

> the power of the attractive nucleus to serve as a magnet for concentrating a diversity of functions and purposes. Without such a nucleus, aided by many sub-nuclei, urban life lacks organs for mixing, meeting, mobilization. . . . Historic cities, above all, great metropolises, thanks to the accumulations of time and sentiment, have powerful nuclei, which magnetize not merely their own inhabitants but also people from distant regions.[113]

The realist apologists for uncontrolled, mega-urban development, however, get it backwards. They turn means into ends. In their cockeyed view of things, as Mumford paraphrases their views, "the form and content of the city must primarily serve its technology and support its 'expanding economy'"[114] and the service that the modern megalopolis gives to these "ideals" is a justification for and celebration of its continued expansion. Such apologias lack any real criteria for city development, criteria based upon the fulfillment of human needs. Thus, according to Mumford, they "turn the true order upside down," for they ignore what is "perhaps the primary function of the city today, . . . that of bringing technology itself into line with human purpose, reducing speed, energy, quantification to amounts that are humanly assimilable and humanly valuable."[115] In other words, the chief task of the modern city is to adapt modern technological power to the city's historic social tasks. The city must facilitate meeting and

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[113] Lewis Mumford, *ibid.*, p. 136.

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intensify and transmit culture, rather than allow that technological power to eliminate these social functions and individual opportunities (via auto traffic and overbuilding the urban space, for example).

Now that we have arrived at such real, human criteria for cities, from the proceeding section, now that we have dealt with the ideological apologias for Megalopolis, how does Megalopolis really measure up, as cities go?

As Mumford's RPAA associate, the architect Clarence Stein wrote in his landmark essay, "Dinosaur Cities," (1925), the "realists," along with "most of us," "see the great city as in a dream" only, and confuse the wish-fulfillment of this dream with the reality. On the surface, the mega-city is

> the sum of all our possible aspirations. A picturesque skyline, massive towers, romantic beauty! Crowds swaying through the lighted streets in pursuit of pleasure; flashing lights, . . . successful lawyers, engineers, advertising men. . . . the city of great opportunities!

Obviously, this dream is a reality—for the elite few. But when the "bubble" bursts, the rest of us discover that "many of the real opportunities of living have slipped through our hands." The problems involved with the modern metropolis, with its concentrated mega-population, are so enormous as to belie the dream.

> Look at the great city in its entirety: the turbid mass of traffic blocking the streets and avenues, the slow-moving crowd of people clambering into street-cars, elevateds, subways, their arms pinioned to their sides, pushed and packed like cattle in ill-smelling cars, with a mingling of bodies which would be indecent were it not for the

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[114] Mumford, "Social Complexity and Urban Design," *The Urban Prospect*, p. 159.
[115] *Ibid.*

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> suffocation and discomfort that acts, as it were, as a counter irritant. Look at the dingy slums of the East Side, Long Island City, the stockyard neighborhoods, the Hump, or where you will: there is little enough to choose between the dark unsanitary tenements of lower Manhattan (some of them among the worst in the world) and the grey minimum of decency that West Philadelphia provides. What part does art, literature, culture, or financial opportunity play in the lives of the millions of men and women who go through the daily routine of life in our great urban districts? The city of dreams is as far away from them as it is from the denizen of Winesburg, Ohio.[116]

Mumford drew heavily upon this essay to work out his own critique of the modern mega-city. From Mumford's account, Megalopolis (which, as I wrote earlier, for Mumford as well as a popularizer of the term, Jean Gottman,[117] means both the skyscraper city and the surrounding, sprawling suburbs) is not even a city, let alone a good city. It is, in fact, an "anti-city," one whose basic "formlessness" makes the carrying out of the historic tasks of the city nearly impossible.

To be sure, the modern metropolis makes *possible* a far greater level of social association than was possible with the old rural, feudal, peasant society. As Raymond Williams argues in *The Country and the City,* socialists such as Friederich Engels and H.G. Wells recognized something that the reactionary critics of the modern city had failed to acknowledge. They recognized that the modern metropolis makes possible

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[116] Clarence Stein, "Dinosaur Cities," in Carl Sussman, ed., *Planning the Fourth Migration,* pp. 65-66; originally published in *Survey Graphic* 7 (May 1925), pp. 134-38.

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> the growth, within the cities, of new kinds of social organisation. . . . the struggle to create new forms of local government. . . the struggle for the vote and for the reform of parliament. . . . the fight for education. . . . the active growth of municipal as well as metropolitan culture; the struggle for new amenities—libraries and the institutes—in the needs of new towns.

But most importantly

> there was the growing organisation of the working class itself: the great civilizing response to industrial tyranny and anarchy: the creation of the unions out of the network of urban friendly and benefit societies, and beyond this expression of a new kind of society: the cooperatives, the socialism, again, of the new cities.[118]

Thus the modern city, like capitalism itself, was not all bad, *historically speaking*. But if it was not a vision of pure hell for these thinkers, it was not the *ideal form* of city, either. For these radical thinkers agreed in part with the more conservative Thomas Carlyle that the modern city *encourages* "atomism," not society. While the modern capitalist city facilitates society, social meeting, cooperation, association among the masses it brings together, it does not *encourage* these things. For it brings people together as monads, competing with each other for scarce jobs, housing, etc. That, anyway, is the original intention of the capitalist class for building the modern city, and that is the basic logic of modern, mega-urban development. If association among these monads occurs (and it does indeed occur, thankfully), it is no thanks to this tendency. This

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[117] Jean Gottman, *Megalopolis: The Urbanized Northeastern Seaboard of the United States* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1961). Like other realists, the problem with Gottmann is that he believes "megalopolitan" sprawl to be natural and inevitable.
[118] Raymond Williams, *Country and the City*, pp. 230-31.

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association is due to an individual or working class socialist *reaction to and rebellion against* these basic, "*atomizing*" structures and processes, against the essential "overcrowding and chaos" of the modern metropolis, as Williams writes, as well as against capitalist exploitation. As Williams reports, Wells and Engels did not share the one-sidedly favorable, "simplistic," "mindless" view of the "metropolitan intellectuals," who saw the city as the result of "unlimited" progress. Instead, the new forms of social association made possible by the modern city were, for these radicals, "new way[s] of *opposing* the city [my emphasis]."[119]

What Williams is arguing in *The Country and the City* is that the reality of the modern city, for the working class, is dialectical. It is precisely the congestion and misery of the modern city, along with the basic contradictions of capitalism, which impels the proletariat to social solidarity (and revolution). Both moments of this dialectic must be grasped if we are to comprehend this reality. Otherwise, we can fall into one of two traps. As I discussed the work of Carl Schorske and Raymond Williams on the subject in Chapter 1, we can, damn the city, in reactionary fashion, as unambiguously bad, in favor of a non-existent pastoral idyll. And we can damn anyone who disagrees for being incorrigibly insensitive to the plight of the working class in the modern city. Or, in the tradition of the "metropolitan intellectuals" discussed by Raymond Williams in *The Country and*

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[119] Ibid.

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the City,[120] we can fall into the trap of believing that the modern metropolis, because it is the potential incubator for proletarian revolution and solidarity, is the ideal city. On this basis, we can view it as the ideal place to foster human society. And we can damn all those who disagree as hopeless reactionaries who fail to grasp the necessity of human progress, society, or cities, in general. It is important to understand that *neither* of these assessments is accurate, that they are both pitfalls, and that Mumford, like Marx and Engels, accepted neither.

It is true that Mumford emphasized more the problems of the modern metropolis than he did the capacity it gave the working class for society. Mumford discusses the guild associations of the middle ages. But there is very little discussion in *The Culture of Cities* (1938) of the labor unions, housing cooperatives, etc. that had been built, and the titanic mass struggles that had been waged, in the cities of the U.S. throughout the previous two decades. The dominant impression from this and other works is that Mumford relies instead upon associations among middle class professionals and scientists to effect the social changes he would like to see happen. Yet it is also true, as we shall see especially in Chapter 9, that Mumford sought to build a popular, mass housing movement, centered on human needs, and that on occasion he called upon the working class to overthrow the capitalist regime. Like Wells, Marx and Engels, Mumford wants a different and better city. Social association and "conversation" of all forms would be encouraged by the basic structure of his ideal city--unlike

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[120] Williams, pp. 36-37.

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the present metropolis, where it is discouraged by the very mega-urban structure itself: where such association occurs only in desperate rebellion against its "overcrowding and chaos." Mumford's criticism of the modern city is essentially progressive, like that of Wells, Melville, and Marx and Engels.

Mumford employs the method of radical historical critique, discussed in chapter 1, to analyze the basic nature of Megalopolis in *The Culture of Cities*. Emerging first in the baroque era, as a manifestation of the prince's absolutist power, the mega-city form is then adopted by the capitalist. By crowding workers together in cities, the capitalists pit the industrial workers against each other, in competition for jobs and housing, which therefore become relatively scarce, driving wages down, and rents up. As David Gordon has confirmed, the mega-city's original and still basic purpose is to serve as one of the primary means to *oppress* people within the new "civil society" of capitalism. Slavery, serfdom, indentured servitude cannot be relied upon by the capitalist class to force people to submit to exploitation, to work at a degrading job and wage to make the capitalist a profit. The competition created by the congestion of the modern mega-city—its *basic feature*—does that now instead. While the enclosure movement and other means of concentrating land ownership forces millions of people to come to the big city,[121] the congestion and competition they find there forces them to accept alienated labor as their lot in life. Thus the tremendous congestion of

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[121] The massive waves of immigration to U.S. cities from foreign countries are merely another example of this process: for these, for the most part, were also the result of land concentration and agricultural "modernization" in these societies.

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population in the modern mega-city does not serve human needs: just the opposite. It serves instead to *frustrate* human needs, in order to force human beings to compete for scarce jobs, as well as housing.[122] Exploitative *profit* through *competition is* the motive; thus, *congestion and misery*—the bringing together into a small space of an enormous number of people, without sufficient provision for their basic biological, economic, social, aesthetic and spiritual needs—is to varying degrees, the result.[123]

Engels' Critique and Its Sources in Dickens and Balzac

New York City, birthplace and home to Herman Melville for most of his life, became the focal point of this historic critique. Since at least the creation of the "gridiron" plan in 1811, New York seemed destined for success as a commercial capital and real estate investment, It was also understood that such success came at a price: excessive levels of population density, which led to social anomie and unsanitary conditions.[124] As early as the 1840s, if not earlier, New York became an international symbol for such success and such problems. In 1842, Charles Dickens had written in his *American Notes* of the "pernicious spirit of [land and financial] speculation" that he alleged he had seen in New York

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[122] David Gordon, "Capitalist Development and the History of American Cities," *Marxism and the Metropolis: New Perspectives in Urban Political Economy*, eds. William K. Tabb and Larry Sawers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 25-63; and Lewis Mumford, "The Insensate Industrial Town," *The Culture of Cities*, pp. 196-235.
[123] See Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 32-86; Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, pp. 143-68; and "The Sacred City," *New Republic*, January 27, 1926, p. 270.
[124] See Wyn Kelley, *Melville's City* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 22-27.

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City on his trip there.[125] That same year, in his *The Two Brothers* (1842), Balzac wrote the following lines—lines which Melville, late in his life, underscored where they appeared on page 45 of his personal copy of the book:

> New York, - a place where speculation and individualism are carried to the highest pitch, where the brutality of self-interest attains to cynicism, where man, essentially isolated, is compelled to push his way for himself or by himself.[126]

Many readers will be reminded of the famous passage in the *Communist Manifesto of 1848*, the passage that reads:

> The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors," and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash-payment." It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation.[127]

But before that, Engels enlarged upon Balzac's theme here in his 1844 work (two years later), *The Condition of the English Working Class,* writing about "great cities," in general,

> The very turmoil of the streets has something repulsive, something against which human nature rebels. . . . the hundreds of thousands . . . crowding past each other . . . as though they had nothing in common, nothing to do with one another. . . . The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest becomes the more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are

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[125] Charles Dickens, quoted and discussed in Kelley, pp. 55.
[126] *The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville, 1819-1891* (New York: Gordian Press, 1951),, p. 830, and discussed in Kelley, p. 38.
[127] Marx and Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," *Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 475.

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> crowded together, within a limited space. And, however much one may be aware that this isolation of the individual, this narrow self-seeking is the fundamental principle of our society everywhere, it is nowhere, it is nowhere so shamelessly barefaced, so self-conscious as just here in the crowding of the great city. The dissolution of mankind into monads . . . is here carried out to its utmost extremes.[128]

Herman Melville's Two-sided Critique of the Moralists and the Metropolis in Pierre

In *Pierre* (1852), the basic theme of Melville's analysis of modern metropolitan society is given by the English translation of his hero Pierre's name: Pierre means "stone." Stone is ubiquitous in the big city. Upon their arrival in the big city, Isabel, Pierre's half-sister, asks Pierre if "they" are "hard-hearted here," Pierre, prophesying his own eventual fate, replies, "Ask yonder pavements, Isabel. Milk dropped from the milkman's can in December, freezes no more quickly on these stones, than does snow-white innocence, if in poverty it chance to fall in these streets."

This passage has confused many interpreters, particularly to Morton and Lucia White. It has a double meaning. It contains two critiques. The first one is a parody on the moralistic and often racist "anti-urban" discourse of the middle class reformers of Melville's time. The second is an objective critique of the modern city itself. This is a socio-economic critique of the big city, identical to

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[128] Engels, *Condition of the Working Class in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 36-37.

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that of Melville's contemporaries, Marx and Engels. So Melville is half-kidding—and half-serious.

On the surface, it is virtually a direct quote from the decidedly anti-urban, pastoralist discourse of middle class reformers and novelists (such as Charles Dickens, George Foster, George Lippard, etc.), who celebrated the countryside and damned the city. It is a *satire upon the a-political, moralistic delusions about the urban poor that such middle class discourse created.* At the same time that he satirizes it, however, Melville, in part, agrees with it. For it opens a discursive space for his own *socio-political, anti-moralistic, objective critique of the problems of the emerging metropolis.*

Though the Whites quote this passage from *Pierre,*[129] they accept "Cold War" literary critic Henry Murray's simplistic, biased view of its meaning.[130] Thus they as well as he miss the double, ironic significance of this passage. Cold War literary scholars like Murray, Newton Arvin, and the Whites, saw Melville purely as "anti-urban," simply because he did not share Murray's and the Whites' uncritical celebration of the mega-city. Thus they were oblivious to the subtlety and irony, the modernity, if you will, of Herman Melville. But if you miss this about Melville, then, I think everyone would have to agree, you miss an awful lot.[131]

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[129] Whites, p. 39.
[130] (On pp. 40-41, they quote from Murray's "Introduction and Explanatory Notes" to *Pierre* (New York Hendricks House), 1949, pp. xxvi-xxvii).
[131] See Wyn Kelley, *Melville's City* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 12.

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The Whites asserted that both Melville and his protagonist Pierre are hostile to the city simply in order to uphold the myth of the superior benevolence of the "semifeudal family tradition" into which they were born. This was tendentious nonsense. In the first place, it is bad sociology, trying to pass itself off as Marxist. There was never any "feudalism," nor even "semi-feudalism," in America. For the Whites to assert this says more about their own dualistic delusions about the "good, progressive, enlightened city" vs. the "bad, reactionary, feudal countryside" delusions than about the actual economic and social history of the United States.

It is true that Melville, and Pierre, had an upper-class, *mercantilist* background. But, in the second place, at the point of this passage in the novel, Pierre has struck out *against* the *hypocrisy* of that tradition, which, Melville reveals and Pierre discovers to his horror, masks a rural form of capitalism quite debilitating to poor women like Isabel and their companion, Delly. Because he has struck out against it, by pretending to marry his half-sister Isabel in order to take care of her, Pierre has already been *disinherited.*

Melville was just as scathing in his attack upon the so-called "semifeudal" countryside as he was upon urban capitalism. Melville was no "aristocrat," let alone "aristocratic" in his sentiments. When he was a child, his father went insane and then died as a result of a scandal and the failure of his business. Melville grew up in genteel poverty, began his career as a schoolteacher, then as a

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common sailor, and for the remainder of his working life then worked as a customs inspector.

In the third place, it is hard to believe that these literary critics were so clueless as to miss the ironic distancing that Melville *always* placed between himself and each and every one of his protagonists in his novels. *Pierre* was no exception. Pierre is an upper-class provincial who, like Melville, has seen through his former "aristocratic" delusions about the countryside. But unlike Melville, Pierre has not shed his pastoralist, anti-urban illusions about urban life, the illusions that the middle class entertained at that time that the new city, crowded with the new urban poor, represented a dangerous "labyrinth." The middle class attributed the problems of this labyrinth to the poor themselves, to their alleged lack of morality—not to the capitalist economy that gives rise to poverty and congestion. These illusions, *combined with* the objective, problematic nature of the city itself, lead to Pierre's downfall—not either one to the exclusion of the other.

What Melville does in *Pierre* is complex—a complexity completely lost on these tendentious Cold War literary critics. Melville agrees with the basic contention of the middle class reformers of his day that the conditions of the new capitalist metropolis were horrible for the poor. Yet he disagreed with their notion that these conditions were purely 'moral." In other words, Melville disagreed with the notion that these conditions originated in the alleged "immorality" of the poor. This notion was often extended by such liberals (including European intellectuals

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like Dickens, by the way!) to the racist notion that it was the "inferior race" of the poor (Jews, blacks, Chinese, Irish, etc.) or their miscegenation with whites, which was responsible for poverty. Therefore, Melville also disagreed with these reformers that purely moral uplift or missionary zeal could solve these problems. Instead, in *Pierre* as well as in other writings—Redburn, White Jacket, Moby Dick-- Melville poses human solidarity and class struggle as an alternative to the rugged individualism of the moral uplift school. In *Pierre,* as Wyn Kelley has shown, Melville satirized these reformers, as he had the urban "spectator" of previous novels, for their obvious aversion to dealing with the poor or their problems—their aversion to dealing with the rootedness of these problems in the social structure of capitalism itself.[132]

While Melville reveals that rural capitalism is no more benevolent toward the poor than the metropolis, the heartlessness of the rich is most apparent in the big city. The stone pavements and walls of the big city protect the rich, keep their "secrecies," and reflect their grotesque insensitivity to the poor whom they exploit.[133] These structures protect property and privilege. But while they profit the elites who create them, they protect and represent harsh, alienating structures

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[132] Kelley, pp. 94-116, 145-61. Thus the Whites attack Melville for the very anti-democratic, "anti-urban" aversion to the poor that he in fact *satirizes* in *Pierre.* Even more ironically, in their attack upon radical intellectuals like Mumford and Melville, these Cold War Centrists are the ones who really evince such aversion. Melville's critique of these reformers was that they rejected human solidarity and collective struggle as a solution to poverty and congestion. But as I said before, so did the Cold War Centrists. Ironically, these reformers' gradualist approach to the problems of the poor, an approach which the Whites explicitly sought to rescusitate, was based, as Melville revealed, upon the very aversion to the poor which the Whites attributed to Meville, Mumford, and other radical intellectuals!

[133] See Rogin, pp. 15-31.

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of social power which did not and could not nurture. They devitalize and atomize the human beings who live, work, and die within and without them—like Pierre in a miserably cold apartment and then in a jail cell, like "Bartleby the Scrivener" in his bleak lawyer's office. The protagonists of *Pierre* learn that neither the "aristocratic" countryside nor the nineteenth century Megalopolis created a community where human needs were served.[134]

In *Moby Dick,* Melville hints that there is something about the "insular town of the Manhattoes" that imprisons men, and drives them to pastoral reveries:

> Circumbulate the city of a dreamy Sabbath afternoon. . . . What do you see? – Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries. . . . But these are all landsmen; of week days pent up in lath and plaster – tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks. How then is this? Are the green fields gone? What do they here?"[135]

Melville's reference to the original, native American inhabitants of Manhattan, "the Manhattoes," alerts us to the history of violence and domination that undergirds present-day Manhattan as well as its name. Similarly, Captain Ahab's ship, the Pequod, is named for the Indian tribe that Melville's maternal grandfather, Major Peter Gansevoort, helped to exterminate. The original inhabitants of Manhattan, as well as the natural environment in which they lived, have been expropriated, exterminated, and despoiled by Europeans. Melville's description of Manhattan as a "town," rather than as a city, hints at the

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[134] Melville, *Pierre or the Ambiguities* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), pp. 321-22.
[135] Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (New York: Penguin, 1986), pp. 93-94.

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tremendous expansion that occurred since the founding of New York—founded by the Dutch as "New Amsterdam". The word "town" connotes a small settlement. This was what New Amsterdam originally was: a walled town, a colonial settlement. The word "city," which Melville ironically avoids using here, is the word that better describes New York at the time Melville wrote this passage. Because the averred word comes from the Roman "civitas," its omission also connotes the expansion of Rome. Like New York, Rome grew from a small settlement to the heart of an oppressive empire. Unlike New York, however, Rome evolved into a city over centuries. It was not "built in a day." By using the word "town," then, Melville hints at the tremendous commercial and demographic expansion that New York has undergone since its founding. This expansion rapidly transformed New York into an open city rather than an "insular town."

How does Melville feel about this development? His conception is dialectical. On the one hand, Melville celebrates this development, because it has created an open, cosmopolitan, city with a multiracial working class, celebrated later throughout *Moby Dick*. On the other hand, Melville also expresses some doubt about the effects that this rapid commercial expansion has had upon the economic welfare, emotional life, and social relations of its multiracial inhabitants. Melville hints at this conundrum in the very first sentence of the book. There, he names his everyman protagonist "Ishmael," the Biblical character representing the epitome of estrangement. Like Melville himself, Ishmael is a

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New Yorker. Ishmael.admits that he is prone periodically to having "little or no money in my purse," "growing grim about the mouth," suidical thoughts, and being possessed by the urge to "deliberately [step] into the street, and methodically [knock other] people's hats off."[136]

One of the keys to the longevity of Rome, as an empire, was to extend at least formal rights of citizenship beyond city limits, to the peoples who were conquered by Rome: those of them who were not made slaves—explicitly, anyway. In reality, the Roman Republic, and then the Empire into which it degenerated, manipulated people's perception of rights in order to foster tremendous oppression and exploitation on behalf of an aristocratic ruling class. In previous novels, such as *Omoo*, *Mardi*, and *White Jacket,* Melville showed how inhumanely and hypocritically the new, purportedly "free republic," the new American empire, treated Polynesian natives, American black slaves, and U.S. Navy seamen. In the above quoted passages, what does Melville say about the economic and political rights of those who live within the confines of the new imperial capital, New York itself? He hints that the rapid expansion of New York into a commercial, capitalist city has led to class oppression within, city limits. While the "insular" walls surrounding the old Dutch town have disappeared, Wall Street is very much a present reality.

What "ties," "nails," and "clinches" these people here? It is because, Melville hints, this is where the jobs are. Why are so many men forced to accept

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[136] Melville, p. 93. See Wynn Kelley, *Melville's City,* pp. 2-6.

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these jobs, jobs that appear so oppressive and restrictive? It is precisely because there are "thousands upon thousands" of men who have been driven by rural capitalism (whose center is also Wall Street) into the big city. Once there, they are forced to compete for the same jobs: otherwise, they starve. There is no alternative livelihood available to these men. Though the city is no longer walled, it is still "insular," still an island, in more than just the geographical sense. It is also an island in the sense that the people who work there cannot easily leave.

In *Pierre,* Melville discusses the transformation of a Wall Street area "Church of the Apostles"[137] into an office building and tenement. As Mumford and Engels discussed in their respective works on the subject,[138] such congestion also stimulates speculative, shoddy building, and high rents for miserable housing.

While the Christian "Sabbath" promises a day of rest, or leisure, it is usually experienced as a burden instead. One should go to church; one cannot really enjoy oneself. Like the "Sabbath," the metropolis, which promises human society, brings instead congestion, competition, and misery. It is therefore likewise felt as an onerous burden, part and parcel of an oppressive rather than amenable civilization. Because congestion creates competition for both jobs and housing, and because the living conditions, in general, becomes so poor, there

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[137] According to Henry Murray, this was based upon the old Baptist Church on Nassau Street. It has since been torn down. See Henry Murray, "Introduction and Explanatory Notes" to *Pierre* (New York: Hendricks House, 1949), p. 419.
[138] Melville, *Pierre,* pp. 369-71; Engels, *On the Housing Question* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979).

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arise tremendous disparities of wealth and poverty in the big capitalist city, and tremendous misery among the poor.. For Melville, the big city is a machine employed by the rich of this world, like the character Glen Stanly in Melville's *Pierre*, to make a profit, just like the rural mills and farms that Stanly and his fellows also exploit (a theme Melville also explores in his short story, "The Tartarus of Maids").

"Insular" is derived from "insula," an island, derived from the Latin "en solas." This phrase is in turn related to the Latin "solus": the same root as "sole," "solitary" and "isolated."[139] In Chapter 27 of *Moby Dick*, "Knights and Squires," Melville further called attention to these mutual Latin etymological derivations: "Islanders seem to make the best whalemen. They were nearly all Islanders in the Pequod, *Isolatoes* too, I call such, not acknowledging the common continent of men, but each *Isolato* living on a separate continent of his own."[140]

Melville is speaking here explicitly of the crew of the Pequod. But as Wyn Kelley has pointed out, with its congested population, its hierarchy, and its racial and class divisions, the Pequod, like all of Melville's shipboard societies, is meant to be a microcosm of modern, metropolitan, capitalist society.[141] In *Pierre*, which he wrote a year after *Moby Dick*, *Melville* writes that in New York City, the "city of hundreds of thousands of human beings," his impoverished hero, Pierre, "was

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[139] Eric Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), pp. 638-39.
[140] Melville, *Moby Dick*, p. 216.
[141] Kelley, pp. 11-18, 165-86.

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solitary as at the Pole."[142] To paraphrase John Donne, no man should be an island; yet the metropolis makes us so. Specifically, Pierre, a would-be writer (like Melville himself) is "solitary" because he must compete with many others for the attentions of a culturally shallow, because commercialized, literary market. But Melville is also, I would argue, making a point about the "great city" as a whole: that its congestion pits us against each other, fosters chronic unemployment, which makes men desperately dependent upon Capital: thus their acceptance of low wages, thus their poverty.

In their alienation from this oppressive state of affairs, men seek escape, as Melville writes in the above quoted passage from *Moby Dick*, in "dreamy . . . reveries." They project upon the sea their *anti-urban*, pastoral nostalgia for the "green fields" from which they were originally driven. In these reveries, there will be no one else, for miles around. The tremendous congestion of metropolitan Metropolis engenders the pastoral reaction against it. Melville hints that neither the "realist" metropolitan space nor the "dreamy," escapist pastoral space, however, is acceptable as any form of ideal form of humane, urban life, however. Through the very fact of congestion, the metropolitan space is isolates men from the aesthetic beauty of nature and from each other. The pastoral reaction is not dense enough demographically to permit urbane human society to flourish.

Marx's Critique

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[142] Melville, *Pierre*, p. 471.

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The modern metropolis is made so extremely big and congested precisely in order to create scarcity and misery. Deprivation is the most basic problem of the modern bourgeois metropolis—and its essential feature. As Marx wrote in his *Economic and Philosophical Mss.* of 1844, referring to the conditions of proletarian life in "each of the industrial towns" in "England and France," and in terms strikingly similar to those of Henry David Thoreau in *Walden* (which we saw in the first chapter):

> Even the need for fresh air ceases for the worker. Man returns to living in a cave, which is now, however, contaminated with the mephitic breath of plague given off by civilization, and which he continues to occupy only *precariously,* it being for him an alien habitation which can be withdrawn from him any day, . . if he does not pay. . . for this mortuary. . . . Light, air, etc.—the simplest *animal* cleanliness—ceases to be a need for man. *Dirt*—this stagnation and putrefaction of man—the *sewage* of civilization (speaking quite literally)—comes to be the *element of life* for him. Utter, *unnatural* neglect, putrefied nature, comes to be his *life-element.*[143]

Just as Marx, in *Capital,* traces the contradictions and many of the miseries of modern life back to the basic fact of alienated labor, so Mumford, in such works as *The Culture of Cities* and *The Urban Prospect,* shows how this basic, exploitative motive for building and maintaining the mega-city creates contradictions and dissatisfactions throughout its structure and later history. Besides the congestion itself and the stress it creates, notably registered at the metropolitan business centers and inner slums, the growth of blight and sprawl in

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the outer dormitory areas and suburbs also create social deprivation: a less than adequate, less than humane, less than urbane social existence and aesthetic environment. These accompanying developments are not accidents: they are the result of the basic drive of the capitalists and rentiers, the builders and rulers of Megalopolis, to make a profit at the expense of human society.[144] "What is called the 'growth' of the metropolis," Mumford writes, "is in fact the constant recruitment of a proletariat, . . . " Mumford uses this term in the ancient Roman, broader sense of the term as an oppressed urban poor, rather than modern, narrower, Marxist sense. In Mumford's lexicon, the "proletariat" created by the modern metropolis is defined by its capability to accommodate

> itself to an environment without adequate natural or cultural resources: people who do without pure air, who do without sound sleep, who do without a cheerful garden or playing space, who do without the very sight of the sky and the sunlight, who do without free motion, spontaneous play, or a robust sexual life.

Those who live in the "so-called blighted areas" of the metropolis must "do without": these "are essentially 'do without' areas. . . . " Mumford concludes that metropolitan growth is at the expense of social and civic life, it is "growth by civic depletion." . . .[145]

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[143] Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 94-95, and compare with Henry David Thoreau, Walden, *Writings*, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1906), pp. II, 33, 38, as quoted in Chapter 1.

[144] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, Chapter IV, "The Rise and Fall of Megalopolis," pp. 223-99; *The Urban Prospect*, Chapters 7-9, "The Disappearing City," "Yesterday's City of Tomorrow," "Megalopolis as Anti-City," pp. 108-41.

[145] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 249. This is not to say that the crowded inhabitants of mega-urban slums do not have sex, or play. But these activities are carried on despite the environment, not as the result encouraged. Mumford's quest is to evaluate the mega-urban environment, its

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It may be objected that this radical analysis of Megalopolis might be teleological. Pro-metropolitans, such as the Whites, might argue that Engels, Melville, and Mumford are crying "doom!" to the modern metropolis out of personal spite, simply because it is not their own aesthetic or moral ideal for urban life. Just because the mega-city is originally built up in order to satisfy these, basically anti-human, destructive, exploitative motives, does not mean that such development could not have a more humane, albeit imperfect, final result.

It is indeed absurd to think that nothing can be redirected from its original intention. But I would counter that Mumford, Engels, and Melville are not guilty of such undue, spiteful fatalism as the Whites might charge. Rather, they have successfully comprehended the actual fatal logic of the modern metropolis. Their analysis is quite similar to Marx's analysis of capitalism in *Das Kapital*, with which Mumford was quite familiar.[146] In Marx's analysis of capitalism, it is not the *greedy motives* of the capitalists that lead directly to crises. Rather, the fundamental *logic* of the system, arising from and sustained by these selfish motives, is what is contradictory. Marx writes that it is possible to temporarily ameliorate the problems of capitalism, for some classes in society. There do exist "countervailing tendencies," as Marx would say, which counter the logic of the

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capacities to encourage healthy human development and activity, and I believe he is write to argue that this environment falls far short of ideal, in this regard.

[146] On May 4, 1949, Arthur Morgan, first chairman of the TVA and a correspondent of Mumford's, asked where Mumford had found the quote from Marx on child labor that Mumford had placed in *Culture of Cities*. On May 14th, Mumford wrote back, telling Morgan that the quote had appeared in *Capital*, and gave him the bibliographic information, including the page number.

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fundamental contradiction of capitalism: the falling rate of profit, due to the rising organic, technical composition of capital. But as Marx would also say, these attempts at amelioration, these countervailing tendencies, in the long run, only postpone the inevitable.[147] Moreover, just because they postpone the inevitable, these attempts at amelioration, as Rosa Luxemburg shows for capitalism, only make the crisis that much more acute. [148] For they permit more time for the basic, contradictory logic of the system to sharpen, to grind on further and to deepen the crisis of capitalism. This contradiction makes it impossible to redirect capitalism, ultimately, toward sustainable, humane ends. Instead, the capitalist system must be radically transformed, if we wish to create a lastingly humane society.

So it is with the modern metropolis. In *The Intellectual vs. the City,* the Whites seem to assume that the rise of mass consumer markets, stimulated by the rise of the welfare state, has already led, or, given enough funding, could lead, in the immediate future, to a reversal of the essential, depletive nature of the mega-city. They assume that such reform might not simply ameliorate some of the problems of the modern metropolis, but instead, create an essentially humane, sustainable metropolis. Neither welfare nor mass consumption, however, can reverse the fundamental contradictions of the modern metropolis, anymore than they can reverse the contradictions of capitalism. For, as Mumford argued, such

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These letters can be found in the Mumford Archive in the University of Pennsylvania Van Pelt Special Collections library and the Morgan archive in the Olive Kecdat Antioch College in Ohio.

[147] See Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, Part 3, Chapter 14 (New York: Vintage, 1981), pp. 339-75.

[148] See Rosa Luxemburg, "Social Reform or Revolution," *Selected Political Writings,* ed. Dick Howard, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 52-134.

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consumption is almost purely private. It is passive. Its relative enjoyment is skewed according to income. Most fundamentally, like low wages and high rents, such consumption is itself based upon the starvation of the civic, social, and aesthetic environment as well as of the physical senses created by the mega-city. Rather than resolve the fundamental contradiction of the modern metropolis, mass consumption exacerbates it, by encouraging the masses to look the other way rather than to confront it.[149]

The modern mega-city is flawed in two fundamental respects. First, it is integrally connected to a doomed, destructive economic system: capitalism. Second, the fundamental aspect of the mega-city is congestion of the human population, and its corollary, the relative deprivation of human beings from their natural environment. Such congestion and deprivation are, as Mumford discussed and as I would like now to show, inimical to human mental and physical health, and individual and communal happiness.

"The Crowd" vs. Overcrowding

Before we discuss the problems of congestion, we should first entertain a possible semantic objection. Some readers might have a problem here with the concept of "congestion" itself. Richard Sennett, following the Whites, argues that any animus toward congestion and its consequent problems is the product of an uncritical adoption of the reactionary cultural animus of such conservatives as Le

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[149] Mumford, *ibid.*, pp. 255-71.

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Bon or Gasset toward "the crowd," or, "the masses," e.g., the working class as a potentially revolutionary class.[150] But this is simply not the case.

Along with a good deal other things in contemporary society, Sennett is very good at analyzing the modern movement within ethnic urban and suburban communities to wall in sameness and wall out racial and cultural otherness. In *The Fall of Public Man*, and then in *The Conscience of the Eye*,[151] Sennett makes a brilliant case for tracing the modern segregationist urge to the culture of capitalism, specifically, and to the whole culture of mutual "aversion" in Western society after the ancient Greeks, in general. The problem with Sennett's analysis is his notion that any animus toward the congestion and impersonality of modern urban life, and specifically the movement toward garden city decentralization, must always flow into such reactionary movement. In Procrustean-realist fashion, he assumes that adjustment to "crowded" big-urban life represents the only progressive choice still available to us in the twentieth century.

Just because some people act upon their animus toward the problems of big city life in a reactionary way, does not mean that these problems do not exist, or that they might not be resolved in more constructive, radical ways. The fact that

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[150] See Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Vintage, 1978), pp. 294-312, and Morton and Lucia White, *Intellectual vs. the City*, pp. 180-81, 183, 227-30. While, for Sennett, this alleged elitism is his only explanation, for the Whites, the "elitist" explanation is coupled with the view that a "romantic individualism" also plays a part.
The simple-mindedness of Sennett's equation of animus toward big-urban congestion with reactionary attitudes is shown by the fact that a founder of his own urban realism, Robert Park, wrote a Le Bon-esque book entitled *The Crowd and the Public*, which, like Le Bon's work, descried the emotionalism and the unruliness of working class and poor crowds vs. the orderliness of the ordered (middle class) public.

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Engels shared Mumford's animus toward megalopolitan levels of crowding should give pause to anyone inclined to accept Sennett's overgeneralizations. As William H. Whyte has written in a related context, population "congestion" is not the same as urban "concentration."[152] Thus, I would add, an animus to the former does not necessary entail an animus toward the latter. What both Mumford and Engels objected to was *overcrowdedness,* not "crowds" or "the masses" *per se.* In their fear of the crowd, Le Bon and Gasset were attempting to repress the capacity or the desire of ordinary working people to come together to determine their fate politically and collectively, via the formation of trade unions, rallies, strikes, factory occupations, revolution. There is no passage in Mumford, anymore than there is in Engels, where one can find such an animus. Indeed, throughout Mumford's work, one finds instead calls for working class organization as the basic requirement for social reform, and even at one point, as we quoted in our introduction from *Technics and Civilization,* a call for working class revolution.

When Engels and Mumford speak of "congestion," they are not decrying the formation of crowds, revolutionary or no. They are talking instead about the fact that, on a daily basis, whether people are working, playing, sleeping, showering, going to the bathroom, commuting, etc., in the modern city, they are packed too closely in with each other *for their own good.* Thus their access to the common amenities of civilized life—from libraries to laundromats, from

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[151] Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1990).

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conversation in public cafes to quiet private sojourns in parks—is actually *reduced*. For other people get in the way. And other people themselves, after a certain point of crowdedness--their noise, their crossing paths with you as you try to go about your business, and they theirs--turns from a spontaneous pleasure into a noisy, crowded "hell," as Sartre implied when he coined his famous "hell is other people."

"Crowdedness," "overcrowdedness," "congestion," then, are terms which do not necessarily imply a reactionary animus toward the working class and its capacity for political action. They instead refer to a certain excessive level of general urban *density* or *concentration*: a level that causes us problems.

Compensations for Crowding

As we discussed earlier, Mumford's criticism of congestion is based upon his view, a view that he shares with Marx and Engels as well as psychiatrists Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Reich, that man is basically a biological creature, with natural instincts, proclivities, and needs, *along with* his intellect, which directs man's will to fulfill these needs. The manifestations, the concrete goals, sought by the intellect to fulfill these needs may well indeed be modified by society. Far from being ignorant of such modification, Mumford's later work, *The City in History,* is a veritable gold mine for understanding it: how it happens, why it occurs, what social modifications in the human psyche become predominant in

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[152] William H. White, "The Anti-City," *Man and the Modern City* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1963), pp. 46-50.

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any given era. But these underlying natural needs are never *abolished*, much as the rationalist mind would like to believe they could be. They therefore impose limits upon social living arrangements, if that society is to be beneficial for its individual members.

According to Mumford, human beings need privacy. They need intimate sexuality and communication. They need to feel a general sense of security that comes with a familiar community. They require frequent physical exercise for his body. They require the aesthetic and direct sensual pleasures from frequent contact with a relatively natural environment--one replete with a wide diversity of non-human flora and fauna, fresh, well-oxygenated air, pure water in rivers, the oceans, lakes, in which to swim and from which to drink. These come in addition to the needs usually cited: food, clothing, and shelter, which, assumedly, an "ideal" metropolitan regime could satisfy. In his *Culture of Cities,* in the section entitled "The Poisonousness of Vicarious Vitality," Mumford asserts that the overcrowdedness, as well as the cramped quarters, and relative artificiality, of the modern city, tremendously frustrates such needs. These frustrations cannot simply be ignored. They must be compensated for somehow. Sounding like Freud and Reich, as well as more contemporary "Situationist" writer Guy DeBord,[153] Mumford writes that the absence of opportunities for intimate sociality, for

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[153] Sigmund Freud, "The Future of an Illusion," *The Freud Reader,* ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989), pp. 685-721; Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970 (originally published in the 1930s); Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983, originally published in 1967).

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popular political assembly and empowerment,[154] are compensated for through the "residual sociality" of the mass "spectacle." The most common, and perhaps the most innocuous, such spectacles are organized sports such as baseball and horse racing. Other, more violent spectacles, according to Mumford, may also offer a perverse compensation for the general sense of vitiation that obtains in the insecure, lonely, polluted, crowded, artificial metropolitan environment. These include such sports as motor races and rodeo, for example, (I might add boxing to this list) or the gladiatorial fights and Christian persecutions of the Roman period. But they also, for Mumford, even include events like baseball games and horse races, when these are "spiced up" via gambling. Further, "If games do not provide" the frustrated spectator of the metropolis with the "bloodier satisfactions" he "demands," "he will manufacture occasions: note the zestful terrorism practiced by the bourgeoisie under the guise of restoring law and order in a labor conflict: note the prompt effort on the part of police to turn peaceful struggles for power into occasions of violence." In the "sadism" usually involved with such "spectacular performances," "an inverted sense of life is promoted through the presence of fear and the nearness to death. . . .The tameness of the metropolitan routine must have its compensatory mobilizations of ferocity.[155] To the list of such spectacles, Mumford adds other, more personal and chemical

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[154] The fact that such opportunities have rarely been experienced in human history does not make their absence any the less pathological for human society, if we accept Mumford's, Marx's, and Reich's notion that they are basic human requirements. The levels of crowding and alienation experienced in the modern city makes their absence that much more pathological, however.
[155] Mumford, *The Culture of Cities,* p. 269.

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compensations: "drugs, anodynes, aphrodisiacs, hypnotics, sedatives, are a necessary accompaniment of this exacerbated state, strenuous efforts to recover the normal equilibrium of the healthy body and the healthy mind: salvation by aspirin."

Aspirin, however, is a comparatively mild example of what Mumford is talking about and perhaps steers him in the wrong direction. Are such drugs as cocaine or alcohol mere attempts to recover a "normal equilibrium," or are they rather consumed to *intensify* sensation? In his much later work, *The Pentagon of Power,* Mumford fleshes out more fully the psychology of modern drug culture:

> The depressing monotony of megatechnic society, with its standardized environment, its standardized foods, its standardized invitations to commercialized amusement, its standardized daily routines, produces a counter-drive in *over*stimulation and *over*-excitement in order to achieve a simulation of life [my emphasis].[156]

Mumford sums up the earlier passage from the *Culture of Cities* by asserting, "In short, the metropolis is rank with forms of *negative vitality*. Nature and human nature, violated in this environment, come back in destructive forms. . . ."[157]

Here, Mumford revises Freud's notion of a death instinct. For Mumford, as well as for Wilhelm Reich, the death instinct is not a natural complement to *Eros*,

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[156] Lewis Mumford, *Pentagon of Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1970), Illustration 26, between pp. 340-41.
[157] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 271.

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but rather, its perversion by an irrational civilization. It was "a historic phenomenon, time-conditioned, place-conditioned, culture-conditioned."[158]

Reich argued that frustrated sexuality, along with the contradictions of capitalism and imperialism, led to militarism, war, and fascism. Similarly, Mumford argues that the frustrations inherent in Megalopolis tend to have the same results, both passively and actively. As Mumford writes, the "sadism" resulting from big city life "has helped harden the metropolitan world into a dull acceptance of the use of poison gas in civil riots or the massacre of unprotected citizens in time of war: fulsome totalitarian murder."[159] As Mumford writes in the

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[158] *Ibid.* Mumford cites Reich's *Function of the Orgasm* later in his bibliography for *The Conduct of Life.* But he does so backhandedly. He writes in a dismissive note that Reich's only originality consisted in "prescribing the orgasm as a panacea for the ills of mankind: the fallacy of one-dimensional salvation." (Lewis Mumford, *The Conduct of Life* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1951), p. 311.) But this was unfair. This was the cheap caricature of Reich, created by his psychoanalytic opponents in order to dismiss him. (See Frank Boadella, *Wilhelm Reich: The Evolution of His Work* (New York: Dell, 1973), p. 26). Reich's work was probably the basis for these passages in *The Culture of Cities.* Reich was the thinker who developed this social explanation for Freud's concept of a death instinct: an explanation that led to the eventual rift between Freud and Reich, and, according to Reich, to Freud's writing of *Civilization and Its Discontents.* And Reich also wrote of the general need for free, natural movement expression for the human organism, especially for children, in many of his works—as does Mumford here in his attack upon the generally cramped nature of life in the big city. (See, for example, his *Children of the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983)).
Reich would have been a good ally to Mumford; both men, often treated as pariahs, needed all the allies they could get. It is so unfortunate that Mumford had this tendency to dismiss his radical teachers, all the while stealing their insights for himself. This he did not only to Reich, but also to John Dewey, as we have already noted, and Marx and Engels. Perhaps it had something to do with an unresolved Oedipal complex which he took out on these mentors; or perhaps Mumford was trying to dissociate himself from them because of a desire to ingratiate himself with the powers that be—who, nevertheless, treated his ideas with just about as much contempt as these other radicals' ideas.

[159] *Mumford, Culture of Cities*, p. 270. Of course, it has been historically and statistically shown that active, conscious support for the Nazis came most from the rural *mittelstand,* not much at all from the urban masses: see Arthur Mitzman, *Sociology and Estrangement* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1987), pp. 27-38. But what Mumford is trying to explain, is the fact that after a period of struggle, Nazism was passively accepted, throughout Germany. While I do not subscribe to currently fashionable theories which blame the entire German people for fascism which was basically sponsored by the ruling class, and staffed in large part by the middle class,

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next section, entitled "A Brief Outline of Hell," such sadism is also instrumental in transforming Megalopolis into a "war capital." "The crowd['s] . . .simple hates [are] fueled by propaganda," so that it "transfers to foreign devils the unconscious hatred it dare not express for the classes that exploit it, or the unconscious contempt each member feels for his own thwarted self."[160]

Mumford's analysis here may, on the surface, appear altogether one-sided. "War and fascism are caused by urban congestion, alone?!" some might ask incredulously. But that is not what Mumford is asserting here. If we examine the passage carefully, we can see Mumford arguing that congestion merely plays a role alongside other causes. Mumford is clearly offering other, complementary explanations for fascism and war, which he integrates with his criticism of urban congestion. He offers a Marxist explanation, involving class exploitation and alienation, and a social Freudian analysis, similar to that of Reich's in his *Mass Psychology of Fascism*, involving concepts of sexual frustration, group narcissism, self-hatred, projection, and sadism.

The Evidence for Mega-Urban Frustration, Personal and Social Dysfunction

Some readers might be bothered by the dearth of possible "hard data" for such analyses. The problems that "overcrowdedness" and "congestion" are

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Mumford's analysis attempts to answer some important questions. Why did the German workers permit their bureaucrats to sabotage the fight against fascism? Why did the German people basically ignore the destruction of the Jews in concentration camps? What Mumford was talking about here certainly applied later on, a well, to the urban masses of the Allied countries—who for the most part stood by and cheered on "their side" during and after the destruction of Dresden, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki.

[160] Mumford, *Ibid.*, p. 274.

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alleged to create are largely social and psychological. The most important deleterious effects of congestion—stress, aggression, irritability, neurosis, social conflict, etc.--occur primarily in the subjective, psychological and social, realms, rather than the more obvious, objectively observable realms of economic stratification (which occurs, for example, as a result of racism or class exploitation). More palpable results—militarism, war, fascism—can be alternately attributed purely to ideological "false consciousness." If there is such a thing as an "orthodox Reichian," unlike Reich himself, he might even attribute these phenomena to a narrowly "sexual" frustration rather than the far broader biological frustrations Mumford attempts to reveal in the modern metropolis. The common response is therefore to reject such problems as illegitimate. Realists assume that if no one, or at least, not many people, are actively complaining about the problem, then there is no problem. They assume that those critics who do point to this alleged problem are making it up out for their own personal, peevish reasons: perhaps, as Sennett argues, because they themselves suffer from a reactionary fear of "the mob" (see above).

One could indeed argue that as long as people *en masse* are not consciously complaining about population levels in the big city, there is no normative limit to how many of them can be crammed into the same urban space. But people may instead have become resigned, out of a sense of pessimism, or hopelessness, to high levels of congestion, and numbed themselves to their real feelings about it. In a perverted way, out of our (socially conditioned) instinct for *Thanatos* as

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opposed to *Eros*, many might even come to *enjoy* the petty conflict, rudeness, noise, and chronic feelings of hostility that go along with such levels of congestion. Such passive acceptance does not mean that congestion is good for people or that they would not, if given the choice, choose a less crowded alternative—anymore than state terror and servility is "good" for the subjects of an absolutist regime because they do not now revolt against it. Paradoxically--before it leads to some sort of social explosion, congestion will probably lead at first to even greater levels of alienation, depression, and psychic withdrawal (anomie), and thus silence—just as the greater level of absolutist terror, the quieter people became. Thus silence can be neither a sign of consent nor a genuine indice that there is no problem, in either the eighteenth or the twentieth centuries.[161] Empirical data cannot, therefore, be the ultimate test here; instead, one must resort to imagination, empathy, compassion—and common sense.

Does it really make *sense* to believe that, alone among all other species, human beings need not worry about the effects of high levels of population density upon their nervous systems and their well-being? Does our "reason," as Jonathan Freedman and Richard Sennett argued,[162] make our minds so superior to the rest of the animal kingdom, so independent of our own bodies, our own natural emotional, hormonal reactions to such crowding that we are uniquely

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[161] See Marshall Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity* (New York: Athenaeum, 1970), p. 14.
[162] Jonathan Freedman, *Crowding and Behavior* (New York: Viking Press, 1975), pp. 41-54; Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, p. 300.

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immune? Does it make us infinitely adaptable to whatever level of congestion and concrete in which we are placed? This is a rationalist, Enlightenment-era fantasy.

Studies have been done on the biological effects of crowding upon rats. Since rats are mammals, like us, such studies would seem germane. Mumford thought so: he accepted the views of social anthropologist Edward T. Hall on the matter.[163] As Hall writes in *The Hidden Dimension,* for all "warm-blooded vertebrates," possessed as they are with adrenal glands,

> When crowding becomes too great after population buildups, interactions intensify, leading to greater and greater stress. As psychological and emotional stress builds up and tempers wear thin, subtle but powerful changes occur in the chemistry of the body. Births drop while deaths progressively increase until a state known as population collapse occurs.[164]

Hans Selye, M.D., an expert on stress, reports such findings about the effect of crowding on vertebrates as well:

> Typical manifestations of the [stress syndrome] in animals as well as in man under crowded conditions include adrenal enlargement and hyperactivity,

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[163] Lewis Mumford, "Home Remedies for Urban Cancer, *The Urban Prospect,* p. 198n.Those who Freedman's and Sennett's notion that through culture, human beings can become independent of their biological impulses might view such studies as in league with the conservative "Sociobiology" of the 1970s. In a nutshell, this ideology posits that nature, in the form of our genes, determines, on a particularistic, *individual, racial and/or class* basis, our social characteristics, aptitudes, behaviors, and success rates in achieving wealth, social status, etc. In contrast, students of the relationship between crowding and behavior are investigating how social relations, *in general,* affect *most people's* personal biology, and then how the resultant stress might in turn adversely affect our *general* social relations. Clearly, these are very different ideologies: Sociobiology is basically invidious, while these studies come from a universalistic, humanist perspective. For a good discussion of why we should not confuse "sociobiology" with every concept of "biosocial" relationships, see Carl N. Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), chapter 13, "Uses and Misuses of Evolutionary Theory in Social Science," pp. 310-27.

[164] Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. 4.

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> theymicolymphatic and sex organ involution, decreased fertility, a special tendency toward the formation of peptic ulcers, and sensitivity to infection.

But rats are not the only animal population among whom deleterious effects from crowding have been noticed. Aggression among rhesus monkeys, whose biology is far closer to man, has also been reported.[165]

Hall certainly acknowledges the argument of cultural relativism. He recognizes the unique importance of culture to mankind, by which man

> domesticated himself and in the process created a whole new series of worlds, each different from the other. Each world has its own set of sensory inputs, so that what crowds peopled of one culture does not necessarily crowd another. Similarly an act that releases aggression and would therefore be stressful to one people may be neutral to the next. [166]

Selye also acknowledges this. Nevertheless, culture can never completely immunize us from our biological nature and its limitations. Regardless of cultural differences, studies show that high levels of crowdedness produces a feeling of uneasiness and stress in human beings, in general. As Jonathan Freedman, an advocate of mega-city densities, argues, there is no automatic correlation between absolute population densities and such feelings. What must be considered are the relationships between the people crowded together. If the people in question are familiar with each other, the stress of contact is reduced. Thus, Freedman argues,

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[165] Hall,. p. 5. See also pp. 32-39 on "The Biochemistry of Stress." Hans Selye, *The Stress of Life* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1976), rev. ed., pp. 383-85.
[166] Edward T. Hall, See C.H. Southwick, "An Experimental Study of Intragroup Antagonistic Behavior in Rhesus Monkeys," *Behavior*, (1967), pp. 182-209; cf. Paul M. Insel and Henry Clay

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social space—elevators and other living arrangements in high rise projects, for example—ought to be designed to facilitate such familiarity. Freedman speculates that the design of social space may affect the success or failure of such high rise projects. Since crowdedness increases the number of interactions one experiences with strangers rather than familiar faces, it can be "somewhat overwhelming. Too much is unpredictable, there are too many faces, too many possible contacts for most people to handle. The whole situation more or less gets out hand and we feel that it is beyond our control." "In addition," Freedman continues,

> large numbers of people discourage close social interaction and a feeling of community, not only because the individual feels overwhelmed and isolated—but also simply because of the mechanics of the situation. If you see thirty people regularly, it is much easier to get to know them than if you see two hundred people regularly.[167]

Sociologist Mark Baldassare's comprehensive survey of studies upon human beings' stress levels relative to a range of social situations and crowding densities documents Freedman's point: interactions with strangers tend to produce anxiety, because the outcome of such interactions are unpredictable.[168]

This anxiety can be consciously felt; or one can try to push this anxiety down into the unconscious, numbing oneself to it. Either way, this anxiety produces chronic stress. In addition, stress is produced by frustration. When there are many others in our environment, in line in front of us, we tend to get

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Lindgren, *Too Close for Comfort: The Psychology of Crowding* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), p. 113.

[167] Freedman, p. 123.

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frustrated. There is also the feeling of being trapped in such crowded situations: particularly if other people are making bothersome noise or, as in a subway, behave obscenely. Because of the crowdedness, one simply cannot *get away*. All these things produce stress. This can eat away at major organs like the stomach, the liver, and the heart, and depleting the immune system, as both Hall and Selye point out.[169]

According to some studies, higher levels of distraction, stress, and conflict can also diminish educational development in crowded homes.[170] Stress, by encouraging aggressive impulses, also heightens neurotic and social conflict.[171] As animals, we human beings have sympathetic nervous systems. Thus, when confronted with unpleasant or even scary sensation, we are prone to the fight-flight reaction, which tends to produce "displacement activities," as Robert Ardrey terms them: stress and intra-personal, inter-personal, and inter-group social conflict.[172] Hall implies that such stress is a primary cause of social pathology. Mark Baldassare agrees with Freedman that this is dubious, and that economic factors are probably the primary cause here. But Baldassare argues,

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[168] Mark Baldassare, *Residential Crowding in Urban America* (Berkeley: University of California, 1979), p. 208.
[169] Hall, pp. 32-39; Selye, pp. 383-85, *et passim*.
[170] See Eleanor E. Macoby, "Socialization Theory: Where Do We Go From Here?" (Presidential Address, Western Psychological Association, Sacramento, CA, 1975), R.H. Bradley and B. M. Caldwell, "The Relation of Infants' Home Environments to Mental Test Performance at Fifty-Four Months: A Follow-Up Study," *Child Development*, 47, (1976), 1172-74. J.W. Greenberg and H. H. Davidson, "Home Background and School Achievement of Black Urban Ghetto Children," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 42 (1972), pp. 802-10. Cf. Insel and Lindgren, pp. 70-72.
[171] Selye, pp. 383-85.
[172] See Boadella, pp. 106-14; Robert Ardrey, *The Territorial Imperative* (New York: Dell, 1966), pp. 78-87.

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correctly, I think, that residential congestion and consequent lack of privacy/control over space among the poor in America's major cities may *exacerbate* the contemporary social crisis of the ghetto--crime, drug use, psychological problems, etc.—which are themselves the product of poverty and racism.[173]

Mumford agrees with Baldassare. While, for Mumford, the economic and social factors underlying social pathology and crime are primary,[174] he argues, as he told the Ribicoff Committee of the U.S. Congress in his speech before them in 1967,

> No small part of this [present] ugly urban barbarization has been due to sheer physical congestion: a diagnosis now partly confirmed by scientific experiments with rats—for when they are placed in equally congested quarters, they exhibit the same symptoms of stress, alienation, hostility, sexual perversion, parental incompetence, and rabid violence that we now find in Megalopolis.[175]

At least these rats, however, are presumably familiar with each other on a day to day basis. What would happen if the Megalopolitan situation of Sartrean "seriality" were reproduced in this rat society? First of all they would have to all be strangers to one another—and keep being strangers, almost all the time. And on top of that, they would all have to pursue the incredible variety of

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[173] Hall, p. 6. Baldassare, pp. 208-09. Baldassare certainly does not lay the problem of social and psychology pathology exclusively at the door of crowdedness, as Hall seems to. He admits that a direct link between the two would be very difficult to prove. Nonetheless, he argues, based upon social scientific research, that it probably plays a contributory role, among other factors, and that increases in population density should therefore be of vital concern to us.
[174] See Mumford, "Home Remedies for Urban Cancer," *Urban Prospect*, pp. 200-06.
[175] Mumford, "A Brief History of Urban Frustration," *Urban Prospect*, p. 210.

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(competitive) goals and agendas possible in the big capitalist (or "socialist"!) city—but in the highly congested space of the Megalopolitan "rat race," at each other's expense, in each other's way, all the time. A congested rat cage would look tame, by comparison!

Critics such as Jacobs, Sennett, and Freedman would like us to believe that overcrowding is an insignificant factor in our urban problem. They would like us solely to blame other factors—poverty, for example, or bureaucratic insensitivity. They ignore how overcrowding works *together* with such factors to create squalor. As bureaucratic planning advocate Roger Starr, in his 1966 work, *The Living End,* has argued:

> Overcrowding means bedrooms occupied by children and parents together, sometimes with more distant relatives and strangers. . . . toilets shared by several families, with none responsible for keeping them clean. . . . dirty hallways, overwhelmed garbage collection facilities; . . . small rooms, insufficient natural light or ventilation. Children, for these objective physical reasons and because of the general distastefulness of the places in which they live, are unwilling to stay home to do their schoolwork, unable, frequently, to see what they are doing if they do stay home, unable to achieve a moment's privacy, unable to gather about themselves confidence that the conditions of life can be changed by even a mighty application of their own efforts. Overcrowding means a lack of playspace, means airshafts into which garbage is dropped because there are no incinerators (Who wants to walk down five flights of stairs at night?) Overcrowding to the Negro means shabbiness, broken fixtures, slovenliness, means paying too much for too little, means the end result of exclusion.

Jacobs and others such conditions through rose-colored classes, Starr argues:

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> The fact that human energy survives these conditions, that children do play in the streets, and that, on summer nights, men gather on the stoops of old buildings to talk, drink beer, laugh, quarrel, make love, gamble, buy and sell, means to some people that the juice of human life is richer in overcrowded areas.

But for Starr, "the significance of what you see is only that you" are able to "see it." It goes on in the street, where you can see it, because there is no room for such activities indoors; "there is room only on the street."[176] I agree. The fact that such conditions, in contrast to suburban or rural isolation, permit a greatly restricted, paltry level of anarchic social life does not mean that such conditions *foster* warm sociability. Nor, therefore, should we defend such overcrowded conditions against their liberal (or radical) critics in the *name* of sociability.

Immunity through Inurement?

It may indeed be the case that some, perhaps even many, people who grow up in the big city all their lives, through their power of cultural adaptation, become inured to its effects, that they might remain calm. This is the usual response of "realists" like Sennett to the biological arguments that congestion

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[176] Roger Starr, *The Living End: The City and Its Critics* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1966), pp. 102-03. I by no means wish to imply that I am a fan of Starr's—who later sponsored the pathological idea of "planned shrinkage," nor that even in 1966, Starr was at all sensitive to the radical concerns of bureaucratic planning and pubic housing posed by Mumford and Bauer (Starr mischaracterizes "Parson Lewis Mumford" as desiring a return to the old medieval walled city, pp. 24-25). Nevertheless, I find his criticisms of Jane Jacobs' position in this work particularly valuable.

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causes us harm. If they become inured to it, they are immune to its effects; therefore, the congestion of Megalopolis should not be a problem for any of us.[177]

But in the first place, however many people can attain this level of hyper-urban serenity, what about the ones who don't achieve it? What about those who are just too sensitive? What about those who just *don't like* "the modern city" and its high level of "strangers and differences. . . its competitive, raucous energies," and who might be far less able than tenured professors like Sennett to deal with such "energies," financially speaking? This is Procrustean "realism." *Why does everybody have to love the big city?* Why is everybody who doesn't, automatically earn the label of "reactionary"? William Blake said, "one law for the lion and the lamb is tyranny." When Sennett demands that we all fall in love with the impersonality of the big city, is this *liberal* modernism—or totalitarianism[178]? Are Sennett and his fellow Centrists really encouraging people to find themselves—or is he defining what "freedom" should mean for the rest of us, whether we like it or not?

One might encourage such mega-urban dissidents to move elsewhere. The whole problem we are discussing, however, is the fact that Megalopolis is becoming the only available alternative, besides rural and suburban sterility. But if it is simply human to want both the pleasures of urbanity and of familiarity and

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[177] Sennett, *Fall of Public Man*, pp. 299-300.

[178] As I wrote in the last chapter, the liberal center is far from immune from the "totalitarian temptation." Again, see Dwight MacDonald, in his "What is Totalitarian Liberalism?" *Memoirs of a Revolutionist: Essays in Political Criticism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957), pp.

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solitude, why do we have to choose between the two? Even a significant minority of such sensitive people would be a mandate for the building of smaller far less crowded garden cities for them: which is all that Mumford would like to see happen!

Secondly, even if we accept the dubious notion that inurement equals immunity from the effects of stress, what effect does this process of inurement itself have upon our emotional life, our aesthetic proclivities, our spiritual selves, and thus, upon our society? The insensitivity and callousness of many mega-urban dwellers has been a frequent complaint in the last several decades. According to architect Christopher Alexander, this is not due to some divinely predetermined moral failing on their part. Instead, it is due to what Alexander calls the "autonomy-withdrawal symptom": "Pushed by stress, pulled by autonomy, people have withdrawn into a private world where they believe that they are self-sufficient," making "intimate contact seem less necessary, and . . . more difficult to achieve in practice."[179]

To merely argue that many people can adapt to present conditions really means nothing, because what we are after, in any serious consideration of the city and of society, is not, to paraphrase Aristotle, merely adaptation to the existing

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292-95, and Marshall Berman's criticism of this tendency to totalitarianism in his *Politics of Authenticity*, p. 321.

[179] Christopher Alexander, "The City as a Mechanism for Sustaining Human Contact," in W.R. Ewald, Jr., ed., *Environment for Man: The Next Fifty Years*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1967), p. 84 cf. Insel and Lindgren, *Too Close for Comfort*, p. 85. See also Stanley Milgram, "The Experience of Living in Cities," *Science*, 176 (March 13, 1970), cf. Insel and Lindgren, pp. 85-87.

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System, but rather, the good life. Urban "realists," like Freedman,[180] like Sennett, and echoing Jacobs, defend the big city in the name of its high level of urbanity, cultured community, and sociability. There are certainly plenty of interesting aesthetic and social events to attend in New York City. But such thinkers neglect to weigh in the high levels of stress and anti-sociability in Megalopolis today, however, which have a more direct effect upon daily life. Weighed in, these other factors tip the scales, Mumford would argue, toward the negative in any balanced assessment of mega-urban existence. Certainly, the level of human society that was originally obtained in the modern metropolis was superior, in its richness and cultural complexity, to anything possible in the rural village. But, as Mumford writes, as the result of these contradictions with the Megalopolitan form, the level of social interaction possible in the big city has sunk below the level of the old rural village.[181]

Freedman has pointed out that urban social space can be organized, as I mentioned earlier, in such a way as to give the citizens more control over their social interactions. Even in the big city we certainly can create smaller informal meeting spaces—extra elevators and social rooms in apartment buildings, neighborhood parks and refreshment areas—in which people can familiarize oneself with one's neighbors more easily and thus reduce big-urban anxiety.[182]. Yet, like Jacobs and Sennett, Freedman advocates such spaces in "realist"

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[180] Freedman, pp. 110-13.
[181] Mumford, "Megalopolis as Anti-City," *The Urban Prospect*, p. 138.
[182] Freedman, p. 130.

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fashion," not as a choice, but repressively, as something he would force upon everybody else. Not only would he like to see more small urban parks; but also, like Jacobs, he would *discourage* the maintenance of large, low-density parks, like much of Central Park in New York,[183] rather than encourage adequate supervision for such places. For even though "many people would probably prefer a low-density use of the park, . . . the purpose of urban parks is not to provide places to be alone to enjoy the beauties of nature."[184] Freedman would also discourage the creation of "inner courtyards" for buildings in favor of making streets "lively and safe."[185] Like Jacobs, Freedman's street is a jealous god: it will brook no rivals. But why should the two be mutually exclusive? And who is Freedman to tell us what the "purpose" of our parks is, or to force us all onto streets if some of us would rather hang out, sometimes, in the courtyard? Couldn't we also design superblocks to ensure that the residents could enjoy fairly large "inner courtyards," without having to compete with automobile traffic, as they do on city streets?

When realists such as Jacobs, Freedman, and Sennett argue in this manner, they betray not only a pompous arrogance, but also a lack of imagination. Mumford himself, as we shall see, along with the Goodman brothers, proposed the creation of such spaces. But these garden-city advocates felt, as do I, that such measures were in and of themselves insufficient, and that exclusive reliance upon

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[183] Freedman, pp. 130-31).
[184] Ibid., p. 131.
[185] Ibid., pp. 132-33.

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them, while sticking to big cities as the sole paradigm for urban existence, was ridiculous. No matter how well big-urban social space is organized, it is still crowded, big-city space, excessively occupied with strangers, to a level that many people cannot really tolerate without experiencing stress. If indeed the creation of small intimate spaces is necessary, then why rely upon mere redesign of existing overcrowded mega-cities? Surely far better results can be obtained if we also decentralize much of the mega-urban and suburban population into garden city centers, which would have far more controllable numbers of interactions, to begin with. It might also allow us to more comfortably enjoy nature and low-density space without fear of getting mugged, as Jacobs, quite rightly, fears this will happen when such space goes unsupervised in big cities. Freedman, however, following Jacobs and the Whites, has no room in his book or in his imagination, for the decentrist (recentrist) scheme Mumford and co. actually envisioned. His concept of the Decentrist vision, like that of the Whites, is identical to Frank Lloyd Wright's, one where "all of the people in the United States" are "scattered evenly over the available land." Freedman states that he would "hate to see" that happen, [186] without recognizing that Mumford and co. would hate it, too

Sociological and Literary Evidence

Besides the biological literature, there is the literature of radical social science, and the fictional literature of the modern period, to support Mumford's

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[186] Freedman, p. 109.

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idea that congestion is a real problem: not just a figment of an hysterical, "anti-democratic" imagination.

We have already presented Engels negative description of big city life. Georg Simmel, like most if not all intelligent people, preferred the stimulation of big city life to the boredom of the old village. Nevertheless, Simmel, in his essay, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," (1903) echoed Engels' charge that the big city encourages individual selfishness and self-isolation, not fraternity. Anticipating the findings of contemporary social-science research, Simmel also argued that the congested, overpopulated big city was responsible for an "intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli." These stimuli threatened to overwhelm the individual's emotional capacities, as well as a fear of depersonalization, of losing, among a sea of strangers, one's sense of one's own special worth and uniqueness. This stress upon the city dweller's psyche gave him a chronically defensive, self-protective attitude, as expressed by attitudes of "reserve" and of casual indifference, or "blasé"—at the expense of community, "spirituality, delicacy, and idealism."[187] In his elucidation of the ways in which the "organized system" might create rebellion, Marshall Berman wrote in similar language about the "character structure of urban men today":

> The metropolis infuses us with survival skills. Primary among these skills is an ability to tell faces from masks,

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[187] George Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," *Metropolis: Center and Symbol of our Times*, ed. Philip Kasinitz (New York: New York University Press, 1995), pp. 30-45.

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> truths from lies, realities from appearances: an essential skill in a system where everyone is always trying to deceive everyone else. Essential, too, is a highly developed sensibility, a capacity for deep feeling—which we must know how to manipulate, to turn on and off at will, in order to bend others to our purposes. . . . If we look into ourselves, we will see how completely our society cuts us off from ourselves, from our deepest feelings and needs and sources of happiness.[188]

As I pointed out in the last chapter, in which we discussed authors such as Hawthorne, Melville, Zola, Gissing, Balzac, etc., a casual survey of the modern urban literature of both Europe and America will reveal the same understanding. Here are several 20th century texts which echo Mumford's, Engels,' Simmel's and Berman's notions, and which I find particularly striking. In his first novel, *Crazy Cock* (1930), Henry Miller talked about the chronic fear he felt from living among so many strangers:

> His mind dwelt for a while on the complexities of that life which is lived in big cities—the *autumnal* cities—wherein there reigned an ordered disorder, a crazy justice, a cold disunity that permitted one individual to sit peacefully before his fireplace while a stone's throw away another was foully murdered. The city, he said to himself, is like a universe, each block a whirling constellation, each home a blazing star, or a burned-out planet. The warm, gregarious life, the smoke and the prayers, the clamor and parade, the whole bloody show was pivoted on a fulcrum of fear. If a man could love his neighbor he might have respect for himself; if he could have faith he might attain peace—but how, *how,* in a universe of bricks, a madhouse of egotists, an atmosphere of turmoil, strife, terror, violence?[189]

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[188] Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity,* pp. 323-24.

[189] Henry Miller, *Crazy Cock* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), pp. 8-9. This was Miller's first, but until recently unpublished, novel, which he wrote in the late 1920s. The "faith" to which he refers is not faith in God, but men's proper faith in each other if they are to have a good community and allay their fears.

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The second is from Delmore Schwarz, poet laureate of the New York Intellectuals. This is from his short story, "The World is a Wedding" (1948). Here, Schwarz talked about the feeling of insignificance and alienation felt by the individual, dwarfed by the sheer numbers of the strangers surrounding him.

> "In New York," he said to himself, ". . . . there are at least six million human beings. . . . But, in a way, these numbers hardly exist because they cannot be perceived (we all have four or five friends, more or less). No human being can take in such an aggregation: all that we know is that there is always more and more. This is the moreness of which we are aware, no matter what we look upon. This moreness is the true being of the great city, so that, in a way, this city hardly exists. It certainly does not exist as does our family, our friends, and our neighborhood."
>
> Jacob felt that he had come to a conclusion which showed the shadow in which his friends and he lived. They did not inhabit a true community and there was an estrangement between each human being and his family, or between his family and his friends, or between his family and his school. Worst of all was the estrangement in the fact that the city as such had no true need of any of them, a fact which became more and more clear during the great depression.[190]

The third is from Schwarz's famous disciple, Lou Reed, leader of the rock band The Velvet Underground, who took the same theme of estrangement and expressed it at a "white heat," drug-crazed, rage-filled, psychotic intensity, in his song, "Heroin" (1967):

> Away from the big city
> Where a man cannot be free
> Of all the evils in this town

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[190] Delmore Schwarz, "The World is a Wedding," *The World is a Wedding* (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1948), p. 25.

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And of himself and those around. . .

'Cause when the smack begins to flow
Well then, I really don't care anymore
'Bout all the jim-jims in this town
And all the politicians making crazy sounds
And everybody puttin' everybody else down
And all the dead bodies piled up in mounds.[191]

Other Problems

The problems of the Megalopolis go way beyond the tremendous congestion and the dearth of meeting places, by which the tremendously crowded citizens might at least grow familiar with each other, however. As discussed before, to drive down the wages and drive up the rents, employers and renters worked to concentrate population in the big cities, in the first place, in order to increase competition for the limited number of jobs and homes available. Thus the problems of unemployment and homelessness are *intrinsic* to the capitalist Megalopolis: its *raison d'être*. There is air and water pollution, because of the irrational encouragement of toxic fuels for industry and for personal and industrial transportation—the petroleum-powered automobile. This is also responsible for a great deal of noise pollution, in the form of honking horns and interminable car alarms, as well as the many fatalities, and the impossibility for the citizens to use the streets as meeting places or broad thoroughfares—they have to use the crowded sidewalk. Because of the premium on rented residential and office space, there is a chronic and growing lack, proportional to population,

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[191] Lou Reed, "Heroin," on the album, *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, Polygram, 1967.

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of local public facilities. On a regular basis, people need to enjoy gardens, parks, gymnasia, libraries, swimming pools, craft work, good, convivial, small schools which do not resemble asylums or prisons, and outdoor cafes insulated from motor fumes. They cannot in the modern metropolis.

Beyond these enormous problems, Mumford, following Clarence Stein, also discusses the fundamental fiscal and logistical contradictions of the big city. These have to do with the traffic, service, and utility requirements of an enormous population squeezed into a relatively tiny, congested space. This creates the need for an enormous and expensive complexity of utilities and services, and an enormous potential for traffic jams. These contradictions are only exacerbated, in the long run, by Band-Aid solutions. For example, the invention of the elevator made possible the building of taller apartment and office buildings. This was supposed to alleviate horizontal congestion. It might, for a time. But it allows even more people to be housed and to work in Megalopolis. Thus, in the end, such measures intensify rather than alleviate the problems posed by urban congestion for traffic, services, utilities, and fiscal budgets.[192] It is just such problems, wrote Clarence Stein in his essay, "Dinosaur Cities," that encourages industry out of the city, into the suburbs—further exacerbating the fiscal crisis of Megalopolis.[193]

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[192] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 240-45.
[193] Clarence Stein, "Dinosaur Cities," in Carl Sussman, ed., *Planning the Fourth Migration*, pp. 7`-72.

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Over the last few decades, we have seen that the increasing complexity of Megalopolitan service systems constitutes, perhaps, the most dangerous problem. For they could easily grow into a full-scale crisis of life- and property-threatening proportions on a massive scale. There is a danger, as recently discussed in the "Y2K" scare, that centralized systems—electrical, transportation, communication—though they can in the short term be more efficient, can break down just as more localized systems can. The difference is that because so many people become dependent upon them, the crises that ensue as a result of these breakdowns become increasingly dangerous.

Finally, and quite obviously, Megalopolis fails to accomplish the third task discussed by Mumford: to facilitate rather than frustrate its citizens' connection to the surrounding natural environment. The dearth of parks and garden space makes it difficult for most people to enjoy nature, within the modern city, on a regular basis. And the great size of the modern city, as well as its perennial traffic problems, makes getting out of the city into the countryside a real hassle—and destroys the countryside as it expands. As Mumford writes:

> Meanwhile, the urban agglomeration produces a similar depletion in the natural environment. Nature, except in a surviving landscape park, is scarcely to be found near the metropolis . . . The blare of light in the evening sky blots out half the stars overhead: the rush of sewage into the surrounding waters converts rivers into open sewers, drives away the more delicate feeders among the fish, and infects the bathers in the waters with typhoid. . . . As the pavement spreads, nature is pushed farther away: the whole routine divorces itself more completely from the soil, from the visible presence of life and growth and decay, birth and

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> death: the slaughterhouse and the cemetery are equally remote, and their processes are equally hidden. . . .[194]

Should Socialism Retain the Mega-Urban Form?

It is of course true that big cities can at least preserve the existing space for public parks and gardens as well as other facilities, in the face of the tremendous pressure to "develop" such space for other private purposes: commercial, office, or residential real estate space. I am all for such preservation. But such preservation is dependent upon a very stubborn, strong, collective political will among the citizens against such pressure. Under capitalism, where the ordinary working people are for the most part powerless, politically as well as economically, such a political will is very difficult to maintain. Under socialism, humane community might be far more easily maintained, and expanded—and should be. But if parks and gardens within mega-cities remain the only available spaces for most of the population under socialism, that population will still have accepted a raw deal. For they will have deprived themselves of the enormous amount of access, and the different kind of access (See chapter 3) they might otherwise have had, living in a newly planned and developed garden city. The garden city is, after all, a *garden* city. It can be planned to permanently include within its boundaries far more space for community gardens and parks than is obtainable now in the modern metropolis. And it is surrounded by a "greenbelt," so that if some people would prefer more "solitary wanderings," as Rousseau and

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[194] Mumford, pp. 252-53.

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Goethe did, they can do so far more quickly than is involved in, say, the journey by subway to Central Park from many points in Manhattan or the Bronx.

On the other hand, if we preserve the concentration of urban development at the contemporary mega-urban center, this will always entail a competitive, zero sum game, an intense conflict among social, political, and economic groups for scarce urban space for their own functions and preferred activities. Today, in New York City, we see an intense conflict fostered by the bourgeois state under Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. Demagogically, Giuliani pits those community groups who would develop "new" space for housing for the homeless against those who would retain the community gardens that now occupy these territories, gardens which afford the present inhabitants with personal, social, and natural satisfaction. As long as population pressure within the mega-city was not eased by a garden city decentralism, there is absolutely no reason to believe that such competition would not continue even if capitalism were replaced by socialism. And the creation of the parks, so well enjoyed today by mega-urban residents, came at a cost to the working class inhabitants of the shantytowns who once occupied that space.[195]

Simply because of the lack of public facilities, the capacity of the city to intensify and transmit culture down the generations, as well as its capacity to permit its citizens access to nature, peace, and quiet, is enormously weakened.

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[195] Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux), 1982), pp. 108-12.

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But the essential "formlessness" of megalopolitan development now makes the task almost impossible to carry out. "Blight" and "sprawl," has spread through the city and the surrounding suburban region alike, an undifferentiated mass of low-grade anti-urban tissue, transitable only by the automobile.[196] As Henry Wright argued, the precondition of an overhaul of such blight and sprawl would have to be new spaces to which to relocate the present occupants, before reconstruction could proceed. But where would they go? The building of garden cities is thus necessary even as the means to save our present cities from blight.[197]

Still, the metropolitan socialist might blithely argue that most if not all the problems I have mentioned above are not intrinsic to the big city, but instead, to capitalism. Given a social democratic government, these problems might be solved through more spending. But this is just the kind of argument that most infuriated and frightened Mumford. As he asked the Ribicoff commission: "Is there any reason to suppose that a massive new attempt by the federal government to wipe out the existing slums . . . will succeed any better than our earlier efforts unless we change both our methods and objectives?"[198]

Money is not a magic elixir. It is no substitute for an honest, critical appraisal of the problems we face with Megalopolis. How could even a socialist government solve these problems, without radically transforming it so that it was no longer Megalopolis? Let's take it point by point. Could a non-capitalist

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[196] Mumford, "Megalopolis as Anti-City," *The Urban Prospect*, pp. 136-37; "The Case Against 'Modern Architecture,' *The Highway and the City*, p. 172.
[197] Henry Wright, *Rehousing Urban America*, pp. 24-26.

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Megalopolis fulfill the fundamental three tasks of the city, as outlined above: to facilitate human contact with nature, sociability, and the transmission of culture down through the generations? Could it solve problems such as homelessness and chronic unemployment among racial minorities and recent immigrants? Could the government of Megalopolis ever be democratic rather than bureaucratic?

I have already shown that Megalopolis can never satisfy the human need for contact with nature. What about society? Let's take meeting space. A socialist government would at most be able to take over corporate office buildings, conventions centers, and sports and music arenas, and either use these for their own offices, or for office and meeting space for political parties and other city-wide organizations. These spaces are structured to house bureaucrats, office workers, or political delegates, however. That is because they are highly centralized in their location in the city. Only a small proportion of the total population may use them at any one time. Thus they do not offer much to the mass of ordinary people in terms of weekly and daily meetings. As for superstores and malls, these are also too centrally located to be convenient public meeting places. And I'm not sure that many people, including myself, would like to give up their present uses as shopping centers, anyway. As long as we stick with a Megalopolitan conception, as long as we refuse to think about regional decentralization of people and urban communities, we will be stuck with the same limited building space for public meetings. In other words, elementary schools

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[198] Mumford, "A Brief History of Urban Frustration," *The Urban Prospect*, p. 215.

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and high schools—at night, after the kids have gone home. But as statistical studies have shown, ever since the turn of the century, a system comprised merely of elementary schools, high schools, and settlement houses cannot adequately serve the high population levels of mega-urban neighborhoods.[199]

Thus, to conclude: in the present Megalopolitan system, we can never recreate the old, democratic, Athenian *agora*: the kind of democratic assembly space that could be obtained once we decentralize the urban community into a regional grid of garden cities. Each of these garden cities could set aside a great deal of public meeting space(s), where people could meet *en masse* as well as in more informal and smaller groups, before any housing or commercial activities would be designed in. And the decongestion of the old mega-urban centers would allow us to create similar spaces there.

Reviving pedestrian traffic by banning automobiles from city streets would allow a great deal more casual, neighborly meetings. And, as Wright argued, in a socialist society, neighbors on each block could combine their back lots into one common garden and playground space (a la Sunnyside Gardens in Queens:

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[199] See Allen Davis, *Spearheads for Reform*, pp. 81-83. Davis refers to a study on the Lower East Side that showed that the impoverished population was far too large to be served by the services provided for them. At that time, only one out of a hundred residents could be served by the settlements and schools in the neighborhood. A socialist government should indeed try to increase that ratio somewhat. My point is, however, that if we develop planned garden cities, we could voluntarily drain off the mega-urban populations into them. Thus we would have far greater capacity to provide a high ration of services to citizens, in both these garden cities and in the old mega-urban centers.

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planned by Mumford's and Wright's own Regional Planning Association of America).[200]

But all these meetings are still very public, by nature, under the potential scrutiny of others. What would still be excluded would be the more romantic, intimate, even erotic interactions possible in more natural settings—like gardens and parks, the more numerous, the more locally accessible, the bigger, as well as the more densely foliated, the better. Such space is particularly important for youth; for, as Mumford argues, pleasure gardens make childhood play far more exciting, and learning about love, far less traumatic.[201]

The name of the game in Megalopolis, however, is competition for limited space among an incredible overabundance of population, with all their differing needs. Even in a socialist Megalopolis, people would still find megalopolis a tight squeeze. To fulfill the tasks outlined above, we would still need housing for all these people—*plus* immigrants.

In my opinion, the only humane way to "solve" the immigrant "problem" is to completely open our borders and make citizenship an *automatic right.* People should be able to live wherever they want to live with equal rights. But an open immigration policy, as Mumford pointed out, is incompatible with a megalopolitan urban structure because the facilities for housing, clothing, employing them will simply never be sufficient—*there.*[202]

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[200] Wright, *Rehousing Urban American,* p. 30.
[201] Mumford, "Planning for the Phases of Life," *The Urban Prospect,* p. 30-32.
[202] Mumford, "Postscript: The Choices Ahead, *The Urban Prospect,* p. 248.

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As said before, all these people would also need big public buildings to house public meeting places. Besides that, they would need public cultural institutions which, as Mumford argues, are needed to focus and intensify public culture rather than atomize it. They need space for public leisure activities, including swimming pools and gymnasia, which *all* the people could enjoy on a *daily* basis. And they would also need space for *industry*. The basic machine industry, by now thoroughly automated, would probably be completely pushed out of the metropolis into the countryside. This process of industrial decentralization into the countryside has been going on for nearly a century, as has the process of automation. And there is no human reason to stop either process: for they make the city a far cleaner and quieter place to live than it was in the nineteenth century. But the adults, and especially, the adults, would still need to learn and perform *work together,* even if this be in the form (hopefully it *will* be in the form!) of traditional *craft*. As Marx, William Morris, Lewis Mumford, and Paul Goodman, among others, understood, to be human is to labor; to grow up is to learn how to work together with other people to mold and shape material in order to create a socially and individually useful product. Individually pursued, fine arts like painting, sculpture, etc. can only fulfill part of this basic human need. Even these individual arts, however, are more enjoyably pursued in larger common studios, where artists can support each others' artistic process, socialize, etc.

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Whether it is socialist or capitalist, there is simply not enough space, by definition, for all the people living in Megalopolis to enjoy these opportunities and fulfill these needs. That it is the simple fact, which no level of Realist denial can really evade.

Culturally and politically speaking, a "socialist Megalopolis" would be a contradiction in terms. Because it could not fulfill these fundamental tasks, Megalopolis run by a "socialist" government would be unable to allay its citizens' biological, cultural, and psychological frustrations.

Megalopolitan municipal government, even if socialists control its "commanding heights", has to be a bureaucratic government. To deal with the enormous complexities of the problems and crises of a congested Megalopolis, experts, not citizens, are usually required: experts who treat their mass clients as statistics to be manipulated, not subjects of their own destiny. Decentralize and reduce the urban population, and we simplify the problems, so that they can be discussed, debated, and resolved intelligently by a democratic citizenry instead.

Left unattended, as Mumford argues in the *Culture of Cities,* such frustrations lead to a mass compensatory psychology. Under capitalism, through gladiator sports, fascination with celebrity trivia, militarism, racism, imperialism, and finally, fascism, the masses take out their frustrations in increasingly violent, sado-masochistic ways, as approved by their social superiors. Presumably, under socialism, once the labor process becomes less alienating, such compensations for the frustrations of mega-urban existence would take an appreciably milder form.

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But why should a socialist movement allow them, along with the bureaucracy that is inevitable in Megalopolis, to fester in the first place?

The question I have just asked amount to a moot point, however. For how could such "socialist" leaders, armed with such a paltry, insensitive, conservative vision of a new society, so out of touch with ordinary peoples' real needs, ever mount a successful political campaign in this day and age—let alone a revolution—in the first place?

As Mumford throughout his work, but particularly in *The Story of Utopias,* such niggardly schemes for socialism are of the same "abstract" nature as the capitalist ideology they aim to combat; thus, they are impotent schemes. They are abstract from people's real needs and aspirations.

What kind of alternative urban structure *would* satisfy such needs and aspirations? We will discuss this in the chapters that follow.

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CHAPTER 5

GARDEN CITIES AND THE RESTORATION OF EXISTING CITIES

In this chapter, I would like to begin to explore Mumford's basic alternative model for the city: the garden city, and his ideas about how to revitalize the urban life of existing big cities. For the most part, this will be a discussion of other writers' work on these subjects, which has a big influence upon Mumford. In the following chapter, we will focus more upon Mumford's contribution to this vision of a new urban civilization.

First, let us once again consider the ideas of Marx and Engels, who made a significant contribution to this theory. As we discussed in the last chapter, there have been "metropolitan socialists" who, in their interpretation of Marxism, want to hold on to the old Megalopolitan form at all cost. They readily admit that Marx and Engels saw the problems of Megalopolis. But, they claim that Marx and Engels' vision of socialism retains the old Megalopolitan form. Once again, this is wrong.

Marx and Engels saw the mega-city as a historically necessary urban form, just as they saw capitalism as a historically necessary mode of production. But the chief value of both these forms is to concentrate, alienate, and drive the proletariat into a sufficiently angry, concentrated, and powerful mass, to make socialist revolution. After the revolution, the megalopolis becomes just as obsolete as is capitalism. With the miseries and the congestion endemic to it, the big city can no

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longer have any progressive purpose for human civilization. Marx and Engels wanted to replace it with a higher form of city, to solve the problems of the big city and fulfill the needs and desires of the victorious workers and poor. That form, for Marx and Engels, is a decentralized form.

In their most famous work, written originally in 1848, the *Communist Manifesto,* instead of calling for further metropolitan congestion and expansion, Marx and Engels write that communists "in the most advanced countries" should call for the "combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country, by a more equitable distribution of population over the country."[1]

In his pamphlet, *On the Housing Question* (1872), Engels writes further upon this theme of the need for decentralization of the big city proletariat after the revolution. He implies here that the big city is incapable of solving the housing problems of the proletariat. These problems involve more than housing problems endemic to capitalism: rental speculation and the impunity with which the ruling class pollutes the urban environment, for example. *In and of itself,* the big city is simply too small a space in which to stuff so many people, and yet expect them to have adequate housing and health, even under a socialist regime. And even in terms of saving further numbers of people from "rural idiocy," Engels writes that it is a *decentralization of urbanity and industry, not further*

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[1] Marx and Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," *On Revolution,* ed. Saul K. Padover, p. 98.

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mega-urbanization, that *alone* can do the job. He writes here: "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."[2] Further on, Engels writes that the big city poses fundamental problems of urban sanitation and agricultural fertility; problems which cannot be resolved without abolishing the big city itself. He points to the work of Baron Justis von Liebig,[3] an expert on the subject of agricultural chemistry, whose "first demand has always been that man shall give back to the land what he receives from it," in terms of nutrients." Furthermore, Liebig, according to Engels, "proves that only the existence of the . . . the big towns, prevents this." But not only is the present metropolitan arrangement responsible for soil depletion. It is also responsible for pollution.

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[2] Friederich Engels, *On the Housing Question* (Moscow, Progress, 1979), p. 51.

[3] Baron Justus von Liebig, (1803-73): German chemist, professor at Giessen and Munich, who, in his work, *Organic Chemistry in its Applications to Agriculture and Physiology* [1840], "provided the first convincing explanation of the role of soil nutrients . . . in the growth of plants." In his later *Letters on Modern Agriculture* (1859), Liebig showed how capitalist agriculture was leading to the depletion of these soil nutrients; in *Letters on the Subject of the Utilization of the Municipal Sewage Addressed to the Lord Mayor of London* (1865)—the piece to which, no doubt, Engels refers here, "Liebig argued—based on the condition of the Thames—that the two problems of the pollution of the cities with human and animal excrement and the depletion of the natural fertility of the soil were connected, and that organic recycling that would return nutrients to the soil was an indispensable part of a rational urban-agricultural system." Liebig's work would seem to be of continued relevance today. Soil fertility is still in decline and the nutritional value of our food is not only in decline; it is toxic: there are carcinogenous dioxins in our food coming out of the sewage sludge that is now permitted in the fertilizer used for commercial crops. See John Bellamy Foster and Fred Magdoff, "Liebig, Marx, and the Depletion of Soil Fertility: Relevance for Today's Agriculture," *Monthly Review*, vol. 50, no. 3 (July/August 1998), pp. 32-45; and unpublished paper, "Dioxin—the View from Europe," Environmental Research Foundation, Annapolis, MD.

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> When one observes how here in London alone a greater quantity of manure than is produced by the whole kingdom of Saxony is poured away every day into the sea with an expenditure of enormous sums, and what colossal structures are necessary in order to prevent this manure from poisoning the whole of London, then the utopia of abolishing the distinction between town and country is given a remarkably practical basis.[4]

By "practical basis," Engels seems to mean that this "utopia" achieves the status of a practical necessity for human civilization. When awareness of this necessity "grips the masses," as Marx famously says in his 'Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State," it will then become a practical reality.

The orthodox Marxist views Megalopolitan expansion as the *cure* for the "rural idiocy" decried by Marx in his 1852 essay, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte."[5] But Engels saw the big city, instead, as principally an *obstacle* to the abolition of such "idiocy." For the extreme concentration of population and development at the metropolitan center meant that the rural periphery was starved. Thus Engels saw *decentralism* of the mega-urban population as the real solution to rural "idiocy":

> Only as uniform a distribution as possible of the population over the whole country, only an intimate connection between industrial and agricultural production . . . —granted the abolition of the capitalist mode of production—will be able to deliver the rural population from the isolation and stupor in which it has vegetated almost unchanged for thousands of years.

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[4] Engels, *On the Housing Question*, p. 92.
[5] Marx, "Eighteenth Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte," *Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 608.

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For the "metropolitan socialist," capitalism merely distorted the alleged essential goodness of the big city. But for Engels, the modern housing problem, a central problem of capitalist life, was *integral* to *die Grossstadt.* "To want to solve the housing question while at the same time desiring to maintain the modern big cities is an absurdity. " Thus the supersession of *die Grosstadt* was integral to the abolition of capitalism, and vice versa.[6]

Though they never went into specifics, I would argue that Marx and Engels envisioned a decentralized, garden-city arrangement, as would be later envisioned much more concretely by Ebenezer Howard and Petr Kropotkin. These would be planned, popular communities, neither over- nor-scarcely populated so as to maintain a vital urban culture. They would be scattered throughout the country. Their populations would collectively own, control, and work in or on local factories and farms.

This vision of Marx & Engels, Howard, and Kropotkin is radically opposed to the present "megalopolitan" system, in *both* its aspects. Obviously, it is opposed to the densely congested megacities, in whose terrible slums minority poor and workers are forced to live. But it is also opposed to the kind of suburban "decentralization" promoted by the Federal Highway system in the 1950s. This "decentralization" created unplanned sprawl and an inadequately concentrated population, connected solely by mechanical means, the automobile, the workplace, and the telephone. Neither Marx, nor Engels, nor Kropotkin, nor

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[6] Ibid., p. 51.

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Howard foresaw this "decentralization". But Mumford saw it and opposed it, as part and parcel of the bourgeois "megalopolitan" process, and these thinkers, his mentors, would have as well. . The reader must not under any circumstances—as Robert Fishman has done in a recent article[7]—confuse the two.

Later Socialist Thought

Though these ideas of Marx and Engels were obscured within the socialist movement, they were not completely forgotten. Such socialists as Jack London, Leon Trotsky, Mike Gold and Lewis Corey maintained the historic commitment of Marx and Engels to the project of garden city decentralization and their animus toward megalopolis. In his 1905 documentary work, *The People of the Abyss,* London wrote that

> the city life of London is so utterly unnatural that the average workman or workwoman cannot stand it. Mind and body are sapped by the undermining influences ceaselessly at work. Moral and physical stamina are broken. . . If nothing else, the air he breathes, and from which he never escapes, is sufficient to weaken him mentally and physically.[8]

In 1927, Leon Trotsky wrote what is probably the clearest elucidation of Engels' vision of the integration of industry and agriculture, of "town" and "country," as follows. As the contradictions between these things under capitalist

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[7] Robert Fishman, "The Mumford-Jacobs Debate," *Planning-History Studies,* Vol. 10, nos. 1-2, (1998).

[8] Jack London, *The People of the Abyss* (New York: Lawrence-Hill, 1995, originally published 1905), pp. 45-46. Some might think that London's notion that workers are made "mentally" weaker by air pollution to be more the result of his penchant for Social Darwinism than sensitivity to their actual condition. It is a fact, however, that exposure to chemical poisoning can lead to

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society disappear, Trotsky writes, so will the contradiction "between peasant and worker; as regards their role in the country's economy, their living conditions, their cultural level they must come closer together as the frontier between them disappears." Further, Trotsky writes that:

> A society in which mechanised cultivation forms an equal part of the planned economy, in which the town has absorbed into itself the advantages of the country (spaciousness, greenery) while the country has been enriched with the advantages of the town (paved roads, electric supply, water supply) . . . where the peasant and the workers have been transformed into participants of equal worth and equal rights in a single production process - such a society will be a genuine socialist society.[9]

Lewis Corey, co-founder of the U.S. Communist Party (under his original name Louis Fraina) agreed with Engels and Trotsky, in *The Crisis of the Middle Class* (1935) that

> Socialization involves more than mere collectivization: it involves the problem of agricultural displacement, of integrating varied forms of farming, of absorbing the displaced farmers in industry, of decentralizing industry and planfully uniting it with agriculture. Socialism destroys the antagonism between industry and agriculture and between town and country.

In today's capitalist society, by contrast, "The masses of the people live in unfit homes, including the homes of workers, lower salaried employees and

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neurological illnesses and mental retardation, see, for example, the paper on Parkinson's disease, "The Need for Civic Action," Environmental Research Foundation, Annapolis, Md.

[9] Leon Trotsky, *Sochineniya* (presumably the Soviet edition of Trotsky's Collected Works), XX1, p. 436, cf. article by Richard Day, article in *Critique* No. 13 (1981), pp. 57 - 58.

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poorer farmers, cities are monstrously congested and scarred with filthy slums, while factories are prisons." Sounding much like Mumford, Corey wrote that

> Socialism offers the architect a tremendous opportunity for creative work. There must be homes fit for the new age and the new man, factories must become inspiring places in which to work, whole cities must be rebuilt to combine the values of town-and-country life. Architecture already provides all the means for making a thing of beauty of the place in which people live: socialism converts the means into action.[10]

In a similar spirit, Mike Gold, the brilliant author of *Jews Without Money* (who later, unfortunately, became a Stalinist hack), ends his 1930 childhood memoir on life in the slums of the Lower East Side with the following:

> O workers' Revolution, you brought hope to me, a lonely suicidal boy. You are the true Messiah. You will destroy the East Side when you come, and build there a garden for the human spirit.[11]

The Absolute Precondition: Socialist Revolution

While Marx and Engels embraced a decentralist vision of ecological harmony, they believed, firstly, that this could only come after a socialist revolution had been successfully fought by the working class. Secondly, they argued that the problem of the division between town and country that this decentralism was meant to solve, while very important in understanding the problems of capitalist society, was not in and of itself the essential problem with

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[10] Lewis Corey, *The Crisis of the Middle Class* (New York: Covici and Friede, 1935), p. 352n, 356.
[11] Mike Gold, *Jews Without Money* (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, Inc., 1930, 1958), p. 309

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that society. An end to exploitation was thus their primary goal—not decentralism. (That is perhaps why their decentralist legacy has been largely ignored in the twentieth century.)

Jack London put the matter quite succinctly in his book, *The People of the Abyss*. As we have already seen, London was no fan of the modern metropolis, particularly of its effects upon working class life. Yet London also wrote:

> The argument that the decentralization of London would ameliorate conditions is a vain thing and false. If the 6,000,000 people of London were separated into one hundred cities each with a population of 60,000, misery would be decentralized but not diminished. The sum of it would remain as large.[12]

The two greatest Marxist critics of Lewis Mumford, Meyer Schapiro and James Farrell, never attack his schemes for decentralized communities, which both critics mention. What they attack is Mumford's "grandiosity," as Farrell calls it, for proposing that such decentralism, and the social planning required to create it, can be realized without a revolution, through mere reformism.[13] For socialists Marx, Engels, London, Fraina, Schapiro and Farrell, while the regional decentralist vision was an important plank in the socialist program, it could never be a substitute for socialism—as it was for Henry George, and even more so for Ebenezer Howard, as we shall shortly discuss.

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[12] Jack London, *The People of the Abyss* (New York: Lawrence-Hill, 1995, originally published 1905), pp. 45-46, 297.
[13] James Farrell, "The Faith of Lewis Mumford," *Southern Review* 6, (Winter 1941): 417-38; Meyer Schapiro, "Looking Forward to Looking Back," *Partisan Review* 5 (July 1938).

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Unfortunately, this reformist idea seems also to have influenced Mumford; such that Mumford was not always clear about what the proper relationship between decentralism and socialism ought to be. But though he seems to have entertained the reformist illusion that decentralism could come before socialism, Mumford always understood correctly that for his decentralist schemes to really work, collective ownership and the abolition of capitalism would ultimately be necessary.

This simply stands to reason. In the first place, the economically self-sufficient garden city, with its local integration of industry and agriculture, could not survive in a market economy. And on the massive scale envisioned by Howard and Mumford, such garden cities would not be permitted by powerful economic corporations to be built (outside of a few "pilot" projects, like Welwyn in England and Radburn in the U.S.). Such garden cities, such relocation of industry, would require massive funding and planning. This would necessitate a diversion of much of the resources of the private sector, away from profitable private investment. Basically, for such development to occur, the private sector would have to be cannibalized. In addition, the capitalist class, as I discussed in the last chapter, requires a good deal of centralization to intensify competition among the workers, middle class and poor for jobs and housing, to keep wages low and rents high. They are perfectly willing to concede, and even make a profit from, the paltry level of decentralism made possible by suburbia: within the limits set by the daily commute for the primary breadwinner(s) to the job in the mega-

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urban core. But the ruling class would simply not tolerate anything beyond that. Thus no capitalist government would sponsor such decentralism. Few if any corporate capitalists, the real power behind any capitalist government, would tolerate such interference with their prerogatives and power.

There is a sort of decentralism actually promoted by the bourgeoisie—what Mumford called "industrial decentralization." But this is designed to make things worse, not better, for the working class. Such decentralization consists of siting new factories in isolated rural sites, without provision for real urban communities to be built for the workers. Thus, as with suburban factories and offices, the corporate capitalists take advantage of the dispersion of working class power in such areas to intensify exploitation and further weaken trade union organization. In *The Culture of Cities,* Mumford attacked the notion that "economic regionalism" ought to be equated with the "bare industrial decentralization" fostered by the capitalist class today. Far from offering an alternative to capitalism, Mumford writes, this "tendency" was "latent from the beginning of the paleotechnic (i.e. capitalist) revolution." It comes about only because "manufacturers" seek "to utilize the cheap sites and cheap labor of the open country. . . ." Its result, "a scattered development of subsistence farms, economically connected with a sweated industry, is no less undesirable a growth than the utmost congestion of a megalopolitan proletariat."[14]

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[14] Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities,* pp. 345-46.

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Garden city decentralism, therefore, is completely incompatible with capitalism. But it is completely compatible with socialism. For after a socialist revolution, there would be no such powerful capitalist corporations to make trouble for a decentralized working class.

On the Other Hand . . .

Those of my readers who are "metropolitan socialists" might come away from this discussion with the smug feeling that decentralism is therefore only a luxury for the working class. They may believe that it can be safely postponed to some far distant "communist" era when all work, and thus all workers, have been abolished. They may believe that before the socialist transition, more mega-urban expansion is the best thing, because it supposedly concentrates the class. I must contest this quite strongly, however, and insist here upon a point raised by one of Harold Scott's lieutenants in his Technocracy movement, the radical regionalist and agronomist Harold Ward, in his 1938 article for the Nation, "Cities That Consume Men." Developing upon the work of Engels, Geddes, and Mumford on these matters, Ward argued that, rather than acting as its antithesis, mega-urban concentration was instead the precondition of this bourgeois, immiserating process of "industrial decentralization" mentioned earlier. According to Ward, the capitalists could not exploit workers so heavily in rural areas if trade union strength had not already been tremendously sapped in these areas by excessive flight to the mega-city. In addition, Ward writes that after they arrived in the big city, many workers, frustrated with its problems, fled into the atomized suburban

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milieu, where their trade union organization would also be weak.[15] In *The Culture of Cities*, Mumford also theorized that big city trade unions, because they have such vast constituencies, tend much more easily to be ruled by an overcentralized, conservative bureaucracy.[16] We can certainly see evidence for this theory in the New York City of today. For both these reasons, mega-urban expansion, after a certain point, can represent a net loss for the working class, not a gain. There is thus a dialectic at work here. The workers cannot profit from decentralization except through revolution; but the workers had better make a revolution to stop further mega-urbanization and its concomitant suburbanization.

Henry George

Henry George's contribution to the garden city movement is not well known or widely discussed. But as I mentioned briefly in Chapter 1, in his book, *Progress and Poverty* (1879), and as the mayoral candidate of the United Labor Party in the 1886 New York election, George promoted a vision very similar to that of Marx and Engels'. He called for an "urban commonwealth," in which ordinary working people would be able to enjoy the pleasures of nature as well as urban society, because city and country would interpenetrate. According to Fairfield, George "embraced the possibilities of the great city. The concentration of population was a stimulus to progress, George believed, and he described the single tax as 'the secret which would transform the little village into the great

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[15] Harold Ward, "Cities That Consume Men," *Nation*, January 22, 1938. We shall discuss this article further in our chapter on Regionalism

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city'." However, by "great city," George did not mean the capitalist *Grosstadte* descried by Balzac, Engels, and Melville. By aimed instead to transform the term, so that it no longer connoted size for size's sake. Instead, as Fairfield writes, "George imagined a landscape and a social order that would balance the advantages of urban life with those of rural life." For George, "greatness" connoted the high quality of the life enjoyed by the inhabitants of the "great city."[17] As Fairfield summarizes George's thought, "The destruction of speculative land values" brought about by George's "single tax" program

> would tend to diffuse population where it is too dense and to concentrate it where it is too sparse; to substitute for the tenement house, homes surrounded by gardens, and to fully settle agricultural districts before people were driven far from neighbors to look for land. The people of the cities would thus get more of the pure air and sunshine of the country, the people of the country more of the economies of the city.[18]

Though his decentralist vision was similar to that of Marx and Engels, George's strategy for achieving it was neither socialist nor revolutionary. George felt that that the essential problem of economics had to do with rents. More generally, George felt that the problem with modern society was the loss of control of land, and thus a loss of connection with nature and of economic independence, by the masses. Thus, instead of socialism, George fixed his hopes for the good society upon his populist "single tax" scheme. In this scheme,

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[16] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, pp. 251, see also 475-76.
[17] John Fairfield, *Mysteries of the Great City*, p. 23.

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government would nationalize all real estate, and everyone would equally pay a "single tax" upon it, instead of rent. George felt this nationalization could be achieved through the ballot box. While George came, reluctantly, to lead a working class movement, he remained at heart a middle class reformer, and eventually purged the socialists from the ULP. George seemed to feel that we could have a beneficial decentralism without socialism. [19]

Yet George's decentralism was no escapist fantasy. While he was obviously influenced by pastoralism, he held the social life possible in cities to be an ideal equal in value to that of the natural pleasures of the countryside, and aimed to provide both to everybody.

Ebenezer Howard

Ebenezer Howard's book, *To-morrow, a Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898; now known under the title of the 1902 edition, *Garden Cities of To-morrow*) had a profound influence upon Mumford. In his 1965 preface to the American edition, Mumford wrote that Howard's book had "done more than any other single book to guide the modern town planning movement and to alter its objectives."[20]

Howard, a stenographer, was an active participant in the London Radical movement of the 1880's, the heir to John Stuart Mill. In formulating his garden

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[18] Henry George, *Progress and Poverty*, (New York, 1987), p. 405, cf. Fairfield, *Mysteries of the Great City*, ibid.
[19] John Fairfield, *Mysteries of the Great City*, pp. 71-73.

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city plans, Howard followed in the footsteps, not only of Henry George, but also of the British economist, Alfred Marshall. According to Stanley Buder, Marshall was one of the first economists to comprehend the relationship between industrial technology, urban concentration, and high rents:

> Marshall . . . related the rise of nineteenth-century cities to the imperatives of a new industrial technology. Once the railroads in the 1830s freed industry from the need to locate near water power or coal fields, it was inevitable that factories would gravitate toward large centers of population. In turn, the relocation of factories drew a rural population seeking employment into the cities. . . ."[21]

Marshall was also original in casting doubts upon the effects that this development had upon human society. He saw that

> the advantages of industrial production needed to be weighed against its negative effects: the depopulation of the countryside and the unhealthy concentration of people in already crowded cities. . . . [And] the economic consequences of concentration inflated living costs while holding down wages for the unskilled. . . ."[22]

However, Marshall, like George, took the culprit here to be, not capitalists or capitalism per se, but instead, the rentiers:

> [In London,] ground rents stood so much higher than elsewhere that businesses dared not pass along their cost of rent for fear of risking their competitive position against rivals elsewhere. London firms compensated for high rents by paying low wages to their unskilled labor who had little

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[20] Lewis Mumford, "The Garden City Idea and Modern Planning," introductory essay to F. J. Osborn's edition of *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (Cambridge, MA, 1965), p. 29. Cf. Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass, 1982), p. 23.
[21] Stanley Buder, *Visionaries and Planners: The Garden City and the Modern Community* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 18.
[22] Stanley Buder, *Visionaries and Planners*, p. 19.

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> ability to resist. Despite this, the capital continued to lure farm laborers and immigrants to swell crowded and disorderly neighborhoods by the prospect of employment.[23]

For Marshall, the capitalists were thus indeed somewhat culpable for these developments: but only because they lacked imagination. To their own detriment, allegedly, they stuck to social trends tied to the old, anachronistic, industrial technologies. However, there purportedly existed a path, *within* rather than *against* capitalism, which would lead society away from the perils of urban concentration, low wages, and high rents: a path of industrial and social decentralization. Capitalists as well as workers stood to gain from such a path: only the rentiers stood to lose. Thus Marshall's strategy for change was not revolution but the formulation of attractive models for relocation. Since most of London's economy was based upon small shops, not large manufacturing concerns, the trick was to encourage potential shop owners to relocate. This could be facilitated by forming a committee, to plant a "colony in some place well beyond the range of London's smoke." This committee "would erect suitable and

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[23]This explanation accepts the bourgeois thesis that the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and thus the tendency of capitalism to immiserate workers, comes from *outside* an otherwise prosperous and benevolent capitalism: from the remnants of feudalism. Marxist theorists would not dismiss such theories completely. But they would see urban concentration as mutually beneficial to both the rentiers, whose rents go up, and the capitalists, who are looking to swell the reserve army of labor. They would also argue, of course, that rentiers are capitalists, and that capitalists are often rentiers. See David Gordon, "Capitalist Development and the History of American Cities," *Marxism and the Metropolis: New Perspectives in Urban Political Economy*, eds. William K. Tabb and Larry Sawers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 25-63; and Lewis Mumford, "The Insensate Industrial Town," *The Culture of Cities*, pp. 196-235.

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sanitary cottages before approaching employers with the argument that their employees in such a salutary setting would prove more reliable and efficient."[24]

Marshall's scheme for "home colonies" was further developed by still another Radical critic of George, Alfred Russell Wallace, in *Land Nationalisation and Its Aim,* published in 1881. Wallace argued that if such colonies were created, the social and economic opportunities, coupled with "the availability of farmland at low rates," would "draw large numbers from the city and revive the countryside. Villages would thrive, developing farming and industry in a complementary balance. Over time the price of land and housing in cities would be lowered sufficiently to make it feasible for government to acquire them at the depressed price and to become the nation's sole landlord."[25]

Howard's contribution was to attempt to put this strategy into practice. He laid out a simple philosophy of "garden city" living—an advertisement to potential financial backers and middle class recruits. The basic concept of this philosophy was the social "magnet." Howard assumed that different social arrangements were like magnets. They drew strength and weight in history because of their "attraction" for the masses.[26] The overcrowded, but culturally stimulating city grew even more crowded because it was far more attractive as a magnet than the beautiful, healthy, but culturally stultifying countryside.

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[24]Alfred Marshall, "The Housing of the London Poor: Where to House Them," *Contemporary Review*, XLV (February 1884), pp. 224--31. Cf. Buder. *Visionaries and Planners*, p. 19.
[25]Buder, *Visionaries and Planners*, p. 20.
[26] Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, ed. F.J. Osborn (London: Faber and Faber, 1946), p. 45.

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But a third magnet, the garden city, might be far more attractive than either. It combined the best features of both, while avoiding their negative aspects.

> There are in reality not only, as is so constantly assumed, two alternatives—town life and country life—but a third alternative, in which all the advantages of the most energetic and active town life, with all the beauty and delight of the country, may be secured in perfect combination; and the certainty of being able to live this life will be the magnet which will produce the effect for which we are all striving—the spontaneous movement of the people from our crowded cities to the bosom of our kindly mother earth, . . . The town and country may, therefore, be regarded as two magnets, each striving to draw the people to itself—a rivalry which a new form of life, partaking of the nature of both, comes to take part in.[27]

The garden city would be healthy and beautiful, because close to nature. Internally, the garden would be divided up into six neighborhood wards, so as to provide a "cellular" basis, a strong neighborhood culture for its social life. Socially and economically speaking, the garden city-as-a-whole would also be a "balanced community," as Mumford asserted: It would be

> relatively self-contained and big enough to provide out of its own resources and activities all that might be needed for the citizen's daily life. The garden city was no "housing project," no dormitory suburb, no trading estate, no industrial satellite; all these separate functions, along with those of recreation, education, and government, were integrated, and balance and integration were the marrow of the organism.[28]

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[27] Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, p. 46.
[28] Lewis Mumford, "The Modern City," in *Forms and Functions of Twentieth Century Architecture, vol. 4, Building Types*, ed. Talbot Hamlin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 806

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Yet the garden city would also offer social complexity and cultural abundance. For Howard advocated a "crystalline" clustering of garden cities. Several garden cities, each with a population of 32,000, would be clustered around a "central city," with a population of "58,000." Rapid transit would permit all the citizens of the cluster easy and equal access to all that the entire cluster offered. These garden cities

> would be so grouped around a Central City that each inhabitant of the whole group, though in one sense living in a town of small size, would be in reality living in, and would enjoy all the advantages of, a great and most beautiful city; and yet all the fresh delights of the country—field, hedgerow, and woodland—not prim parks and gardens merely—would be within a few miles walk or ride.[29]

Howard's social magnets were much like Mill's "experiments in living." This should not surprise, since Mill was one of the intellectual fathers of the Radical milieu in which Howard moved. Mill felt that individuals had the right to perform such experiments. Though society might seek to quell such experiments, out of intolerance, such experiments were ultimately for society's benefit. If they were of positive benefit, and were given a chance, they might "catch on" with the majority someday, and thus benefit society. Thus it was also the duty of a genuinely liberal state to protect such experiments.[30]

Howard's garden-city magnet, like Marshall's home colonies, was supposedly conspired against only by contemporary popular ignorance, and

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[29] Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, p. 142.

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corrupt elite interest—not by the structure of capitalism itself. Thus Howard thought that society might change if his experiment in garden-city living were only given a chance. Howard accepted Marshall's assumption that a "peaceful path" to the good society could be found within capitalism, rather than against it. All that was required was that a model of the utopian alternative be created. Society as a whole would then eventually swing over to the new pole of attraction, and make the model universal.

Unfortunately, Mumford seems to have been unduly influenced by Howard's voluntarist notion of social change. Mumford does often articulate the need for governmental intervention in any decentralist process. But throughout his career, Mumford also refers to this necessary decentralism as a "fourth migration." He seems to have imagined that individuals, apparently on their own, might just pick up and move out to the countryside, just as they did during the early nineteenth century, from the East to "out West," or at the turn of the century, from the countryside, into the growing metropolis. Mumford's pronouncements on this subject lend themselves quite easily to this voluntarist interpretation, because he never spells out precisely what the role of government ought to be in this process.[31]

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[30] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (New York: Norton, 1975), pp. 53-86

[31] See Lewis Mumford, "Preface: The Fourth Migration" (which was written originally in 1925), and "Postscript: The Choices Ahead" (which was written in 1968), in *The Urban Prospect*, pp. ix-xx, 249. The earlier written preface outlines vaguely this "fourth migration" scheme; the later, "postscript" still defends this vaguely voluntarist formulation as a "rational program for resettlement."

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Yet despite this strong taint of voluntarism in Mumford's work, he was never quite so voluntarist, or as anti-socialist, as Howard. And unlike Mumford, as well, Howard's complete willingness to work with rather than against the individualism and commercialism of capitalist society was matched by his complete unwillingness to acknowledge any need, in the immediate sense, to work within or upon the present metropolitan urban society or structure. The demographically concentrated urban working class, as an urban working class, had little use for Howard as a potential subject of social change (as it did for Marx). Howard had little sympathy for striking workers.

> It is idle for working men to complain of this self-imposed [sic!] exploitation, and to talk of nationalizing the entire land and capital of this country under an executive of their own class, until they have first been through an apprenticeship at the humbler task of organizing men and women with their own capital in constructive work of a less ambitious character—until they have assisted far more largely than they have yet done in building up capital, not to be wasted in strikes, or employed by capitalists in fighting strikers, but in securing homes and employments for themselves and others on just and honorable terms.

Conveniently ignoring the fact that workers were forced by the conditions of their existence to sacrifice most of their life-time and energy to perform alienated labor, Howard advised workers not to strike, but instead, to climb on board the garden city bandwagon:

> The True remedy for capitalist oppression where it exists, is not the strike of *no work*, but the strike of *true work*, and against this last blow the oppressor has no weapon. If labor leaders spent half the energy in co-operative organization that now waste in co-operative

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> disorganization, the end of our present unjust system would be at hand.[32]

As can be seen here, the only use he had for workers were as migrants away from the cities. Even here, however, the chief instruments of his grand design would be an imagined group of sympathetic capitalists. He quotes Marshall,

> There might be great variety of method, but the general plan would probably be for a committee, whether formed specially for the purpose or not, to interest themselves in the formation of a colony in some place well beyond the range of London smoke. After seeing their way to building or buying suitable cottages there, they would enter into communication with some of the employers of low-waged labour. . . . . They would find an employer—and there must be many such—who really cares for the misery of his employees. Acting with him and by his advice, they would make themselves the friends of people employed or fit to be employed in his trade; they would show them the advantages of moving, and help them to move both with counsel and money. They would organize the sending of work backwards and forwards, the employer perhaps opening an agency in the colony.[33]

Howard's view of the working class as a potential agent for social change is not the only thing that suffers from his aversive attitude toward the modern city. His proposal that migration and the "sympathetic" capitalist alone would be the agent of social change also impoverishes his vision of how to deal with the modern metropolis. With what might be seen as crocodile tears, Howard hopes that such cities will not become both "squalid and deserted" completely. He hopes

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[32] Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, p.108.

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that, in competition with the new garden cities for workers and other inhabitants, London will be "transformed," that "the country" will "invade the town," that "these wretched slums will be pulled down, and their sites occupied by parks, recreation grounds, and allotment gardens.[34]" He hopes that London will be reduced only to "one-fifth of its present population; and that new systems of railways, sewerage, drainage, lighting, parks, etc.," will "be constructed if London is to be saved." But ultimately, since the agency of the working class is ruled out, that is a matter for the capitalists to decide.[35]

Clearly, Howard's strategy suffered from utopian illusions about the nature of power, class interest, and agency in capitalist society. Paradoxically, though he allowed the real capitalist world to influence his vision of the good society, he simultaneously allowed his utopianism to blind him to the realities of power within the contemporary world.

Trusting as he did in capitalist society as is, Howard did not see that the capitalists would thwart even the limited experiment in such genuine (rather than suburban) decentralization, cooperative living, and urban planning that Howard envisioned. Howard's vision was a threat to the capitalists' basic desire to concentrate the working population in cities in order to drive up rents and drive

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[33] Alfred Marshall, "The Housing of the London Poor," *Contemporary Review,* 1884. Cf. Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow,* p. 121.
[34] Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* p. 156
[35] Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* p. 158.

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down wages. Howard thought that a good attractive design could be substituted for class struggle. But as Murray Bookchin points out,

> 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. . . . .

Mumford's encomiums to Howard's "statesmanship" notwithstanding, *Garden Cities for Tomorrow* is not overly burdened by great insights into the social and economic 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.[36]

Yet, as Bookchin also asserts, Howard's vision was nevertheless valuable. It might actually bear fruit—if it was incorporated into a more complex strategy for social change, which might involve urban class conflict and pro-active policies for urban restoration, as well as for decentralist social and ecological harmony. The question is—did Mumford succeed in formulating this more

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complex strategy, as Bookchin asserts? Or was he too taken in by Howard's confusion of design with politics? The answer, I think, is the former—contrary to what we might assume from Jane Jacobs' implication, at the beginning of *The Life and Death of Great American Cities,* that Mumford and all his friends were blind followers of Howard.[37] Obviously, Mumford *was* partially taken in by Howard's confusion. But Mumford also criticizes, as does Bookchin, the later incorporation of Howard's schemes into the basic pattern of capitalist development, as suburban satellites, bereft of a common, intensive social, political, and economic life.[38]

Mumford's Revision of Howard

While Mumford blames Howard's followers for these problems, and unfailingly praised Howard, it is clear that Mumford's understanding of the "garden city" concept is different from Howard's. In the first place, Mumford is quite a bit more flexible in his limits upon population for these centers:

> Now the major common functions of a community can plainly be taken care of in towns of from five thousand to a

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[36] Murray Bookchin, *The Limits of the City* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 118-20.
[37] See Carol A. Christensen, *American Garden Cities and the New Towns Movement* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Research Press, 1986, 1978), pp. 55-59, for a study of Radburn. It reveals that even several of Mumford's associates in the RPAA, principally Clarence Stein, also equated communal harmony with the absence of political conflict, like Howard, and that Stein also, like Howard's British followers, accepted a suburbanization of Howard's garden city vision which Howard would never have accepted. Christensen's critique of Radburn and Stein may indeed be correct—when applied to Radburn and Stein. But it is not applicable, I would argue, to Mumford and Bauer, especially, among the RPAA: those members who rejected suburbanization and sought a "beloved community" imbued not with a pre-imposed harmony but with political, social, as well as intimate *dialogue.*
[38] See Lewis Mumford, "Beginnings of Urban Development," *The Urban Prospect,* pp. 148-52.

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> hundred thousand population quite as well—frequently much better—than they can in a vast megalopolis.[39]

This is almost twice the number that Howard would have wanted for his largest, central city: 58,000. And don't forget Mumford's support, in *The Urban Prospect,* for "thirty world metropolei," which would conceivably be home to even greater numbers of people. Mumford's rationale for such metropolei is that they "might prove necessary to serve as a medium for world intercourse, and as containers of world culture."[40] Such cities, with their relatively high populations and cultural facilities, would presumably specialize in the creation and preservation of culture to a far greater degree possible than in the typical garden city. They would cater to a population more interested in urban (or perhaps we should say, mega-urban) levels of sociability and aesthetics, far less in direct contact with nature, than the typical garden city resident.

Secondly, while Howard is silent on the question, Mumford is articulate about the need for each garden city, within the regional complex, to specialize upon a particular cultural function, in order to guarantee a continued level of cosmopolitanism in urban life.

For "there are special institutions which require a large basis of population, and it would be futile to duplicate these in small communities and unfortunate to do without them: they must be produced on a regional scale." For this reason, "the

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[39] Lewis Mumford, "Regional Planning," *Planning the Fourth Migration: The Neglected Vision of the Regional Planning Association of America,* Carl Sussman, ed., (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976).

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new regional pattern will be a constellation of related cities, separated by parks and permanent agricultural areas, and united for common projects by a regional authority." As Mumford lays his vision out,

> Each city would have all the local institutions necessary to its own effective life, local shops, schools, auditoriums, theaters, churches, clubs; and in addition each center would perhaps tend to specialize on some one institution of culture or social life, a museum of natural history in one center, a radio broadcasting station in another, a university in a third. . . . Each city would perhaps be a regional center for at least one function; but no city would attempt to be the regional center for everything.[41]

Thirdly, Mumford's vision is far more comprehensive than is Howard's toward existing cities and toward the possibilities of a radical working class movement for social change. He does not seek merely to abandon existing cities and their working class populations, leaving them to their fate, as does Howard. Instead, as we shall see, both the existing cities and their working class populations have a significant role to play in his plans for the future. Thus, Mumford's version of the garden city cannot be so easily incorporated into schemes for suburban boredom as was Howard's. Though Mumford seemed reluctant to do so, in general, Mumford criticized Howard specifically for putting the "garden city shopping mall" at the center of his plans. Nothing wrong with shopping, per se: it is just that Mumford did not seem to think it should be the

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p. 206.
[40] Lewis Mumford, "Postscript: The Choices Ahead," *The Urban Prospect*, p. 234.
[41] Ibid., p. 207.

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only activity, or even the central activity, planned for at the garden city center.[42] But we will explore Mumford's ideas on the need for a complex articulation of urban space in the following chapter.

Peter Kropotkin and the Importance of Labor-Intensive Agriculture and Gardening

Another writer whose decentralist philosophy influenced Mumford's vision greatly was Petr Kropotkin. What would later become Kropotkin's book, *Fields, Factories, and Workshops* (1899), appeared as a series of articles which appeared in the widely read London journal *The Nineteenth Century* between 1888 and 1890.[43]

Kropotkin saw the capitalist division of labor gripping not only the internal relations of factories, but whole nations, to specialize and stratify them. This was inevitably disastrous, however. For while the process began with only a few nations controlling and exploiting world-wide empires, technological knowledge was bound to disseminate to new contenders for power and profit. World war was the inevitable result—unless men overthrew the entire system, and replaced it with a system of regional self-sufficiency, political decentralization, and an integration of manual and mental labor (and education), of industry and agriculture, and of city and country.[44]

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[42] Lewis Mumford, "The Disappearing City," *The Urban Prospect*, pp. 110-11.
[43] Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias of the Twentieth Century*, p. 36.
[44] Ibid., pp. 23-40.

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Kropotkin also took issue in his book with a modern myth: that the centralization and automation of agricultural production had been an unambiguous advance in human progress. Mechanization was potentially beneficial because it could make farming less onerous. But the wholesale removal of human population from agriculture had not been beneficial—not even in terms of productivity, let alone quality of life. Rapid urbanization meant that much arable land had been left to deteriorate. The agriculture that remained was over-mechanized and motivated by profit. Thus bourgeois agriculture was insensitive to the exigencies required to maintain full productivity and to husband the land for future high yields.[45]

Kropotkin imagined his future alternative society to be embodied in what he called 'industrial villages,' much like Howard's garden cities. These would be, as Fishman writes,

> twentieth-century versions of the old craftsmen's villages of the pre-industrial era. There electrically powered, cooperatively owned cottage industries would turn out goods more efficiently than the old urban factories, while the workers' homes and gardens would be nestled in unspoiled countryside.[46]

Kropotkin argued that cooperative living and farming would yield enormous benefits. The first of these would be agricultural:

> If you return to the soil, and cooperate with your neighbors instead of erecting high walls to conceal yourself from their looks; if you utilize what experiment has already

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[45] Ibid., pp. 47-107.
[46] Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias of the Twentieth Century*, p. 36.

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> taught us, and call to your aid science and technical invention . . . you will be astonished at the facility with which you can bring a rich and varied food out of the soil.

But the paedagogical benefits would also be enormous:

> You will admire the amount of sound knowledge which your children will acquire by your side, the rapid growth of their intelligence, and the facility with which they will grasp the laws of Nature, animate and inanimate.

Kropotkin, too, argued for an integration of industry and agriculture—provided that the industry was small, humane, and eco-friendly:

> Have the factory and the workshop at the gates of your fields and gardens, and work in them. Not those large establishments, of course, in which huge masses of metals have to be dealt with and which are better placed at certain spots indicated by Nature, but the countless variety of workshops and factories which are required to satisfy the infinite diversity of tastes among civilised men. Not those factories in which children lose all the appearance of children in the atmosphere of an industrial hell, but those airy and hygienic, and consequently economical, factories in which human life is of more account than machinery and the making of extra profits, of which we already find a few samples here and there; factories and workshops into which men, women and children will not be driven by hunger, but will be attracted by the desire of finding an activity suited to their tastes, and where, aided by the motor and the machine, they will choose the branch of activity that best suits their inclinations.[47]

In the fusion of agriculture and industry obtainable through the garden city scheme, whole new possibilities for natural and aesthetic pleasure, socially

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[47]Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow*, ed. by Colin Ward (London: Freedom Press, 1985), pp. 196-97.
[47]Stanley Buder, *Visionaries and Planners*, p. 73. Philip Abrams, *The Origins of British Sociology* (Chicago, 1968), 77-105; Patrick Geddes, *The Garden City*, new series, I (Aug. 1906), 151-52.

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enjoyed, would present themselves. Paul and Percival Goodman further developed upon Kropotkin's themes, in their work *Communitas*. Outside their planned garden city, of course, there would be the "usual" greenbelt, as well as "industrialized farms." In large measure, within the garden city's walls, much space would be planned for "diversified farms," for carefully tended community gardens.[48]

Though important, the modern mega-urban park only offers limited pleasures—scenery for the alienated people of the modern bourgeois metropolis, who can spare an hour or so per week to sit and listen to the birds. Large provision for community gardens, inside and outside the garden city, would permit all the citizens to become an active part of the agricultural process. This would also shift us away from the sterility and toxicity of modern agribusiness, to far more vital locally and even personally and organically grown food. In these gardens, agriculture would become an enjoyable social activity and collective labor of love. But such activity, in turn would now be freed, by (non-polluting) technologies, from the backbreaking drudgery of the middle ages, and would be complemented by the produce of larger, more mechanized farms outside the garden city.[49]

Has the Decentralist Dream Been "Proven" Wrong by Events?

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[48] Paul and Percival Goodman, *Communitas* (New York: Vintage, 1960, originally published 1947), p. 158, *et passim*.
[49] See Petr Kropotkin, Paul Goodman, Communitas.

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Let's deal, finally, with Robert Fishman's change of heart about garden cities: his new objections to this decentralist vision. In a recent (1998) article entitled "The Mumford-Jacobs Debate," strongly reminiscent of contemporary "god that failed" rhetoric about the "failure of socialism," Fishman now dismisses the decentralist alternative to the mega-city which he once upheld. He is not explicit about this, however. Indeed, Fishman claims to give "all honor" to Mumford. But his intention would seem to be, not praise, but rather, burial. Fishman seeks merely to incorporate Howard and Mumford's ideas into the existing mega-urban arrangement. Unlike his previous work, *Urban Utopias of the Twentieth Century* (1982),[50] Fishman no longer sees the garden city as a feasible alternative to the mega-urban status quo. He is willing to accept the tinkering to create small changes in existing arrangements, advocated by such realists as Jacobs. But the more fundamental, radical changes advocated by Howard and Mumford are out of the question. Fishman accepts the notion of Jacobs and of William H. Whyte, in the 1960s, that urbanity can only be found in great cities; it cannot be planned, recreated, or, as Whyte writes, "lacquered on" in garden cities.

This points up a problem, not only in Fishman's article, but also throughout the work of his realist mentors Whyte and Jacobs. In Jacobs' *Death and Life,* in Whyte's *The City,*[51] they come up with all sorts of ingenious schemes

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[50] Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass, 1982).
[51] William H. Whyte, *The City* (New York: Doubleday, 1988).

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for tinkering with the existing great city so as to foster urbanity and sociability. Yet they adamantly deny the possibility that urbanity might be created, through planning, outside of the great city, in garden cities, or by rebuilding existing cities, as Henry Wright and Mumford wanted to do. So on the one hand, they staunchly uphold the impossibility of making fundamental changes in the way we live; but on the other, they insist that things can, indeed, must, be changed—in small ways, within limits set by the existing big city, and above all, by the market. But if urbanity can be shaped in small ways, why not in large ways? Admittedly, changing things in big ways is not as easy—we have to confront the powers that be in order to accomplish this; we have to challenge the sway of the market. But that's not the same as the idea that such fundamental change is impossible or futile.

Glazer's, Jacobs', and Whyte's answer to such reasoning is that people have tried fundamental change before, and this has proven to be a disaster. From Ebenezer Howard to Lewis Mumford, the decentrists have tried to create bustling garden city communities, and middle class suburban sterility has been the invariable result. This is Fishman's response, as well. He writes,

> In the 1920s Mumford had predicted a "fourth migration" from the large cities back to the regions; here it was with vengeance. But by the 1950s Mumford was forced to admit that the result of this state-sponsored decentralization was not the regionalist utopia of small-scale communities he had envisioned, but its opposite. . . . the decentralized terrain where the regionalists had expected to build their participatory society—this terrain

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> has become the area in our society most dominated by centralized power and standardized culture.[52]

For Fishman, Mumford's decentralist agenda was proven bankrupt, once and for all, by the fact that postwar, corporate capitalist, *suburban* "decentralization" resulted only in greater "centralized power and standardized culture." He even tries to argue that Mumford himself accepted such pessimism:

> Where Mumford . . . had seen the great city—New York especially—as little more than the enemy to be "decongested," Mumford in the 1950s was reaching toward the conclusion that large cities must be nurtured if the freedoms he valued were to survive at all. In 1960 he wrote, "Now the great function of the city is to . . . permit—indeed to encourage—the greatest number of meetings, encounters, challenges, between varied persons and groups. . . ."[53]

But this is sloppy scholarship. This quote is from Mumford's 1960 article, "Landscape and Townscape."[54] While the language here may sound like Jacobs' praise for the modern great city's alleged capacity to bring about such "encounters" and diversity, it is not the same. Mumford presents social contact as "the great function of *the city*." He does *not* say, as would Jacobs, that this function can *only* be performed by the *great* city. The adjective "great" modifies "function," not "city." Perhaps Fishman believes that by "city," Mumford must have meant "great city." But in that case, Fishman assumed what he had to prove. If we refer back to the article that Mumford wrote, Fishman is proven wrong.

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[52] Fishman, "Mumford-Jacobs Debate," p. 6.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Mumford, "Landscape and Townscape," *The Urban Prospect*, p. 88.

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Even a cursory glance reveals that the "city" Mumford is describing here as capable of this "great function" is still the *garden city* he promoted in the 30s. In another passage from the same article, Mumford calls for "two complementary movements." Yes, the first movement he calls for is that of "tightening the loose and scattered pattern of the suburb. . . ." But the other movement for which Mumford calls is

> that of loosening the congestion of the metropolis, emptying out part of its population, introducing parks, playgrounds, green promenades, private gardens, into quarters that we have permitted to become indecently contested, void of beauty, and often positively inimical to life. . . .

And even in terms of the first movement, Mumford does not in the fashion dictated by Jacobs or the Whites, call for expanding Megalopolis by forcing all suburban dwellers into die Grossstadt. Instead, he speaks of a far more reasonable project, of "turning" the suburb "from a purely residential dormitory into a balanced community, approaching a true garden city in its variety and partial self-sufficiency, with a more varied population and with sufficient local industry and business to support it; and the other is"[55] In short, Mumford retained both his critique of Megalopolis and his desire for garden city decentralism, in the very article that Fishman alleges that Mumford admitted to having abandoned these commitments! Faced with suburban sprawl, Mumford still promoted garden cities, not Megalopolis, as the solution. The "landscape" of his vision in 1960 is

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[55] Mumford, "Landscape and Townscape," pp. 88-91.

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still a regional one; the "townscape" is still the small and decentralized garden city here.

Mumford never accepted Fishman's fatalism about Mumford's utopian regionalist project. For Mumford, the fact that "state-sponsored" regionalism became the suburban nightmare *under the regime of corporate capitalism* does not mean that such a process of centralization and standardization is *intrinsic* to the process of decentralization, as Fishman implies but never proves.

Urbanity, wrote Whyte in 1968 in his *The Last Landscape,* "is the quality produced by the great concentration of diverse functions and a huge market to support the diversity."[56] For Fishman, the congestion and insecurity of mega-cities are indeed justified by the "possibilities" that they and they alone, supposedly, "open up for smaller enterprises, and for the plans of ordinary people." Fishman quotes "an economist for the Regional Plan of 1929" as writing that New York

> is the paradise of the small manufacturer. In many lines of industry a small firm may conduct a national business without the owner traveling more than a few blocks in any direction. Supplies, related industries, financing, space, in lofts or old buildings, labor at the door, styles or ideas all in the very locality and buyers who come regularly from all over the country—all make it possible for the small fellow to exist.[57]

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[56] William H. Whyte, *The Last Landscape* (New York: Doubleday, 1968), p. 234

[57] Committee on the Regional Plan of New York and its Environs, *Regional Survey of New York and Its Environs, VI, Buildings and their Uses and the Spaces Around Them,* by Thomas Adams, Wayne D. Heydecker, and Edward M. Bassett, (New York: Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs, 1931), p. 188. Cf. Fishman, ibid., p. 6.

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Such "smaller enterprises," Fishman writes, include not only "small business," but also include small cultural institutions "which in New York City at least has belonged in creative terms less to the large institutions than to the world of the small gallery, the little magazine, the ad hoc theatrical production or ballet troupe." Fishman concludes, "Nonstandardized culture can survive only in the supportive ecology of the great city, where a small organization can make a national impact."[58]

But, like most of the other conclusions to which Fishman jumps in this article, this one does not follow from the premises. As Mumford wrote in a draft of his critique of Jane Jacobs, a passage Jacobs himself quotes and agrees with:

> The whole tendency of centralized metropolitan organization has been to wipe out the local bakery, the local laundry, the family managed grocery and to turn the business over to a big organization. Under the banner of free enterprise all the dynamic forces of our culture are curtailing every surviving freedom, and reducing to a dead level of bureaucratic regimentation every trace of individual initiative.

Mumford concludes: "Mrs. Jacobs wishes to fight new forms of economic organization that are wiping out choice and variety. But she absurdly ignores the larger forces"—i.e., the forces the capitalist free market itself, which Jacobs celebrated rather than adequately comprehended--"that must be controlled and humanized.[59]

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[58] Fishman, ibid., pp. 6-7.
[59] Lewis Mumford "Home Remedies for Urban Cancer," typescript version, Mumford Papers, Special Collections, Van Pelt Library, The University of Pennsylvania. Cf. Fishman, ibid., p. 8

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As his solution to this problem, Mumford advocates garden cities as an alternative to the big city itself. In his garden cities, the place of the small bakery, laundry, and grocery would be made secure if the residents wanted them there. But what then of the problem, raised by Jacobs, Whyte and Fishman, of securing markets and supplies for such culture? Mumford's answer would be to replace the market system with democratic socialist planning, and with direct financial sponsorship of such arts by the community, by the state. In this way, Mumford would supplant the sway of the market and "control and humanize" these "larger" corporate capitalist "forces" which Jacobs "ignores."

Fishman agrees with Mumford that the existing forces within the big city destroy whatever "nonstandardized culture" it formerly hosted. Thus, Fishman implies, planning is necessary; urbanity must indeed by "lacquered on," not left to chance. But if Fishman allows for planning, why doesn't he accept Mumford's garden city solution?

Fishman's response is to argue that the historical experience of statist "socialism" shows that planned garden cities must lead, supposedly, to a "totalizing new order." The "locus classicus" of this "totalism," Fishman argues, "was, of course, Le Corbusier, who despised the chaos of the modern city and the 'disorder' of parliamentary democracy and eagerly sought a Leader who could impose order from above on both." Echoing Jacobs' outlandish notion that Mumford and Le Corbusier were secretly brothers under the skin, Fishman writes,

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"Mumford too, for all his devotion to freedom, does not entirely avoid the totalizing impulse behind his 1930s project of a Regional City."[60]

For fear of such "totalism," Fishman, once a self-avowed utopian, now settles these days for a "realist" version of planning. Unlike Jacobs, Fishman does not reject planning *per se*. But his planning would only tinker with the existing urban system while leaving that system's basic megalopolitan contours intact. Assumedly, Fishman would plan for "non-standardized culture," but only within the limits set by the great city and the market—even though he agrees with Mumford that the most powerful tendency of the market-driven great city is to destroy such culture!

Fishman's logic, like Jacobs', seems to run more on nostalgia for the past and on aversion from the specter of comprehensive planning than on sound reasoning. Since, according to Fishman, comprehensive planning is by its very nature authoritarian, mega-urban chaos represents, oddly enough, the last best hope for democratic culture: it is "precisely in a world dominated by large organizations," writes Fishman, that "the great city becomes the great alternative." Fishman admits that the great city is fast becoming, or has already become, the exclusive province of just such large organizations. Yet he still argues that the great city is still the creation and the choice of the masses: "the

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[60] Fishman, p. 7.

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everyday choices of ordinary people produce (especially in the context of the great city) far more genuine order than the totalizers recognize."[61]

In arguing that the corporate-controlled great city should be championed over the suburban, corporate-controlled countryside, Fishman echoes the minimalist notion of 1950s liberals. They argued that American society, despite the terrors of McCarthyism and the banalities of mass media and conformism, deserved support over Soviet-style totalitarianism because there was still freedom here in the "margins," "between the cracks," because it was slightly less totalitarian. What neither Fishman nor these 50s liberals seems willing to consider is the possibility that both the official alternatives are unacceptable, that we could replace bureaucratic/corporate totalitarianism with democratic planning, that the realm of freedom and "nonstandardized culture" could be extended throughout the society.

The most Fishman seems willing to endorse is a cautious "market socialism," a "mixed" economy where planning only augments rather than replaces the current corporate capitalist order. He seems to recognize that such marginal planning will not resolve the inequalities and irrationalities of the

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[61] Fishman, ibid., pp. 7-10. In arguing that the corporate-controlled great city should be championed over the suburban, corporate-controlled countryside, Fishman echoes the minimalist notion of 1950s liberals. They argued that American society, despite the terrors of McCarthyism and the banalities of mass media and conformism, deserved support over Soviet-style totalitarianism because there was still freedom here in the "margins," "between the cracks," because it was slightly less totalitarian. What neither Fishman nor these 50s liberals seems willing to consider is the possibility that both the official alternatives are unacceptable, that we could replace bureaucratic/corporate totalitarianism with democratic planning, that the realm of freedom and "nonstandardized culture" could be extended throughout the society.

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market. But Fishman also seems fearful of the horrific Stalinist results of the undemocratic, authoritarian Bolshevik "socialist" revolution. Thus, like the old 50s centrists, and like his fellow "post-modernists," formerly utopians, socialists, and/or revolutionaries, Fishman grasps at the straws offered by current capitalist society, rather than go "once more into the breach" to fight for a genuinely democratic socialism.

To rationalize his newfound ameliorism as "democratic," Fishman, like Glazer before him, identifies the unplanned mega-urban status quo with the "everyday choices of ordinary people"—*as consumers*. Compare Fishman's language to Glazer's in "Why City Planning is Obsolete" *Architectural Forum*, July 1958: "were it not for the ["free enterprise"] 'independent whim of a multitude of individuals', there would be no way to develop the density and richness of texture that defines the city."[62] Glazer is quoting Mumford's associate, Clarence Stein. But Glazer ignores Stein's point: that the "multitude of individuals," as Stein writes further, only "determine the pattern" of urban living today "by filling in the cubbyholes marketed by the subdivider; and for the individual there seems to be no alternative."[63] Stein argues, correctly, that this is a very limited, *laissez-faire* concept of freedom. It offers people a "choice" between a cafe vs. a clothing store on the corner (today this is usually a choice between Starbucks vs. the GAP). This is on the corner, in both cases, of streets always

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[62]Nathan Glazer, "Why City Planning is Obsolete," *Architectural Forum*, July 1958, pp. 98, 160.
[63] As quoted by Glazer, p. 98 (Glazer does not give the reference.)

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filled with noisy and polluting automobiles and crowded sidewalks. Or, as Stein writes in his 1925 article "Dinosaur Cities,"

> there is little enough to choose between the dark, unsanitary tenements of lower Manhattan (some of them among the worst in the world) and the grey minimum of decency that West Philadelphia provides. What part does art, literature, culture, or financial opportunity play in the lives of the millions of men and women who go through the daily routine of life in our great urban districts?"

Here is a "choice" that is simply not offered in the mega-city, to most people.[64]

Confusedly, Fishman attacks Jacobs for this very same "laissez-faire" attitude; her blindness to the lack of "power" that the citizens actually enjoy within the present arrangement.[65] The only real alternative to the inequality and chaos created by the market, in Mumford's and my own opinion, is comprehensive planning. This would allow "ordinary people" to choose the *basic contours* of their lives, (to get the cars off the streets altogether, to supplant streets with common gardens, to live in a garden city vs. a crowded, polluted mega-city) comprehensively, consciously, and collectively. Yet Fishman implies that such comprehensive planning is authoritarian, because one urban planner, Le Corbusier, was authoritarian. This is nonsense.

In any case, culture, even "nonstandardized" culture, is only a means to an end, and that end is the good life. To argue, then, that we must preserve the tremendous congestion of the big city, with all its problems, because of the

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[64] Clarence Stein, "Dinosaur Cities," in Carl Sussman, ed., *Planning the Fourth Migration,* p. 66.
[65] Fishman, p. 8.

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"nonstandardized" culture it once fostered, which found its heyday in the Greenwich Village (and enjoyed by Mumford himself and his friends), is nostalgic, not realistic. Like Jacobs, Fishman defends the very same Megalopolis which, as he admits, increasingly vitiates, rather than fosters, cultural diversity and creativity. Like the defenders of suburbia, Jacobs and Fishman seek a site *within* the capitalist present to restore the values of a (capitalist) past that they nostalgically idealize. What neither Jacobs nor Fishman comprehend is the contradictory, dialectical nature of modern urban development. Both the poles of this development, the mega-urban center as well as the suburban periphery, are intrinsically bound up with capitalism itself, and thus, with corporate capitalism. Thus, as Mumford argues throughout the essays in *The Urban Prospect,* the endpoint of Megalopolis is cultural standardization along with social and urban chaos. To foster cultural diversity, creativity, and social life, we must instead to strive to create the conditions for such "nonstandardized" culture in the garden cities, as well as the (much fewer and smaller) metropolei, of the (democratically and comprehensively planned, socialist) future. Because he does not acknowledge this exigency, Fishman's call for planning as an alternative to Jacobs' "laissez-faire" philosophy is not really an alternative. It is instead a mere palliative, an excuse for failing to take a position between Mumford and Jacobs, between acceptance of mega-urban chaos and "standardization" vs. radical confrontation with the mega-urban status quo.

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Restoration of Existing Cities

As I wrote before, Howard's attitude toward the big city was basically passive-aggressive: to abandon it and then let it rot, until the capitalists left behind would become desperate enough and pliable enough to transform what was left over into yet another garden city. Mumford's plans for existing big cities were quite different, however. He sought active restoration and revitalization of the old mega-urban center instead. In formulating these plans, Mumford turned to Patrick Geddes, not to Howard. Before we discuss Mumford's plans for the big city, let's explore Geddes' contribution to his thought.

Geddes differed from Howard substantially. While he supported the garden city idea, he did not see the complete depopulation of the cities to the countryside as either a practical or desirable solution to modern ills. Ordinary people had to learn to work from where they were—cities—and revitalize their environment and their society themselves. It could not and would not be done for them by bourgeois elites. He did not think that cities, in and of themselves, were unworkable. He thought they could be revitalized.[66]

Like Mumford,[67] Geddes was influenced profoundly by the ideas of the social settlement movement in Britain and America. Ultimately, he was invited to the United States and touted by that settlement movement, for his attempt to

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[66] Helen Miller, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner* (London & New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 70.

[67] Recall from chapter 1 Mumford's indebtedness to Charles Horton Cooley and John Dewey. He also had very kind words of praise for Jane Addams and her social settlement movement, which

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synthesize Howard's Garden City ideas (which, as I discussed in chapter 1, had a great attraction for such American social reformers as Mary Simkhovitch) with the urban revitalization ideas of the social settlement movement.[68]

Geddes was personally involved in the Scottish version of the social settlement movement. He himself, along with his wife, Anna Morton, conducted their own urban revitalization projects. For example, they rented an apartment in an Edinburgh slum, and led their neighbors in beautifying the area. This involved as much a collective change in attitude, a rise in self-esteem for the inhabitants, as it did a paint can and a brush. "In such ways," Geddes wrote, "a better standard of living arises; and . . . the poorest hovel feels it may again become the beginnings of a new and better home instead of merely the wreck and ruin of an old one."[69]

To intensify and expand these efforts, Geddes pioneered co-housing with his friends in run-down areas, and coordinated the building of cooperative housing for university students as well as poor residents. Though support from financial quarters was decidedly limited, he also formulated redevelopment designs for whole urban areas, complete with parks, museums, and facilities for public gathering.[70]

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contributed to Cooley's and Dewey's thought on the importance of neighborhoods and face-to-face democratic community. See *The Culture of Cities*, pp. 297-99.

[68] See Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement, 1890-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 74.

[69] Paddy Kitchen, *A Most Unsettling Person* (London: Saturday Review Press, 1975), p. 113. Philip Boardman, ed., *Patrick Geddes: Maker of the Future* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), p. 18.

[70] Kitchen, pp. 112-29; Helen Miller, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist an City Planner*, pp. 68-84.

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Social ecology lay at the heart of Geddes' strategy of urban revivalism. Just as with the urban renewal programs of recent memory, Establishment planners of Geddes' era invariably proposed creative destruction: tear everything down before any new building can begin. In the field of town planning, as he writes about Old Edinburgh and Dumferline, Geddes' philosophy was first, to learn about the present geography and town layout, and how these suited or did not suit popular needs and aspirations. His aim was then to remove only what was deleterious to these needs and aspirations, restore what could and should be restored, and innovate only where necessary.[71]

Though his critique of current town planning (as far too piecemeal and destructive), and his support for the garden city movement was radical, at heart, Geddes styled himself a conservative—but in the best sense. He saw the urban tradition, no matter how depleted, as embodying ecological relationships between human beings and their environment. According to Geddes, the medieval tradition of town planning was quite similar to Howard's garden-city notions. Both were planned to meet human needs--not for profits.[72]

Unlike Mumford, it should be noted, Geddes had a strong aversion to government planning and intervention, in favor of pure citizen voluntarism.[73] But in his attack upon Thomas Adams's and the RPA's plans for New York, as well

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[71] Kitchen, pp. 83-84, 209. Patrick Geddes, "Cities in Evolution," in *Patrick Geddes: Spokesman for Man and the Environment,* ed. Marshall Stalley, pp. 117-19.
[72] Geddes, pp. 117-19, 171.
[73] Geddes, pp. 137-41.

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as later, Mumford revealed that he was far closer to Geddes than to Howard in his estimation of the importance of revitalizing existing cities, as well as building new ones.

In his rebuttal to the RPA, Mumford argues that a genuinely visionary plan for New York City would need to find ways to:

> (1) lessen the pressure of congestion in Lower Manhattan by recentralizing the business areas of the metropolis;
> (2) lay down new cities and direct the exodus of industry to these new cities *outside* the New York region: this means a widespread system of state aid for city building and housing, . . .
> (3) rebuild the blighted areas and take care of part of the increase of population, while it continues, by a process of intensive internal colonization. By proper planning this will increase the amount of open park and playground spaces, even though the density of population is increased above that of the two-story frame-house districts of South Brooklyn and Newark.[74]

Adams planned a development that extended megalopolitan expansion even further. By contrast, Mumford's plans, even for the garden cities that he planned for outlying areas, might be termed "intensive." Such planning is designed to utilize the existing resources as consciously, rationally, and as efficiently as possible, by and for the community. Mumford argues that "genuine regional planning" is different "from the superficial metropolitan planning to which the Russell Sage planners are committed, because regional planning "is not content to accept any of the factors in city growth as outside human foresight and control."

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Regional planning, metropolitan planning, is willing to go the distance rather than take the path of least resistance: "If we cannot create better urban conditions without changing our present methods and institutions and controls, we must be prepared to change them. . . . " Mumford asserts that the "metropolitan planners" of the RPA "hold that the present means are sacred and untouchable. . . ." But this, Mumford argues "is to succumb to a superstitious capitalistic taboo."[1]

Mumford gives several, economic, reasons for first, redeveloping the blighted areas within the city's boundaries intensively. The first has to do with the importance of existing service facilities: "With curtailed budgets and resources, we must temporarily plant our new building where the costs of site development and utilities have already been met: namely, in those areas already adequately served by sewers, water mains, transportation services."[2]

The second rationale has to do with the danger that blight is causing suburban exodus and the dwindling of tax revenues. To prevent this suburban exodus, Mumford argues, we must raze and rebuild these blighted areas "as desirable neighborhood communities, with more healthy, efficient houses and better sunlight, air, garden space and playgrounds than most of the suburbs can boast for the higher income classes which they chiefly serve."[3]

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[1] Ibid.
[2] Ibid., p. 251.
[3] Ibid.

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Mumford cites architect Henry Wright as his authority for how such intensive development might occur: "In the case of the large areas of two and three-story buildings throughout the metropolitan area, the population can, as Mr. Henry Wright has suggested . . ., be more intensively housed, with an increase of usable open space."[4]

Along with his partner, Clarence Stein, Wright began his architectural career in the innovative era of the early 1920s. This innovation had been stimulated by the U.S. government's construction of housing for wartime factories during World War I, along with a tremendous housing shortage after the war. These developments stimulated an interest by young architects like Wright and Stein in constructing public housing for whole communities.[5] Mumford drew heavily upon Wright's original vision for urban redevelopment. In a previous article, in the *Survey Graphic*,[6] Wright discusses the Sunnyside project created by the RPAA in Queens, New York. This project was based upon community planning rather than individualist consumption. This permitted "a sufficiently large parcel of ground to be treated as a unit, and not to be opened up in advance of use." This in turn permitted "grouping the houses and apartments." Such

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[4] Ibid.
[5] See Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City: Dwelling Type and Social Change in the American Metropolis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 122-30.
[6] Henry Wright, "The Road to Good Houses," *Planning the Fourth Migration*, p. 127. Reprinted from the *Survey Graphic* May 7, 1925; 165-168, 189.

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grouping does not create a bland uniformity, however; quite the contrary, according to Mumford. Individuality and community complement each other:

> Planned housing of this kind is able to achieve the sort of honest individuality that comes from performing adequately one's own part in a larger whole; each house is, as it were, a good private citizen, with its individual entrance, its individual porch, its individual drying green, its complete sense of privacy, and at the same time it performs its civic obligations—it supports a park, a playground, a tennis court, swings, slides, wading pools. Above all, no house attempts to shout down its neighbors by reason of special size or style.[7]

It is by virtue of this "collective" nature of Sunnyside that more people can be housed in the same space, that more open space can be produced, that the open space produced is more enjoyable. Yet costs can nevertheless be reduced, by avoiding, "the high costs of special fireproof construction which is imperative in more crowded quarters, and because we have eliminated the speculative profits of the builder who aims to give as little as possible for as much as possible."[8]

Wright and Mumford's scheme for "intensive," "group" housing should not be confused either with tenement buildings or walk-ups: the domestic architecture of the traditional slum. As Wright outlined in *Rehousing America* (1935), the "group" housing he imagined would be for two-story, two-family dwellings. These would be arranged lengthwise along the street and would abut each other; unlike the current arrangement for multifamily apartment houses or row houses, in

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[7] Ibid.

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their current narrow, deep lots. In this latter, standard arrangement, the length of the buildings runs perpendicular to the street. Thus most of the windows look out on narrow alleyways. In addition, the families usually share a hallway or stairway just as dark and narrow, and since both are nominally responsible for its upkeep, nobody takes care of it. Wright's plan would ensure far greater sunlight and fresh air. In the first place, he would have no such hallway, and he would put the stairway for the top floor on the outside. By "fronting" the housing rows near the street, by proposing to fuse five city blocks into one superblock, as he did in Sunnyside, Queens, Wright also provided far greater economy of land, and thus open, public park and garden space for the inhabitants of each superblock.[9] Wright wanted to group housing into more cooperative arrangements, redesign urban street patterns, and replat suburban sprawl, so as to obtain much more open space within cities, and much more space reserved for agricultural or park land outside the city.[10]

In a practical way, Wright and Mumford addressed the common concern among liberals about the drain of potential tax dollars out of the city into the suburb as well as the poor cultural, social, and political conditions found there. Where realists like the Whites scapegoated intellectuals, Wright and Mumford argued that, to stop this drain, we must merely make the city more attractive

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[8] Ibid.
[9] Henry Wright, *Rehousing Urban America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), pp. 29-98.

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again. This can be done by "rehabilitating," as Wright wrote, "the great areas that have been left behind in the slum and inner blighted districts . . . for a reasonably large portion of these central [city] workers." Such revitalized areas can offer to these workers the same amenities offered by the suburb as well as all the advantages the city has to offer: including "very ample open spaces."[11]

Like today (1999), the capitalist crisis of the thirties was making it difficult for suburban homeowners to continue to afford to live there and commute into the city. Wright and Mumford first hoped to build garden cities in the countryside. This would give not only the suburban homeowners, but also, the residents of slums and blighted areas, a place to move. Wright and Mumford would then redevelop these "inner blighted" and abandoned factory districts for intensive residential use. Real estate values would come down in the more central slum areas: so these in turn could be redeveloped, for both intensive residential use or the creation of well planned, beautiful community buildings and their facilities, like, as Wright imagined, the *Ringstrasse* of Vienna.[12]

Wright wrote an article for the Housing Study Guild's[13] series of articles in *The New Republic* in the spring of 1934, "New Homes for a New Deal." In it he

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[10] Wright, pp. 12-13.
[11] Wright, p. 14.
[12] Wright, pp. 14-15.
[13] After "the RPAA went bankrupt early in the depression," the Housing Study Guild was formed by Mumford, Henry Wright, Henry Churchill, Albert Mayer, and Carol Aronovici, "to train architects to take part in the new public housing efforts begun by" the New Deal government. Donald Miller, *Lewis Mumford, A Life*, pp. 362-63.

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outlines the program he envisioned to save cities like New York from blight, slums, homelessness, suburban flight, and consequent fiscal insolvency. Such a program would have to involve far more than the kind of melioristic "slum clearance" program that the real estate interests were willing to tolerate and that the New Deal liberals were therefore willing to promote at the time. It would involve the government's use of its power to condemn slums and blighted areas, upon which it would plan and create entire neighborhood communities.

> It will seek, not for an isolated block or two, but for a whole area, big enough to provide from ten to fifty thousand inhabitants. It will lay out its playgrounds, its local and adjacent parks and its school sites at the same time that it lays out its housing neighborhoods. . . . In short, it will not provide "model houses"; it will provide a vital, self-maintaining, permanently attractive environment.

This ambitious program would put the government in direct competition with private developers for the middle and working class market. For it will charge "a rent that will begin to cut close to the lowest-third income group, instead of beginning with the middle third and rising well into the upper third."[14]

In the following chapter, we shall explore the articulation of urban space Mumford envisioned within the garden city and the restored metropolitan neighborhood.

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[14] Henry Wright, "Abolishing Slums Forever," Part II of the Housing Study Guild series, "New Homes for a New Deal," *The New Republic*, February 21, 1934, p. 43.

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CHAPTER 6

THE SPATIAL ARTICULATION OF URBAN FUNCTION

What Mumford proposed was nothing less than a new, decentralized, regional civilization. In this chapter, we will take a look at how, concretely, this civilization would be structured. Besides need-fulfillment, what would be its core values? What would be the new center stage of the new "drama" of social meaning, for the new city that it would create?

Let's first briefly review the basic problems of the bourgeois Megalopolis. First, of course, there is population congestion, which we have already discussed at length in Chapter 2. Second, there is the ugly sprawl, which of course characterizes both inner urban and suburban development today, built at the expense of human community, as well as of aesthetic pleasure in the traditional harmony and unity of the urban environment. As Mumford writes in his article, "The Disappearing City" (1962), in the "cities of the past," people "expressed a visible unity that bound together, in ever more complex form, the cumulative life of the community; the face and form of the city still recorded that which was desirable, memorable, admirable. Today," however,

> a rigid mechanical order takes the place of social diversity, and endless assembly-line urban units automatically expand the physical structure of the city while destroying the contents and meaning of city life. The

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> paradox of this period of rapid 'urbanization' is that the city itself is being effaced.[1]

Thirdly, economic and social functions have been spatially overspecialized. The split between bedroom suburbs, central city cultural institutions, and office skyscrapers is the most obvious example of this trend. Fourthly, in part to compensate for the latter, as well as simply the basic processes of capitalism itself, mechanical systems of transportation, communication, and industrial production, or what Mumford calls "the increasingly automatic processes of production and urban expansion,"

> have displaced the human goals [and community] the are supposed to serve. Quantitative production has become, for our mass-minded contemporaries, the only imperative goal: they value quantification without qualification. In physical energy, in industrial productivity, in invention, in knowledge, in population the same vacuous expansions and explosions prevail. As these activities increase in volume and in tempo, they move further and further away from any humanly desirable objectives.[2]

Ironically, the "current suggestions for further urban improvement," such as

> gouging new expressways into the city, multiplying skyscrapers, providing moving sidewalks, building garages and underground shelters, projecting linear Roadtowns, or covering the entire area with a metal and plastic dome to make possible total control of urban weather . . . still tend to fall automatically into a purely mechanical mold.[3]

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[1] Lewis Mumford, "The Disappearing City," *The Urban Prospect*, p. 109.
[2] Mumford, *The City in History* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1961), p. 570.
[3] Mumford, "The Disappearing City," *The Urban Prospect*, p. 111.

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But this is in the very same pattern that creates the problems, in the first place. So a vicious cycle of sprawl, social fragmentation, mechanization, and further sprawl and social fragmentation, is promoted.

Thus Mumford's primary goal for the reconstruction of urban space is to integrate economic and social functioning, to create an aesthetic landscape: to recenter the modern urban drama around human themes rather than the mechanical abstractions of power, profit, and mechanization. As Mumford wrote in *The City in History* (1962),

> Should the forces of life . . . rally together [against the forces of destruction in modern civilization], we shall stand on the verge of a new urban implosion. . . The task of the coming city is . . . to put the highest concerns of man at the center of all his activities: to unite the scattered fragments of the human personality, turning artificially dismembered men—bureaucrats, specialists, 'experts,' depersonalized agents—into complete human beings, repairing the damage that has been done by vocational separation, by social segregation, by the over-cultivation of a favored function, by tribalisms and nationalisms, by the absence of organic partnerships and ideal purposes.

The task ahead is as much or more spiritual, aesthetic, and psychological, Mumford argues, as it is physical and technological. This is why urban/regional planning and architecture must play such a key role in the transition to a healthy civilization:

> Before modern man can gain control over the forces that now threaten his very existence, he must resume possession of himself. This sets the chief mission for the city of the future: that of creating a visible regional and civic structure, designed to make man at home with his deeper self and his larger world, attached to images of human nurture and love. . . .

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As we will discuss at more length later on, this new civilization, unlike the past, must be based upon a radically democratic political form. As Mumford writes here, "Now it is not the will of a single deified ruler, but the individual and corporate will of its citizens, aiming at self-knowledge, self-government, and self-actualization, that must be embodied in the city." The new regional civilization must be centered on each human being, and the whole man:

> Not industry but education will be the center of their activities; and every process and function will be evaluated and approved just to the extent that it furthers human development, whilst the city itself provides a vivid theater for the spontaneous encounters and challenges and embraces of daily life. . . .

Whether or not the old anthropological nostalgia for a benevolent "matriarchal" society ever really existed, Mumford argues that the essence of the new society and the new city must be maternal, nurturing, and humanistic:

> We must restore to the city the maternal, life-nurturing functions, the autonomous activities, the symbiotic associations that have long been neglected or suppressed. For the city should be an organ of love; and the best economy of cities is the care and culture of men.[4]

All right, so this is the goal. Now would Mumford propose to accomplish it?

We have already discussed at length Mumford's notion, borrowed from Howard, of how the building of garden cities could substantially and voluntarily reduce the overpopulation and congestion of the modern big city. Mumford proposed other solutions to redevelop the depopulated big city as well as to make

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the suburb for a humane as well as urbane existence. Mumford would like to replace our present highly technological systems of human interaction (or mechanical stimulation) with facilities that are simpler and encourage face-to-face social relations. They would thus be more potentially intimate and less lonely. They would be less dangerous and far more accommodating to pedestrians. They would be more accessible, more public, more local, more aesthetically pleasing, and more harmonious with the natural environment.

The Gridiron Pattern vs. Common Ownership

In the new city, town layout would not encourage motor traffic and congestion. Nor would it feature prominently the classic "gridiron" pattern of bourgeois cities. This pattern, consisting of a monotonous series of square plots and buildings, only became prevalent, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, because it maximizes the profitability of real estate speculators. It maximizes the development and sale of small plots to individual home, apartment building, and storeowners.[5] As Camillo Sitte pointed out, this gridiron pattern is the basis for the modern "art" of town planning, which is fundamentally flawed and ugly.

Sitte may have been somewhat extreme, far more than Mumford, in his condemnation of the ugliness of places even as beautiful as modern Paris. Despite their unplanned nature, such cities are not without a certain romantic charm. If we

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[4] Mumford, *ibid.*, p. 573.
[5] Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, pp. 161-68; 183-84.

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disregard these excesses, however, Sitte's views are quite valuable for the radical urban planner.

Sitte argues that the current art of town planning is borne of the abstract ideology, which Mumford would later term the "Baroque." When architects are guided by this ideology, when they place buildings within a city square, they believe these buildings must always occupy the geometrical center. This is far less aesthetically satisfying, in actual fact, than their placement on one side or a corner of the square. Sitte argues that the medieval town architects, armed only with their naive, traditional sense of aesthetics, produced far superior results than those moderns who insisted upon using their T-squares and compasses to plot out geometrically perfect layouts. Sitte critiqued the dearth of city squares in modern cities—which, according to him, depleted public life—and attacked the checkerboard grid of modern towns. This was not only monotonous and ugly, but also terribly inefficient for traffic, because, with this pattern, there is always cross-traffic, for which both automobiles and pedestrians are frequently forced to wait before they can proceed.[6]

Mumford also attacked the gridiron pattern. He, too, argued that the free market imposed monotony—since every builder appeals to same, lowest common denominator, and iconoclasts are usually punished with no sales. He also believed that the free market created architectural chaos. He celebrated the greater, more

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[6] Camillo Sitte, *The Art of Building Cities: City Building According to its Artistic Fundamentals*, tr. Charles T. Stewart (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1979, c 1945).

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unified architectural masses and diversity of forms and diverse social functions that master planning, based upon collective ownership, could make possible: forms and functions we will now discuss.

The Need to Limit Traffic and Articulate Activities and Functions

Mumford did not believe that all specialization of urban and economic function and activity was bad. Indeed, such specialization was a key factor in the city's contribution to human progress. For Mumford, the city, "in its social aspect," is "a special framework directed toward the creation of differentiated opportunities for a common life and a significant collective drama." Specialization creates more impersonal, "indirect forms of association," in addition to "direct face-to-face intercourse, . . . " The result may be beneficial; a potential richness and "multifacetedness" in the citizens' personalities, which "reflect their specialized interests, their more intensively trained aptitudes, their finer discriminations and selections. . . " Thus "the personality" is no longer locked into a stultifyingly rigid role, for it "no longer presents a more or less unbroken traditional face to reality as a whole."[7]

In other words, if I may interpret, what Mumford is saying here is similar to the thought of Simmel, about the difference between small-town or village parochialism and big city life. In the big city, the old traditions no longer provide the ready answers for all life's problems. Mumford, like Simmel, implies that this

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[7] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 481.

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freedom from traditional rigidity is by and large a good thing. But he is quick to add that such specialization is not without "the possibility of personal disintegration" if the social whole to which men now relate in a far more complex, interdependent manner is incoherent, or chaotic. While "dissonance," in small measure, is a good thing, a completely state of anarchy is obviously not beneficial. Thus "the need for re-integration through wider participation in a concrete and visible collective whole. What men cannot imagine as a vague formless society, they can live through and experience as citizens in a city."[8]

Just as the human personality could approach such dissolution, so can society itself. It too, as Mumford writes earlier in *Culture of Cities,* can disintegrate into barbarism. This division of labor, the specialization of interests, aptitudes, and pleasures can further humanize man, provided that men are re-connected to each other through a public society. The modern megalopolis, however, is a product of pecuniary interest. Here, construction and planning are designed with an eye to profit, exploitation, and social control. Thus the need to create public space is ignored. Thus irrationality grows, threatening to dissolve society into chaos. As we discussed in Chapter 3, Mumford thought that the frustration and chaos of "Megalopolitan" living arrangements could be partially responsible for such things as an increasingly common callousness, fiscal bankruptcy and indebtedness, militarism, and fascism.[9]

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[8]Mumford, *ibid.*
[9] Ibid., p. 291.

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In attempting to describe the alternative, a public, integrated society, Mumford develops the notion of a "contrapuntal society." Unlike the totalitarian, a-political utopias of the past, such a society attempts to "realize," within a broader urban unity, the "essential human need for disharmony and conflict, elements whose acceptance and resolution are indispensable to psychological growth." It recognizes the "positive need for variety in urban life: varied groups: varied personalities: varied activities."

In Mumford's view, as in Howard's, there is a need in urban planning for neighborhood and garden city "self-sufficiency," for "cellular organization," for focusing neighborhood life around single or a few social centers, as we shall presently discuss. Yet Mumford did not wish to create a social autarky thereby. For "Balance is a necessary attribute of all organic life but in the nature of things is incomplete." Just as the individual "needs family, friends, comrades, and colleagues" just as "the adolescent must leave his immediate neighborhood to become a member of a secondary school; so, too,

> The balanced community of from thirty to sixty thousand citizens may take care of the larger number of daily activities, but there remains a whole range of activities of a more occasional or specialized nature which requires a wider population base; higher education, certain types of recreation (like opera), specialized surgical or medical services, and comprehensively stocked department stores, for example, call for wider forms of co-operation.

Yet, for Mumford, "Even that" regional "balance" would not be completely satisfactory. For "certain activities" must draw upon the resources of larger regional areas which encompass several of today's nations, while "these in turn,

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though still more intermittently or selectively, will call for international collaboration."

Thus, according to Mumford, "a community, no matter how large, cannot be completely self-sufficient." What should be aspired to instead is a complex order of space and activity and function, so that each can be performed without interfering with the others.

> The essential problem of modern urban planning is to conceive a series of relatively self-contained units, each of which has an open passage to the next larger and more complex community, so that eventually it will achieve an articulate order leading from the life of the child to the life of the mature man, from the immediate day-to-day activities, involving neighbors, friends, family, and fellow workers, to occasional activities that will enlist the support of men and women in every part of the world or the specialized activities that will call for the constant intercourse of special people or groups everywhere.[10]

Variation and diversity is the essence of the city. Celebrants and promoters of the Megalopolis, such as Jane Jacobs and Rem Koolhaas,[11] would have us believe that we have already arrived, however. "The more the merrier," they imply: there is an automatic, direct relationship between a rise in congestion of urban population, and a rise in the level of general spiritual, emotional, intellectual, social, and sexual satisfactions on the part of this congested population. There is no point, or at least, the point is a long way off, at which the

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[10] Lewis Mumford, "The Modern City," in *Forms and Functions of Twentieth-Century Architecture*, ed. Talbot Hamlin, v. IV, *Building Types* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 807.

[11] See Jane Jacobs, *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, pp. 200-21; Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

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city will be so congested with people, that such satisfactions will diminish, rather than increase. For more people—with all their diverse aptitudes, talents, and interests—a greater number of diversity of buildings—shops, stores, apartment buildings, restaurants, offices and factories—and technologies—cars, TV stations, utilities, etc.—just make urban life more interesting.

Mumford, however, believes that there is such a thing as too much of a good thing:

> There is an optimum numerical size, beyond which each further increment of inhabitants creates difficulties out of all proportion to the benefits. There is also an optimum area of expansion, beyond which further urban growth tends to paralyze rather than to further important social relationships.

Mumford's reason for believing this "is a variation on an old theme in physics: that two objects cannot occupy the same space." So it is with "different technologies and activities. . . ." which must be limited to "different maximum areas" if each of them is to be enjoyed fully. Mumford delineates

> three types of public activity which are important. The first is the informal and political public meeting and activity which occurs on a quotidian basis, in a neighborhood, in the public square or the local meeting hall. The second is the kind of "selective" meeting together and activity of a significant minority, who must come from far distances to meet together or to use the same facility, such as a library or hospital, concomitantly. Finally, there is this activity of travel itself, which occurs on a system of increasingly rapid transportation.

These three basic public activities "encompass different maximum areas," and involve different purposes pursued by the individuals who move and interact

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within that space, none of which should be discouraged. "Rapid means of transportation," for example, "have given a regional area, . . . that unity that London or Hempstead had before the coming of the underground railroad." The activities of small children," on the other hand, "are still bounded by a walking distance of about a quarter mile. . . ." In the larger neighborhood, "men . . . congregate freely and frequently," while a far larger area serves "for a selective minority by a university, a central reference library, or a completely equipped hospital. . . ."

These areas require different levels of concentration of population if they are to be engaged in successfully. For "when the spaces of these activities are confounded, the extent to which people may participate in them, especially in the first type of informal, local meeting activity, becomes increasingly limited."

Modern transportation, above all else, must be separated from spontaneous social activity. In the first place, rapid transit threatens to displace social activity, or human life itself, if it is not strictly subordinated to social activity. For example, and contra Jacobs, one should not, quite obviously, run automobile traffic through a space in or near where children also play.

Conversely, congestion of population and building also has the potential to weaken human society, because it makes both rapid transit and social interaction difficult: "the region cannot function effectively, as a well-knit unit, if the entire

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area is densely filled with people—since their very presence will clog its arteries of traffic and congest its social facilities."[12]

Thus Megalopolis, because it is so confused, is in actuality severely limited in its capacity to offer its inhabitants a diversity and complexity of social life. As Mumford argues, "That which the overgrown metropolis achieved by mere vastness and juxtaposition of elements within a limited space, at the price of disorganization, must now be achieved by orderly design."[13] To articulate social uses so that neither pedestrian nor motor traffic supplants spontaneous pedestrian and face-to-face interaction thus becomes the primary task of new town planning. For Mumford, "the physical organization of a city, its industries and markets, its lines of communication and traffic, must" now become "subservient to its social needs." In the nineteenth century, Mumford argues, "we expanded the physical plant recklessly. . . " Today, "we must treat . . .the essential social nucleus, the organs of government and education and social service. . . as the essential element in every valid city plan. Now, "the spotting and inter-relationship of schools, libraries, theaters, community centers, is the first task in defining the urban neighborhood and laying down the outlines of an integrated city." [my emphasis][14]

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[12] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 481.
[13] Lewis Mumford, "The Modern City," in *Forms and Functions of Twentieth-Century Architecture*, v. IV, pp. 807-08.
[14] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 482.

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Hitherto, these social, economic, and cultural institutions—the important, well-financed ones, anyway—have been concentrated in the City Center of the contemporary Megalopolis. In the suburbs they are almost nonexistent. To reduce the transit, and thus the traffic, necessary to use and enjoy these institutions, we must make the local neighborhood, or garden city, their proper locale. Employment, culture, and social institutions must be decentralized to new neighborhood and garden city centers, so people will want to fulfill these needs where they are, as well as, but less occasionally, far away.[15] For "it is only by the decentralization of as many activities as possible into local units that the centralized facilities can be kept from becoming congested and ultimately unusable."[16] In addition, such decentralization makes life a lot easier for ordinary people, especially, women and children:

> The neighborhood is based, essentially, on the needs of families; particularly on the needs of mothers and children from the latter's infancy up to adolescence; as well as upon the needs of all age groups for having access to certain common cultural facilities: the school, the library, the meeting hall, the cinema, the church. To have all these institutions within easy reach of the home is a guarantee of their being steadily used by all the members of the family, while to have them scattered and unrelated, especially in distant parts of the city, is to discourage their constant use and often, when children must be cared for, to prevent their use entirely—except at the price of family neglect.[17]

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[15] Mumford, *ibid.*, p. 483, and see his "Neighborhood and Neighborhood Unit," *The Urban Prospect*, pp. 65-71.
[16] Mumford, "Neighborhood and Neighborhood Unit," *Urban Prospect*, p. 71.
[17] Ibid., p. 69. One should also mention the related predicament of the inhabitants of contemporary suburbia. Being middle class, most of them have the means to get to where they all want to go—but at the price of never seeing much of each other, since they are in their cars or the various and

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The "free market" is notorious for shortchanging these members of the human family. Thus, Mumford concludes, "the creation of a neighborhood . . . demands the orderly provision and relationship in both space and time of a group of neighborhood institutions, such as schools, meeting halls, shops, pubs, restaurants, and local theaters." This in turn demands "the continued activity of a public authority."[18]

The neighborhood/garden city must become the new, well financed urban nucleus, the basic center of the new urban drama. What would it look like? How would it be designed?

The Human Development-Centered Neighborhood

The drama of any society is the focal point, not just for social meaning, but for the transmission of this meaning down the generations. This drama is the forum for the reawakening and formation of the meaning, in the here and now. Heretofore, however, these dramas, these forums, have been as alienated, as undemocratic, as the societies whose meaning they organized. In the current, "paleotechnic" era, for example, the factory, the office, and the machine become the drama, or rather, the organizing spectacle, of our society, as was the church in the middle ages, the palace in the baroque. All of these spectacles, one way or

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extremely spread out different institutions in their lives: school, office, nursery, shopping mall, etc. See Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, pp. 182-207.

[18] Ibid., p. 73.

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another, promise participation in the formation of meaning in the society—but do not deliver on that promise.[19]

The neighborhood is the new center for the new, "biotechnical" civilization. Neighborliness, for Mumford, is the most basic, public social relation. For it is "the most primitive of social bonds," the "simplest form of association," based merely on the fact that one is, for much of one's life, in "view of one's neighbors." As neighbors, we enter into common life by the "very fact of birth or chosen residence. . . united primarily not by common origins or common purposes but by the proximity of their dwellings in space." Continuing on this theme, Mumford writes,

> There is nothing forced in this relationship and to be real it need not be deep: a nod, a friendly word, a recognized face, an uttered name—this is all that is needed to establish and preserve in some fashion the sense of belonging together. Neither friendship nor occupational affiliation is implied in the give and take of neighborhood life, though in time such relationships may take form, along with inter-marriage.[20]

Thus Mumford, at the beginning of his article, "Neighborhood and Neighborhood Unit," defines the neighborhood by describing it in its current condition within Megalopolis. Today, the most that neighbors can usually offer to each other is a very loose, hardly intimate, facial recognition or a reassuring nod. And Mumford implies that this is important, regardless of how weak a

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[19] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, pp. 471-72. See also his *Story of Utopias*, which I discussed in Chapter 1.
[20] Mumford, "Neighborhood and Neighborhood Unit," *The Urban Prospect*, p. 59.

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"neighborliness" this is: regardless of how weak neighborliness has become in our era. But then he discusses how this state of weakness came about. The first factor is "the segregation of income groups under capitalism, with a sharp spatial separation of the quarters of the rich and the poor." The second factor discussed by Mumford, is "a technical factor, the increase of wheeled vehicles and the domination of the avenue in planning." As the traffic avenue cut, "often ruthlessly. . . through urban tissue that had once been organically related to neighborhood life, the city as a whole became more united, perhaps; but at the cost of destroying, or at least of seriously undermining, neighborhood life. " The final result:

> the traffic avenue, abetted by other means of mechanical transportation, tended to break up, not just the rituals of local attachment, but the very sense, conveyed by street plans and architecture, of being part of an identifiable and lovable whole. . . . the long uniform avenue, the random placing of public buildings, created a nightmare of the indefinable. It was easier to lose oneself in the city as a whole than to find oneself in the neighborhood.[21]

But the neighborhood, for Mumford, is the basic organ of urban social life and social health. Within the field of sociology, Charles Horton Cooley was the first, according to Mumford, to locate the potential in the modern world for genuine face-to-face community, sought by Dewey as well as German sociologists like Toennies, in the urban neighborhood. As I wrote in Chapter 1, Mumford praised the social settlement movement of Jane Addams, Cooley and

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[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

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others at the turn of the century, for providing "a common building and meeting place where residents of the neighborhood could come together for the purposes of play, education, or sensibility." This movement, according to Mumford, "answered so many of the needs of the great city, particularly those that grew out of its anonymity and loneliness."

Within this movement for "community centers," Clarence Arthur Perry played a key role. Perry "was led by his analysis of the local community's needs to" argue successfully that "the basic unit" employed by planners be expanded: "from the city block or the avenue to the more complex unit of the neighborhood. . ." This change in perspective in turn made obvious the need for far more comprehensive proposals: "a reapportionment of space for avenues and access streets, for public buildings and open areas and domestic dwellings: in short, a new generalized urban pattern."[22]

Out of the community center movement, which unfortunately "seemed to collapse around 1920," came two important ideas. The first was "the recognition of the need for a definite building to serve as meeting place for the local community. . ." The second, " following from this," was "the simple practical suggestion that the elementary school, the most ubiquitous of local institutions, need only be provided with suitable halls, offices, and committee rooms to serve both children and adults, and to function both by day and by night."[23]

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[22] *Ibid*, pp. 62-63.
[23] *Ibid*., p. 64.

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The School as Social Center

Within the larger neighborhood/garden city complex, Mumford, following Perry, proposes that the school, along with the dwelling house itself, "with all their specialized communal aids," should "constitute the essential nucleus of the new community."[24] We shall discuss Mumford and Bauer's ideas on housing in our final chapter, when we discuss their transitional program for regional socialism. Here, let's discuss the school as a new dramatic social center for the new civilization.

The school, in the new, neotechnic society, is the first drama that is not a mere spectacle. It delivers on its promise of "transmitting heritage" and "reawakening of purposive group life."[25] The school, which is charged in any society with this task of generational transmission of knowledge and meaning, becomes the center of the new society, and thus dedicates the mission of that society to intelligent social thought and continual renewal of social meaning.

The human center of a humane civilization must be its most precious, weakest, needy, and most vulnerable members: children. Thus, in a human centered civilization, the school is the natural center for the neighborhood, and defines most if not all of the parameters for structuring the neighborhood, and the school itself. The size of the neighborhood "is determined by the convenient walking distance for children between the farthest house and the school and

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[24] Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, p. 472.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 471.

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playground in which a major part of their activities are focused." Mumford argues that the neighborhood's "pattern" should be "determined by the need of isolating school and home from the noise of traffic and its dangers: so main traffic areas of any sort must never run through a neighborhood." The neighborhood should also become a functional extension of the school: "While the school has become a universal institution, and the main symbol of the educational process, the instruments of modern education are continuous with life itself: no mere building can fully house them." Thus, agreeing with Clarence Perry, Mumford argued that "A neighborhood should be an area within the scope and interest of a pre-adolescent child: such that daily life can have unity and significance for him, as a representation of the larger social whole. . . " John Dewey had written that the child should be given the opportunity for, in Mumford's words here, "direct observance of all kinds of industrial processes . . . which the child at school may not merely inspect and understand, but also, perhaps, take part in as an educational experience. . . . Synthesizing Dewey's ideas with Perry's, Mumford argues that

> a special effort should be made in the design of neighborhoods to incorporate in them those light industries which directly subserve neighborhood life. There should be a compact, orderly industrial zone containing not only a garage and filling station, but likewise a laundry and a bakery: perhaps even a small electrically powered plant such as a wood-working shop or a garment factory. . . If in addition a neighborhood could provide a place for other types of activity—such as a plant nursery or a painter's studio—the educational value of the equipment would be highly increased.

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Such observance of industrial processes "in the open workshops of Athens no doubt gave to Plato and his fellow citizens [their] visual acuteness and [their] intelligent grasp of the processes of existence. . .."[26] "*Under the new biotechnic economy,*" Mumford concludes, "*the city becomes again, as it has often been in the past, the chief instrument of education.*" (Mumford's emphasis).[27]

As I quoted him once before, in Chapter 3, Jim Sleeper, in *The Closest of Strangers* (1990), confirms this view of the vital educational role performed by a good neighborhood:

> To children, especially, a good neighborhood life offers a wealth of spontaneous but manageable challenges and contacts beyond the front stoop or apartment door. When it works, neighborhood life introduces youths to the satisfactions of roles which the urban market rewards only indirectly, if at all: nurturer, defender, uplifter, communicant, teammate, lover, friend.[28]

Space for Politics and Culture vs. Commerce

As I wrote in the last chapter, Ebenezer Howard placed the shopping mall at the center of his garden city scheme. Mumford criticized him for this. In *The Culture of Cities*, discussed in Chapter 2, Mumford also described his ideal city in terms of creating intimate relations between strangers. We may surmise, then, that Mumford's garden city would be a far more profoundly political and social entity. It would be less exclusively concerned with shopping than the modern mall, much

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[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 472-473.
[27] *Ibid.*, pp. 474.
[28] Jim Sleeper, *The Closest of Strangers* (New York: Norton, 1990), p. 123.

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more with recreating the old Greek tradition of the city as a meeting place, political as well as social and economic.

In the Greek *agora,* however, both mercantile and political activity was permitted to occur simultaneously, in the same space. This tradition is perhaps what Howard had in mind when he put a shopping mall at the center of his plans: perhaps he assumed that politics and culture could also be pursued there in the modern era as well. But such confusion of activities, Mumford argues, was only possible and desirable in a more "primitive" era. We live in a far more technologically advanced society. Thus our collective desires and activities can come into a great deal more conflict with one another; *and,* we have far greater capacity to segregate them, spatially and architecturally, so as to maximize the enjoyment of each. It may indeed have been fine in the ancient Athenian agora, *contra* Aristotle's patrician disdain,[29] to put politics and markets in the same space. Indeed, for its time, the Athenian *agora* represented a remarkable historical, social, political achievement. But the one rule in studying history is that all things change: social relations, institutions, men themselves. The rising merchant class led the Athenian democracy. This is why both the demos and the aristocrats, like Plato and Aristotle, identified democracy with the placement of merchant activity right there in the political arena, the *agora.* In our society, the bourgeoisie has become the greatest opponent of the possibility of popular democracy—for obvious reasons. Their commercialism now pretty much

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preempts political awareness and activity, and prevails over most of social life. To establish real democracy, the ubiquitous presence of commercialism and the advertising mentality must be reduced. In saying this, I do not wish to argue that shopping must be eliminated, nor that informal communication cannot occur in a (quiet) shopping mall; merely that separate space must be set aside for public meetings. To ensure the good life, we need to ensure that political as well as intellectual, spiritual, intimate activities and sentiments also get their place in the sun, that these do not get drowned out by blaring speakers advertising the latest discount sales.[30]

Intimacy among Strangers

If we need to segregate one public activity from another, how much more so, private, intimate meetings and activities from public activities? In chapter 2, I argued that the problem of "living among complete strangers," posed by the congestion of the modern metropolis, *is* not solved within the big city, because it *cannot* be solved there. Does this mean that people can only live among their intimate friends, that the good life can only be lived in the (boring, stagnant) *Gemeinschaft* of the small village? Not at all. The garden city proposed by Mumford and co. would still promote concentrations of population well above the usual number of close friends and lovers any single individual manages to

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[29] See Aristotle, *Politics,* 1331a30, Book 7, no. 12 (New York: Penguin, 1982), p. 425.
[30] See Susan Willis, *A Primer for Daily Life: Is There More to Life Than Shopping?* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

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accumulate, even over an entire lifetime. Yet the garden city would not be so crowded as to overwhelm the individual with the strangeness of others. Most importantly, in the decentralized garden city, crowdedness and competition for scarce space would no longer be a problem. Thus, much urban space could be allocated for chance, yet relatively intimate meetings between strangers. No longer would the crowded street, restaurant, or the marketplace monopolize "public" space; in the garden city, other spaces could be planned for such spontaneous encounters. There could be many spacious gardens, quiet cafes, and benches in quiet squares, nature reserves, and museums. One could get to know a good many of one's neighbors and fellow citizens in such a planned garden city far more easily, spontaneously, and in a far more relaxed atmosphere than in the crowded metropolis. We could break down the rigid distinction found in the big city between intimacy and otherness, between the many strangers in one's life, and one's few intimate friends. Such writers as Herman Melville, Delmore Schwartz and Henry Miller expressed this gap poignantly and fearfully. This gap yawns so widely between the isolation of one's private apartment and the crowded street, full of strangers, below. To bridge this gap is Mumford's romantic urban quest. The ideal city he wishes to create would give "collective form to what Martin Buber has well called the 'I-and-Thou' relation." This is Bourne's "beloved community" of Bourne. Here, people, complete strangers as

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well as close friends, could meet frequently, comfortably, and spontaneously, in such a way that they might come to know and love each other intimately.[31]

Mumford's model for this intermediate space for casual meeting seems to have been predominantly the garden or park—a space where even sexual encounters could be pursued without fear of embarrassment, as long as enough foliage was provided. But this is inadequate, I believe. Surely not every encounter, especially non-romantic encounters, require this level of privacy. What about meetings among groups of friends, or strangers desirous of becoming friends with more than one person at a time? Thus, I think, Paul and Percival Goodman positively expanded Mumford's vision, where they proposed public *squares* for such semi-private, semi-public encounters. In their book, *Communitas,* which Mumford lauded,[32] the Goodman brothers proposed planning their "new community" around "closed squares," which they asserted were "the definition of a city." These squares, which are derived from the thought of town planner Camillo Sitte, are patterned after the old *piazzas.* Such squares, the Goodmans inform us, "are not avenues of motor or pedestrian traffic, but are places where people remain." Though, in the "new community," "place of work

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[31] Mumford, "Landscape and Townscape," *The Urban Prospect,* p. 88. For an overview of Buber's work and an explication of the "I-Thou" ideal, see Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

[32] An excerpt from Mumford's very favorable review appears on the front cover of the second, revised paperback edition. Mumford termed it " fresh and original theoretic contribution to the art of building cities. . . a witty, penetrating, provocative and, above all, on many essential matters, a wise book. . . ."

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and home are close at hand . . . in the city square is what is still more interesting—the other people."[33]

Planning for Each Phase of Life and for Each Family Member

In his 1949 essay, "Planning for the Phases of Life," Mumford cites the insight of Dr. Joseph K. Hart, in 1925, that, at that time, "city planning was mainly conceived in terms of a single phase of life: that of adults without family responsibilities. . . ." Hart had explored the meaning of the old saying that "the crowd on the boulevards never grows old": "the boulevard, by reason of its purpose and design, draws to it the same age groups, following the same interests, pursuing the same ends."

Mumford updates this insight for 1949:

> In spite of that timely reminder, the city planner has not yet come to realize the full nature of his task: the provision of an environment suited to every phase of life and growth from infancy to senescence. Too much of our recent planning up to now, certainly in the United States, has been concentrated on adult life: indeed, on the adult life of mainly the masculine half of the population, and on only so much of this life as is concerned with business, industry, administration, traffic, transportation.[34]

In this essay, Mumford goes on to consider what institutions, spaces, and facilities, in addition to schools, are necessary to fulfill the needs of every family

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[33] Paul and Percival Goodman, *Communitas*, pp. 162-63. See also the diagram on p. 159.
[34] Mumford, "Planning for the Phases of Life," *The Urban Prospect*, p. 24. The article by Dr. Joseph K. Hart, according to Mumford, was in *Survey Graphic*, May 1925.

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member, at whatever stage in their life process they happen to be. We will briefly outline each phase and the facilities appropriate:

Birth, Infancy, Pre-school

For infancy, to combine the advantages of the modern hospital with home care, while escaping the drawbacks of both, Mumford recommends

> a small nursing home: established as an integral part of a unit of, say, two hundred and fifty to five hundred families; attached perhaps to a local medical clinic, which needs so many of the same facilities. Confined to such a place, a mother would have access to her other children, could be visited easily by her husband, and could be looked after by relatives or neighbors, except where special care was required: an important economy[35]

Like anyone else, the mothers require some level of sociability. Thus the need for a "common meeting place for mothers, where, on a good day, they might come together under a big tree, or a pergola, to sew or gossip, while their infants slept in a pram or their runabout children grubbed around in a play pit."[36] For children a little older, what is needed is a little more freedom, but within a "snug" environment:

> There should be something snug, intimate, protective about this order of planning, if it is to correspond to the needs of the very young, who have perhaps not altogether forgotten the environment from which they originally emerged. Little children—perhaps even up to the age of children—need hiding places and cubby-holes: walls and bushes: walls and bushes, if not caves and pits, perform their function in the open. Above all, the little ones,

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[35] Mumford, "Planning for the Phases of Life," *The Urban Prospect*, p. 26.
[36] *Ibid.*

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> especially those under six, must get the feel of their environment: they need sand, gravel, stones, boards, branches, billets, for their play activities; and to prevent these materials from being put to destructive uses, the most elemental type of playground might well be placed in a shallow, well-drained sand pit, surrounded by a stone or brick wall, around which the mothers could sit. . . .[37]

The School Child:

Mumford writes that we should attempt to minimize the "shock and inner disorder" that results when we suddenly transfer a child from "the protective oversight of the mother" to "what is often, from the child's point of view, a gigantic complex building: awful in its impersonal immensity." While a small elementary school is not entirely bad,

> perhaps the best way to effect the transition is through a nursery group in the neighborhood unit; and to make this possible, I for one would willingly forego wholly professional care in exchange for the more amateurish part-time treatment by partly trained mothers, working for a nominal reward.[38]

As the child grows older, his play space should become less "snug," more "uninhibited." But, as Mumford writes, at present,

> In our effort to provide space for the formalized play of children in cities, we have forgotten, especially in new communities, the role of spontaneous play. The endeavor to take children off the dangerous street, in crowded urban areas, has made us too easily content with creating equivalent asphalted areas that lend themselves only to a limited round of activities: slides, swings, or . . . jungle-gyms, apparatus for danger-free climbing, safe, easily kept up, but, from the child's standpoint, often inhibiting.

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[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.
[38] *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

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Mumford's model for appropriate play space for this age group is decidedly uninhibited:

> Meanwhile, in the bombed-out areas of London, we have discovered a new kind of playground, more to the fancy of children above the age of six: old foundations, opened up cellars, rock and rubble for clambering over, sometimes a pool of undrained water for dabbling in or sailing an impromptu boat.
>
> Such playgrounds have a fascination for the child that never becomes dulled. Growing up in New York, almost a half century ago, I still had the run of open lots, with rocky uneven surfaces, where the boys of my street roasted apples and potatoes; and where we played games impossible on pavement or street. Bushes and parapets may be used to separate such informal play areas, visually, from the rest of the community; but a certain untidy plenitude of facilities—old boards, stones, boxes—may increase their value for play.

In such areas, Mumford writes, children's aggressive, more primitive impulses may be channeled constructively. Such areas

> are the urban equivalent for the more primeval type of wilderness, which so delights the heart of children. Such areas would afford a channel where destructive impulses could innocently run off and lose their force: countered, often in the same area, by the urge to build and construct. Perhaps the only special contribution to such areas would be to design them in depth: grading down some of the hazards, or, by digging and quarrying, creating artful opportunities for adventure.[39]

To socialize adolescents and to make them feel a vital part of the community, as well as to take advantage of their tremendous energy, Mumford hopes to revive the old utopian ideal of "work armies," for which idea Mumford

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thanks "Fourier and Goethe, . . Schreber and William James and Rosenstock-Huessy [and, I would add, Marx, Engels, and Bourne--TS]," In support of this idea, Mumford writes,

> Just as there is no better way of making a male parent feel the responsibilities of parenthood than by giving him the active care of a child for a whole day, so there is no better way of making citizens than by turning some of the care of the community over to the young: in such fields, an hour of practice is worth a week of book-learning.

The term "work armies" might put readers off. I don't think that Mumford, any more than Goethe or Marx, meant for these armies to be structured along the lines of the rigid hierarchy and discipline of modern armies; a better term might be "youth corps." Such youth corps would be a mainstay of Mumford's program for transforming the regional environment into one big garden for human enjoyment. Such work, according to Mumford, would be "perhaps the best place to begin . . ." for such youth corps.[40]

Adolescents are not just potential worker-drones. They have needs, the most important of which, at their age, as Wilhelm Reich wrote, were sexual. Mumford writes that the previously discussed institution of "work-armies," when they do reconstruct the natural environment, will perhaps benefit youth themselves most of all "at their next phase of growth: that marked by courtship." "In the open country, Mumford complains, youthful "lovers have little difficulty in finding places of seclusion that match their mood, but the lack of such walks and retreats

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[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

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in our cities, even in our parks, make even courtship too often either brief or furtive, harassed or embarrassed to the point of desperation. . . . " Thus urban planners should recognize that "what lovers need are accessible places where they can easily lose themselves and get away from the visible presence of others." For examples of uban planning-for-courtship, Mumford offers "the maze, that favorite device of Baroque planners," as well as Frederick Law Olmsted's "The Ramble," part of his design for Central Park in New York. "With its irregular topography," The Ramble is a "deliberately made . . . place to get lost in; with the admirable result that it is perhaps the one place well adapted to love-making in the whole city of New York.[41]

Maturity:

Mumford writes that in previous ages, "work went on . . within sight of the family, for example, and often with the cooperation, in different degrees, of all its members. There were no walls, visual or functional, between business, domesticity, education." But "the age of specialization, concentrating on mechanical efficiency alone, has robbed working life of some of its esthetic and human dimensions." Thus, "here as elsewhere in modern cities a deliberate attempt must be made to reunite these severed aspects of life, which create, almost automatically, radical divisions and disharmonies in the personality."

Echoing an argument he had with them in the Letters-to-the-Editor

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[40] *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

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column of the *New Republic,* Mumford criticizes Paul and Percival Goodman for proposing "that houses and factories should be united around 'city squares'" as a solution. While Mumford had no problems with squares, per se, he had a problem with placing factories around them. By so placing factories around their squares in order to resolve the division between industry and sociability in modern life, Mumford asserts that the Goodmans propose "to go back to an earlier primitive form," in which the problem of activities "confounding" each other, as discussed above, still remained. Mumford argues that we need instead "to create new form" in which we consciously articulate, contain, and facilitate different social, economic, political, and transit activities as appropriate. Instead of confounding social life with industry, Mumford argues, we need to introduce into

> the industrial zones of our towns, either by renovation or by new design, the domestic and social functions appropriate to the working day: accessible playgrounds, for example, for physical recreation during lunch hour and at other intervals; a diversity of dining halls to replace the canteen; meeting halls and committee rooms, usable not by a single plant but by the whole area, for conducting the political affairs of both the management and the worker, school buildings and museums, so that vocational preparation and part-time study of a non-vocational nature might be encompassed with a minimum waste of time and effort.[42]

These are points well taken. But in making them, Mumford is not being fair to the Goodmans. Firstly, Mumford's implication that the Goodmans gave no consideration to our need for indoor social centers was patently false. And

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[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

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Mumford must have known this. Alongside Mumford's own article, "The Modern City," in Talbot Hamlin's 4-volume anthology, *Forms and Functions in Twentieth Century Architecture,* there appeared an article by the Goodman brothers, entitled "Community Buildings," which deals with this very topic.[43] Secondly, we have discussed the fact that Mumford's problem with the Goodmans' schemes for factory placement inside the city was probably based upon a misunderstanding. The factories that the Goodmans would place off their city squares would have been noiseless, and clean. I believe that the Goodmans' vision of a workday integration of factory workers and public and social life is actually an improvement upon Mumford's idea that workers ought merely to have more meeting space *among themselves, within* the "industrial zones."

Pointedly, the Goodmans asked Mumford, "is the work [of workers] undignified or uncultural"?[44] Who should the city and its public spaces be for, if not for the workers? The fact that Mumford creates a separate category for "management," *alongside* workers, is disturbing. It might indeed be evidence of his life-long, middle class wavering over the idea that workers should control society and participate completely within it. As opposed to segregating the workers away from the rest of the city during the workday—a strategy which should have been anathema to Mumford, judging from everything he wrote

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[42] *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.
[43] Paul and Percival Goodman, "Community Buildings," *Forms and Functions in Twentieth-Century Architecture,* ed. Talbot Hamlin, vol. 4, *Building Forms,* pp. 647-58.
[44] Paul and Percival Goodman, reply to Mumford, *New Republic* vol. 110, no. 9, February 29, 1944, p. 283.

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against social segregation—the Goodmans' ideas about making factories smaller, quieter, cleaner make much more sense. It is unfortunate that Mumford could not bring himself to recognize this.[45]

Something else that modern society lacks is meeting space, outside the home, for families. The "mere domestic closeness" provided in a "dwelling house and a garden, placed among a thousand other dwelling houses . . . is not enough. . . " For "the ingrown family tends to become self-absorbed, isolationist, exclusive, hostile to the further development of its members." Thus, paradoxically, domestic closeness and insularity within the young family engenders its opposite as the children grow up. Either teenagers' extra-domestic activities are completely ignored, or they are driven away from the nuclear-familial home by parental obsession with control. The remedy for this, according to Mumford, is "companionship and common interests outside the home, first, on the part of the husband and wife, then such companionship as may take in, directly or indirectly, the younger members of the family, . . . " We must therefore create

> a common meeting place, outside the confines of its home, where the varied age groups, now so often thrust apart by the variety and intensity of individual interests, can become united again, or at least go about their work or play within view of the other members. . . . For parents and children to be constant companions is far from advisable; but there are much more likely to be good family relations if each has some idea of what the other is doing—instead

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[45] Perhaps this was due to Mumford's personal and political rivalries with the Goodmans over the war (while the Goodmans were anti-war pacifists, Mumford had vehemently supported U.S. entry into World War II and lost his son, Geddes, in a battle in Northern Africa). Throughout this exchange in the *New Republic,* Mumford refers to them somewhat sarcastically as the "*Messrs. Goodman.*"

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> of having their activities so separated that they live in different worlds. . . .

In this regard, Mumford mentions the settlement house, the community center, the health center, the elementary and secondary school, as such common meeting places. These already have meeting rooms, "auditoriums, swimming pools, gymnasiums, and workshops" for meetings and common recreation for each member of the entire family in the evenings. Such facilities are good even for adults-only activities, as "simple form of meeting place . . . as a room capable of holding fifty people seated, where neighborhood discussions may take place, and where occasional social festivities—on a scale too populous for the home—may take place."[46]

To facilitate what Mumford calls "citizenship," but what might be better termed "community" or "fraternity," the city needs to provide informal meeting places

> . . a good plan will multiply the occasions of an accidental and unpremeditated character, such as those that take place in compact market areas and in public eating places. . . . Thinking in these terms, the planner will multiply the internal spaces of the city, where people may meet for diverse purposes—marketing, eating, drinking, talking, debating—instead of merely multiplying the occasions for escaping from sight and contact with other people or of massing together to perform a single function. A plan that does not further a daily intermixture of people, classes, activities, works against the best interests of maturity.[47]

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[46] Mumford, "Planning for the Phases of Life, *Urban Prospect*, pp. 34-37.
[47] Ibid., p. 39.

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Another requirement of adults, which often goes unmet today, is "personal solitude":

> One of the marks of maturity is the need for solitude: a city should not merely draw men together in many varied activities, but should permit each person to find, near at hand, moments of seclusion and peace.

It may indeed be true that a certain level of solitude can be found in Central Park and other big city parks--when one has the time to travel there. But "the function of withdrawal, so far from being segregated as in the medieval cloister, must be recognized as a daily human need."[48] This is a big reason, as we discussed in Chapter 3, for building garden cities, where travel to places of solitude will be far more convenient.

Senescence

For the elderly, Mumford makes the argument, frequently heard today, that they should be cared for as much as possible within the neighborhood rather than segregated into some impersonal institution. A community of generations, a "mixture of age groups," is "essential to good life. . . ." Mumford points out as well that "there are many important social functions that the aged, so long as their mental faculties are not impaired, may perform to everyone's benefit. . . . [for women: sewing, mending, etc.; for men: gardening, odd job repair, etc.] Moreover," Mumford argues, "the aged have a natural affiliation with the young, which often works out reciprocally: as experienced baby-tenders and patient

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'sitter' they would relieve the parents of the awful confinement of twenty-four-hour attendance upon the young."

Therefore, Mumford proposes the creation, in every neighborhood

> A small one-story unit, of from five to ten couples, or a score of individuals, not segregated in any way from the rest of the housing development, is a far more adequate provision for the aged till they need continuous professional care in a nursing home. Such units should be placed, preferably, near playgrounds or schools or neighborhood markets, for the old want most of all the reassuring presence of life, to overcome the loneliness and the growing sense of alienation or frustration that age itself brings with it. . . .

Housed in this fashion,

> the aged could be near their families, near enough at hand for affectionate supervision or occasional nursing; best of all, capable of participating, without a sense of being burdensome, in the lives of their children or their neighbors; useful, blessed with a purpose in life, even as their days narrow. . . .[49]

Thus, by discoursing on the planning necessary to accommodate the needs of every phase of life, Mumford has provided a comprehensive and detailed portrait of the planned urban society. In our next chapter, we will delve deeper into Mumford's and his associates' concept of regionalism.

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[48] Mumford, "Planning for the Phases of Life, *Urban Prospect,*" p. 40.
[49] *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

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MEGALOPOLIS VS. THE MASSES: LEWIS MUMFORD AND THE POLITICS OF 20TH CENTURY ROMANTIC URBANISM

by

THOMAS SMITH

VOLUME II

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2000

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CHAPTER 7

MUMFORD'S PHILOSOPHY OF REGIONALISM

We have discussed the most concrete, tangible alternatives to Megalopolis proposed by Mumford: the concept of the garden city, and the need to revitalize existing cities. Now we turn to discuss the far more complex and broader alternative to the whole culture of Megalopolis—Mumford's concept of regionalism.

For Mumford, regionalism must serve as the basis for the new society. Though the garden city was his ideal urban form, he writes in the *Culture of Cities*, "The garden city can take form . . . only when our political and economic institutions are directed toward regional rehabilitation."[1] Regionalism is a deep awareness of the importance of geographic, biological, economic, social and cultural facts in their mutual interrelationship, which makes rational planning possible.

Let's now discuss in depth Mumford's philosophy of regionalism, beginning with its intellectual ancestry, as well as the "progressive" regionalist milieu of the twenties and thirties in which Mumford found himself.

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[1] Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, p. 401.

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Mumford's Regionalist Ancestors and Associates:

I. Fichte

The regionalist movement starts, I would say, with the nationalist movement. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, the German romantic philosopher developed a nationalist, autarkic idea of regionalism in his essay, *The Closed Commercial State* (1800). Fichte opposed the feudal, dynastic pretensions to Germany of the Hapsburg and other empires, along with imperialist expansion of these European powers into Africa and Asia, both of which led frequently to war. Fichte drew a connection between this imperialist commerce and capitalist exploitation within Germany, which treated men, according to Fichte, as beasts of burden. With this animus, Fichte fostered the nationalist idea of "natural frontiers of realms." These national "realms" would differ from the old feudal, dynastic empires profoundly. They would be geographically integrated, as opposed to the patchwork quilt of dynastic claims to which each absolutist emperor currently made claim. This would empower the urban burghers—the emergent bourgeoisie whom Fichte supported against the old aristocracy. Fichte hoped that these burghers would create a national economy for the sake of the people, rather than for the enrichment of the dynastic rulers.

Fichte argued that the diversity and "fertility" of production among the different "regions" within the "natural" nation" were sufficient that each national people lived could achieve complete economic self-sufficiency as soon as the government engaged in "the complete closure of the commercial state." The state

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would supplant market anarchy, in Fichte's scheme. It would closely control commerce, especially international commerce, so that the enormous disparities of wealth, the poverty, war, and the exploitation that Fichte attributed to international and national market freedom would no longer arise.

Fichte's autarkic dream begins in a desire to alleviate the suffering of the poor and the slavery overseas fostered by imperialism. But it culminated, one might argue, in modern bourgeois nationalism, the fratricide in the Balkans and elsewhere, the genocidal nationalism and imperialism of Nazism, as well as the barbaric bureaucracy of the Stalinist "socialism in one country" idea. These are all outcomes Fichte would never have envisioned, however, let alone promoted. But the fact of the matter is that the medieval burghers became the modern bourgeoisie, who, contrary to Fichte's expectations, have employed nationalism to foster imperialism, war, and exploitation: even though nationalism contradicts the globe-engulfing endeavors into which competition propels, as Marx and Engels wrote in the *Communist Manifesto:*

> The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world-market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of Reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of

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> distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations.[2]

Summarizing what he had written in *The Story of Utopias*, to which we will turn in the next chapter, Mumford wrote in the *Culture of Cities* that nationalism was inherently oppressive. He saw it as "an attempt to make the laws and customs and beliefs of a single region or city do duty for the varied expressions of a multitude of other regions. . . held together" through "indoctrination in the school, propaganda in the press, restrictive laws," etc.[3] It has also become abundantly clear that in the modern world, no nation can be economically self-sufficient. It is the world market that has made possible the realization of Fichte's dream of prosperity for all people: to realize the possibility requires international, democratic socialism, not nationalist autarky.

Yet if we discard Fichte's nationalist and autarkic delusions, insisting upon the need for international trade and economics, the possibilities that Fichte raises appear tremendously valuable, nevertheless. Can we have a world where international trade exists, yet where that trade is not exploited by privileged elites? Can we build democratic communities whose people have a far greater say in economic decision-making than currently? Such decision-making would have to based upon a more limited level of regional and local "self-sufficiency"—a level which could and would not exclude intra-national and international trade,

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[2] Karl Marx and Friederich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," *Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 476.

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but which would give the local inhabitants an economy they could have some measure of control over.

Building upon Rousseau's democratic ideas, Fichte, by counterpoising control by local urban burghers to that of foreign dynasts, also originates the concept that popular democracy and freedom *must* have as its precondition at least this limited level of local and regional economic self-sufficiency. People cannot easily make decisions, or for that matter, get excited about making decisions only about economic factors that operate far away. In such an economy, democratic communities would merely end up rubber-stamping decisions made by their "representatives." This is not an argument against economic interdependence, nor against political delegation, any more than it is for Fichte's autarky. But within an interdependent socialist economic system, why not attempt, as much as possible, as long as it is still within the realm of efficiency and economic possibility, to match resources, production, and consumption, on a local basis? Such local economy gives the local inhabitants something to make decisions about, a real content for their local democratic form.

Fichte is the first writer to question the economic as well as political rationale, in Stuart Chase's words, of "carrying coals to Newcastle." In other words, he opposed our modern practice of shipping and selling raw materials or goods (such as coal), to regions (such as Newcastle), where the same raw

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[3] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 349.

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materials could be found or the same goods could be manufactured indigenously.[4] Instead, however distorted by his nationalism, Fichte's vision consists of a regional matching of consumption, production and resources, where, as much as possible, the citizens of a given region could rely upon their own resources—coal, for example—for their consumption. Fichte thinks this would eliminate the basis for war, that it would be more efficient, and that it would create a potential for economic justice. Fichte comprehends that imperialism abroad is the precondition not only for war, but also for exploitation and injustice at home. The "inner essential prosperity" of his alternative and antidote to imperialism, the autarkic "nation," "consists of being able to procure the most human pleasures with the least amount of hard and continuous labor. This is the prosperity of a *nation*." Fichte argues, as if to connot the prosperity of an 'entire society': "not" the prosperity "of a few individuals whose greatest prosperity is often the most striking indication as well as the true cause of the greatest misery of the nation. . . ." The "nation" national autarky, is Fichte's remedy, then, for the economic polarization that imperialism creates within the imperial society: it will ensure that "prosperity [will] be appropriately spread amongst all in the same degree."[5]

Fichte's idea challenged the rationality of the "free" market, and the legitimacy of those elites, in Fichte's time and our own, who manipulated and exploited their control over that market. He encouraged people to think about

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[4] Stuart Chase, "Coals to Newcastle," *Planning the Fourth Migration*, ed. Carl Sussman, pp. 83-84.

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economic planning as a more viable, politically and economically less costly alternative to such elite control and market anarchy.

Finally, Fichte's vision of a renewed medieval German Empire of burgher-controlled cities was simultaneously an early vision of the "city-within-the-region" concept. Fichte envisioned an integrated region in which the city would play a healthy role, as Comte would later say, as the central "organ," or facilitator and organizer of social, cultural, and economic regional vitality. Taking on its proper, "organic" role, the city would cease to play an imperialist role. It would cease to drain population, culture and resources of its own local region as well as other regions. As we shall discuss, Mumford would develop upon this theme.

The Nineteenth Century Socialists and Anarchists

Along with the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movements, the socialists of the nineteenth century—those who did not adopt what Raymond Williams called "metropolitanism," as discussed earlier—further developed this regionalist legacy of Fichte. Under their development, regionalism became an ideal no longer for medieval burghers, but for workers, peasants and farmers.

As we have seen in Chapter 3, Friederich Engels, utilizing the findings of chemist Baron Justus von Liebig, conceived the enormous waste of fertilizer as well as environmental destruction represented by Megalopolis. Engels insisted that socialists decentralize mega-urban populations to new centers, to resolve

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[5] Fichte, p. 92.

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problems such as housing. With Marx, Engels spoke of the need, for the sake of economic efficiency and social solidarity, to integrate industry and agriculture on a regional and local basis. Marx, in his *Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League*, called upon the rural workers to farm the old estates collectively, to encourage similar cooperative efforts among landless and landed peasants.[6] With Proudhon, Marx praised the Paris Commune of 1871 for advocating a system in which associations of workers and peasants would make *most* of the important economic and political decisions on a local and regional rather than national level.[7]

Anarchists like Proudhon, Elisee Reclus,[8] Kropotkin, and Bakunin shared a similar ideal, which they termed "mutualism." Workers and peasants, according to this conception, did not need the state to run their lives and their economy. Mutual association of workers and peasants, in urban communes (like the Paris Commune of 1871) and rural communes in the surrounding regions, could be constructed instead. These agro-industrial city-regions would in turn "federate" with each other, so that the workers and peasants could establish and control direct trade relationships between them. Operating on a territorially wider basis, "intercommunal" "labour" and "interest-related" associations would cater to social, intellectual and artistic needs that individuals could not fulfill within their

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[6] Marx, "Address of the Central Committee," *Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 509.
[7] Marx, "Civil War in France," *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 629-42.
[8] Elisee Reclus, *The Earth and Its Inhabitants: The Universal Geography*, eds. E. G. Ravenstein and A. H. Keane, 19 vols. (London: S. J. Virtue, 1878-94), cf. Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1988), pp. 142

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own communes. Such relationships would obviate the need for the national state and the "free" market system. From the early phases of the October Revolution in Russia, to Spanish Catalonia in the 30s, to France in May 1968, we can see this actually happening in the revolutions of the 20th century.[9] In *Mutual Aid* and *The State: Its Historical Role*. Kropotkin analyzed how the failure of the urban artisans in the middle ages to reach out to the peasants in the countryside spelled the doom of the independent city-states.[10] Kropotkin, perhaps deriving some of his views from Fichte before him, argued in *Factories, Fields and Workshops* that a union of industry and intensive agriculture in local communes and regional areas would make imperialism, economic crises due to overproduction and underconsumption, and war all unnecessary.[11]

Indicating that he supported such mutualism, Mumford adopted Kropotkin's historical analysis of this failure for *Culture of Cities*. There he wrote, to explain the victory of absolutism:

> Ecologically speaking, the city and countryside are a single unit; if one can do without the other, it is the country, not the city, the farmer, the burgher. . . . [But the feudal] cities attempted to solve the problem of a common union by forcing their peasant neighbors into a state of subjection. . . . Instead of creating allies in the open country, who could have helped strike at the roots of feudal power, they created a sullen wall of enemies.[12]

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[9] . Murray Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 17-21; Martin A. Miller, *Kropotkin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 185-95; Graham Purchase, *Anarchism and Ecology* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1997), pp. 60-61.
[10] Petr Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid* (London: Heinman, 1900).
[11] Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow* (London: Freedom Press, 1985), pp. 23-40.
[12] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 68.

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This failure to create allies occurred everywhere in Europe in the fourteenth century, except in Switzerland and Holland, where "the problem of the federal unification of the corporate towns and the countryside was actually solved without undermining the political integrity of the urban unit." Thus "the Swiss achieved unity without despotism. . . ." Everywhere else in Europe, however, according to Mumford, national monarchs took advantage of the hostility between city and countryside to subjugate cities to their despotism.[13]

III. Regionalists of the Twentieth Century.

Mumford himself, of course, along with his mentors Victor Branford and Patrick Geddes, and his associates in the Regional Planning Association of America, differed in their politics from both the anarchists and the revolutionary Marxists of the nineteenth century. Mumford advocated workers' revolution in *Technics and Civilization.* He and his friends were around if not in the CP's "Popular Front" of the 30s. But Mumford was less interested in violent class conflict, more interested in Victor Branford's notion of a "symphony" of classes, including enlightened industrialists, who would reform society through mass political pressure and electoral movements.[14]

Twentieth century regionalists, however, continued to think up ways of convincing the populace, legislators, businessmen, as well workers and farmers,

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[13] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, pp. 68-69.
[14] Mumford, "Victor Branford," *New Republic* August 27, 1930, p. 44.

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and intellectuals, socialists and liberals, that the "metropolitan" ideology was not the way to go. The big cities grew bigger, and the "metropolitan" ideology grew more powerful, as the century wore on. So the regionalists, as opposed to the doctrinaire "metropolitan" socialists of the era, put some effort into figuring out what was wrong with metropolitanism, what power it had over men's minds, and how to undo that sway.

Le Play and Geddes

Mumford's teacher Patrick Geddes emphasized the dependence of cities, and their inhabitants, upon the natural environment that they destroyed when they made room for further mega-urban expansion. For Geddes, the antidote to this dangerous megalopolitan insensitivity was the process, derived from Le Play, of regional survey, in which he hoped to involve ordinary citizens. The conservative, nineteenth century sociologist Le Play[15] developed the concept of the "social survey," an exhaustive social, geographic, and historical survey of a given region, a positive contribution to the regionalist tradition. In addition, Geddes developed the concept and methods of the "civic" survey, which would happen within the

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[15] Frederick Le Play was a conservative sociologist of the nineteenth century. More fearful of violent social change than enamored of the status quo, Le Play emphasized the importance of the region to human culture and of "the importance of environmental factors and industrial change in causing the destitution and degeneration of the poor." Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 34-35.

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borders of the city or town, to increase awareness of local urban problems and the presence of the resources needed to deal with them.[16]

Besides their work on building garden cities or redesigning and building good urban neighborhoods at Sunnyside and Radburn,[17] NJ, Mumford and his associates in the RPAA made major contributions to the philosophy as well as strategy and experience of regionalism. There is no way, in this paper, that I can do justice to the depth and breadth of this work. I will merely cite the particularly noteworthy contributions of two members of this group, Stuart Chase and Henry Wright, as well as another radical regionalist whose work was noteworthy: Garrett Eckbo.

Stuart Chase and the Need for Democratic, Regional, Master Planning

In his article, "Coals to Newcastle," Stuart Chase made the basic argument, found in Fichte, for the greater efficiency of regional and local self-sufficiency. Chase's critique of the enormous waste of the free market would be amplified and documented in the many reports issued by the New Deal's National Resources Planning Board of Charles Merriam. Howard Odum and the Sociology Department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill would also develop it. In Boston, Chase noted "the arrival of eggs from China, peaches from Africa, various fruits and vegetables from Argentine, and iceberg lettuce" from

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[16] See Geddes, "Cities in Their Evolution" chapter II, "The Population-Map and Its Meaning," pp. 123-33.

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California, despite the fact that all these things "are grown or could be grown in New England." "The Geological Survey" of 1921 "found Kentucky lump coal moving into Indiana, Illinois and Ohio past mines in these states producing coal of an identical quality," and many other similar instances in other states. To the Eastern United States, which had increasingly lost its hold over its production, wood was shipped from Norway 1,000 miles inland; or from the West through the Panama Canal "to New York and thence by rail inland." Due to the excessive concentration of industry in the northeast, "if we plot on a map the location of factories, and superimpose above it a map of sources of raw material . . . we will find that the lack of correlation is amazing."[18]

To end this waste, to rationally balance resources, production, and consumption in an advanced technological, "mechanical culture," required "centralized," "master planning." Planning for merely a city or a town was too small a unit to bring this "culture," this economy, under control. Ultimately, such planning had to embrace the entire world. But its basic unit, if it was to be democratic, if it was to involve the majority of the people in decision-making, would have to be the "economic region." One of the grounds on which Chase argued this was economic: the fact that a certain level of self-sufficiency could be attained in the region through rational allocation. But he also argued that the

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[17] See Daniel Schaffer, *Garden Cities for America: The Radburn Experience* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982).
[18] Stuart Chase, "Coals to Newcastle," *Planning the Fourth Migration*, ed. Carl Sussman, pp. 83-84.

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region had cultural, emotional and political significance. In the tradition of Rousseau, Fichte, and Simone Weil, Chase wrote that

> Human beings, in spite of their rushing about at fabulous speeds, are lost without a place to root. This does not mean a house as much as waving prairie, high plateau, undulating meadow land, sand and cliff, and sea. Regional planning designed to make the home country fairer, happier, more to be loved is perhaps the only sort of master planning that will some day arouse the emotions of the wayfaring citizen.[19]

Any planning, if it is to be democratic, had to involve the emotion of patriotism. Patriotism, Chase pointed out, has much to do with the natural beauty of one's regional environment. This patriotism, Chase implies, filters into the civilized culture of the region. As Montesquieu once said, "Now a government is like everything else: to preserve it we must love it."[20] So it is, according to Chase, with democratic master planning: patriotism for one's region provides the emotional basis for continued interest and participation in such planning. Thus the region is the best unit for democratic planning, for economic, emotional and cultural reasons.

Henry Wright's Report

In the mid-1920s, Governor Al Smith asked Clarence Stein, an RPAA associate, to chair the New York State Commission of Housing and Regional Planning. Its Report to Governor Smith, on May 7, 1926, though largely ignored,

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[19] Stuart Chase, "The Concept of Planning," *Planning the Fourth Migration*, p. 211-13.

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was a landmark in regionalist philosophy and study. Members of the RPAA figured prominently in writing it. Mumford and Benton MacKaye contributed studies. And Henry Wright, according to Carl Sussman, "contributed the essential ideas and his distinctive illustrations to" it. In this report, Wright aimed to expand regional consciousness, to explore the regional history of New York State, to show how, in previous centuries, population had been evenly distributed in small communities throughout the state and how resources, production, and consumption had been relatively balanced. He also showed, as capitalism and metropolitanism had developed, how this balance had been destroyed, how these communities had been deserted, as more and more population and industry became congested in New York City.[21] It called for planning to reverse these destructive trends, for the rebuilding of garden cities in these old communities, and argued that new technologies like the automobile and electrical production from hydropower made such a new decentralization possible.

As we discussed in the last chapter, Wright also wrote articles, and a book, *Rehousing Urban America* [1935], which became the basis for both Mumford's as well as Catherine Bauer's ideas, (in *Modern Housing*) on the subject of housing. Wright's work also seems to have had a great deal of influence on other thinkers, such as Herman Kobbe, in his *Housing and Regional Planning* [1941]. Kobbe

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[20] Charles de Secondat de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, tr. Thomas Nugent, vol. I, Chapter 4, number 5, (New York: D. Appleton, 1900), p. 41.
[21] "Report of the New York State Commission of Housing and Regional Planning," May 7, 1926, *Planning the Fourth Migration*, pp. 145-194.

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tried to integrate the two concerns together into a comprehensive housing program for a given region.[22]

Garrett Eckbo's Integrated Landscape

The California-based Garrett Eckbo, according to Mike Davis, was a "pioneer of modernism in American landscape architecture." But besides applying the Walter Gropius' ideas to the field. Eckbo was also a "regionalist, ecologist, and radical social democrat who conspired to turn the aristocratic influence of landscape design on its head."[23]

In the *Culture of Cities* (1938), Mumford had written that the "task of regional planning" must be " to bring the earth as a whole up to the highest pitch of perfection and appropriate use—not merely preserving the primeval, but extending the range of the garden, and introducing the deliberate culture of the landscape into every part of the open country."[24]

Eckbo developed upon this vision of the region as garden. Like Mumford,[25] Eckbo argued that landscape architecture should take as its "cultural hinterland . .

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[22] Herman Kobbe, *Housing and Regional Planning* (New York: Dutton, 1941).
[23] Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1998), p. 81.
[24] Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, p. 331.
[25] In his *Landscape for Living*, Eckbo writes, "the long view of Osborn, Brunhes, Sauer, and Mumford is the view that must become basic to all the members of the planning professions. . . ." (F.W. Dodge Corp., 1950, p. 29). While Eckbo was obviously influenced by Mumford's work (and the influence worked both ways), Eckbo evinced some displeasure when Mumford began his trajectory toward cultural idealism, in the 40s, as opposed to the practical regionalism of *Culture of Cities*. In the same work, Eckbo also writes (p. 36) of "stuffy, pompous, and condescending books written about the "condition of man"—these are not the route to understanding. *The Condition of Man* (1944) was, not incidentally, the title of Mumford's next major work after he wrote *Culture of Cities*.

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. the total physical expression . . . of the relations between man and nature."[26] Eckbo believed that the ideal human civilization must attempt to transcend the conflict between man and nature, to create a synthesis between the two. He argued that landscape architecture should be the principle field for creating this synthesis. As Eckbo writes, "Our main objective" should not be "to protect the beauties of nature from the ravages of man (although that becomes at times a pressing tactic)." "Nor," argues Eckbo, with obvious reference to those in favor of further metropolitan expansion, should our objective be "to rebuild or reproduce nature to save man (although that has been until recently a most convincing argument.)" Instead, Eckbo writes,

> Our major objective is the integration, the harmonization, the co-ordination of, or the establishment of good relations between, the physical forms of nature and the physical manifestations of man in the landscape. . . . The outstanding characteristic of nature is growth unrestrained by man.[27] The outstanding characteristic of man is organization for a purpose. Put these two together in landscape design and you have an organization of natural materials in such a way as to serve man's purposes, yet allow the continuance of their development with a minimum of interference. This is a principle for organic form in the humanized landscape.[28]

Instead, however, with obvious debt to *Culture of Cities*, Eckbo asserted that "we have destroyed or spoiled more natural beauty than the amount of our higher and finer contributions to the landscape." He argued that "all our cities,

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[26] Garrett Eckbo, *Landscape for Living* (F.W. Dodge Corp., 1950), p. 29.
[27] Eckbo, p. 38.
[28] Eckbo, p. 41.

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without exception, are sordid, ugly and chaotic as a whole: and the country, the mountains, and the beaches are forced to function as escapes from this ugliness."[29] Why was this the case? Eckbo traced this ugliness to "the antithesis between town and country," which in turn, as Marx and Engels had originally written, was "based . . . on exploitation."

> If the towns did not have such a primarily parasitic relation to the countryside, devouring all its mineral, vegetable and animal produce; scarring and eroding it in the process; dumping their raw and fertile wastes into the ocean; and then, as a final indignity, sending their confused and starved citizenry out to the countryside in a destructive and anarchic search for the life-giving recreation which the towns are too irresponsible to provide—if the towns did not do all these things to the landscape they would not be as ugly as they are. . . .

Like Engels and Liebig, Eckbo argued that instead, towns ought to "treat sewage and convert it to fertilizer," to "respect the basic organic procedure of converting every scrap of organic waste to compost for return to the soil." This would repay "society's debt to Nature" and build "up our credit balance with the landscape more accurately and convincingly than any acreage of naturalistic park development or preservation of wild scenery in park preserves."[30]

Naturally, as Engels had discussed, the only way to make such a plan work would be to unite industry and agriculture in regionally decentralized garden cities. According to Davis, against the suburban sprawl around Los Angeles, Eckbo was a firm advocate of such decentralization of population into garden city

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[29] Eckbo, p. 44.

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concentrations, as the cornerstone to the integrated landscape he envisioned for the region.[31]

But as Davis writes, Eckbo was not only a regionalist: he saw "radical social democracy" as the only possible political strategy for his regionalism. For Eckbo, the "exploitation" of the countryside by the town was in turn based upon the social exploitation of man by man. "Man destroys nature," wrote Eckbo, "primarily in the course of the full-bodied, unregulated—or inadequately regulated—pursuit of private profit." The problem was with "the forces which have controlled and produced the sordid chaos that is any city today—real estate speculation, building speculation, general commercial speculation." Against such greed and irresponsibility, Eckbo argued that "such forces can be analyzed, exposed, and placed under proper public control, and . . . this will have to be done before we can go on to realize our potential and our objective of fine and wholesome surroundings for all.[32]

After these chaotic forces had been placed under democratic control, Eckbo envisioned that the entire region could be transformed into a garden paradise, where we might move:

> from the ugly city toward the peak of wilderness through constantly more magnificent and orderly rural refinements of the face of the earth, to urban communities composed of structures, paving, grass, shrubs, and trees, which are rich, sparkling, crystalline nuclei in the web of

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[30] Eckbo, p. 40.
[31] Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear*, pp. 81-83.
[32] Eckbo, p. 45.

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> spatial relations that surrounds the earth—peak expressions of the reintegration of man and nature.[33]

In his later article, "Landscape and Townscape (1960-61)," Mumford, building upon Eckbo's work, writes that, against the psychic neuroses and pathologies of Megalopolis,

> nothing less than a whole region, the larger part of which is in a state of natural growth and useful cultivation, will suffice to meet the needs of our new-style recreation, open to the larger part of the population. The most important public task, around every growing urban center, and far beyond, is to reserve permanent open areas, capable of being maintained for agriculture, horticulture, and related rural industries. . . .

We must no longer think of "greenbelts" Mumford argues, as in the older garden city plans, but instead, of "a permanent green matrix, dedicated to rural uses. . . . For weekend recreation, the whole regional landscape [will] become, in fact, the landscape park. . . . " Thus the new

> task of the landscape architect will be to design footpaths, picnicking grounds, pedestrian pleasances along river fronts, beaches, and woodland groves in such a fashion as to give public access to every part of the rural scene, without undue disturbance to the daily economic round. One must think of continuous strips of public land weaving through the whole landscape and making it usually accessible both to nearby residents and holiday visitors.[34]

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[33] Eckbo, pp. 111-12

[34] Mumford, "Landscape and Townscape," *The Urban Prospect*, pp. 81-84.

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New Deal Regionalists

Finally, let's consider the work of regionalists of the 1930's who were not in the RPAA but in and around the New Deal's National Resources Planning Board. This group—headed by Charles Merriam—were more conservative in their political views. They were solidly "Progressive" liberals, in the mold set by Herbert Croly and the *New Republic* in the nineteen tens. They supported the New Deal as the fundamental means of change. They were interested in greater "social control" and centralization of power in the federal government, rather than in the radical democracy promoted by Bourne and Mumford.[35]

These writers' regionalism was administrative rather than political. Their model was the Tennessee Valley Authority. The TVA had produced great economic benefits for its region, as Mumford himself certainly recognized and praised. In the *Culture of Cities*, and in many other texts, Mumford himself used the TVA as a model for the kind of regional development he would have liked to see develop on a broad scale throughout the United States.

The governance of the project, however, was top-down—an extension of the centralized federal government, controlled by the New Deal liberals.[36] The NRPB had far less problem with this undemocratic aspect of the TVA than did radicals like Mumford. The ultimate goal of the NRPB liberals was liberal corporatism. They promoted indicative planning, which would still leave a

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[35] See Fairfield, *Mysteries of the Great City*, pp. 247-49.

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predominant economic role for the bourgeoisie. Government would simply guide their investment process more rationally.[37]

Mumford was prepared to support such government agencies when and if their programs actually built something substantial. But his ultimate objective, politically speaking, was more democratic. His regionalism was political, not administrative.[38] As we shall see, as in the "federalism" of the anarchist Proudhon,[39] or the "communal constitution" of the Paris Communards, praised by Marx,[40] Mumford leaned far further toward placing decision-making power in the hands of the local popular, communities, in their democratic assemblies.

The NRPB's report on *Our Cities in the National Economy* [1936], is not only of special interest to us because of its subject. It also shows especially the tension between the radical regionalism advocated by Mumford, versus the government version, promoted by the its Urbanism Subcommittee, which wrote the report. Figuring prominently on the roster of this subcommittee, chaired by C. A. Dykstra, was Louis Wirth, who went on to write a seminal document in the history of urban "realism" a year later, entitled "Urbanism as a Way of Life." In this essay, and in the report, Wirth and the subcommittee were careful to delineate

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[36] See Philip Selznik, *TVA and the Grass Roots: A Study in the Sociology of Formal Organization* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).
[37] See Gardner Means, *The Structure of the American Economy*. Part I, National Resources Committee, June 1939; Part II, National Resources Planning Board, June 1940.
[38] Allen Tullos, "The Politics of Regional Development: Lewis Mumford and Howard W. Odum," in *Lewis Mumford: Public Intellectual*, eds. Thomas Hughes and Agatha Hughes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 110-20.
[39] Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Selected Writings*, ed. Stewart Edwards, tr. Elizabeth Fraser (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), pp. 102-112.

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the daunting social problems of urban social life: congestion, rootlessness, economic insecurity, social fragmentation, marital and family problems, declining birth rates, commercialism, the "superficiality, the anonymity, and the transitory character of urban social relations."[41] They also discussed the increased levels of "personal disorganization, mental breakdown, suicide, delinquency, crime, corruption, and disorder."[42] Such frankness appears as well as in the work of Wirth's "realist" mentors in the Chicago School of the 20's—Robert Park, for example. But Wirth and the subcommittee, like Park, also obviously accepted the contemporary trend toward greater mega-urbanization as "natural," a "symptom of national maturity."

Their conception of "maturity," as *Nation* reviewer Harold Ward,[43] pointed out, differed markedly from the conception of Patrick Geddes and Frederick Engels. Both these theorists, according to Ward, "understood that the real maturity of an industrial society, dependent upon technics for its mastery of a physical environment," implies 'the abolition of the antithesis between town and country'." According to Ward, this "antithesis" created all the problems

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[40] Marx, "Civil War in France," *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 627-37.
[41] Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," [1938] *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities* (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 153.
[42] Wirth, p. 162.
[43] Harold Ward was an important member of Howard Scott's Technocracy movement. As we discussed in Chapter 1, like the NRPB progressives, the Technocrats, and Ward himself, sought elitist, scientific "social control" rather than radical democracy. But the Technocrats desire for social control, which they derived from Thorstein Veblen, was more radical than the New Deal's: more willing to take on the powers-that-be and radically transform the government and the economy in order to help people—from above, of course. Ward had a strong interest in soil conservation as well as the problems of Appalachia. See William E. Akin, *Technocracy and the*

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mentioned by the subcommittee in the mega-cities. But it also, as we discussed earlier, created problems in places like the Appalachias, and the deep South, where "the triple plagues of resource exhaustion, human exploitation, and political barbarism have reduced the proportion of those living in urban communities to about a third of the population." According to Ward, and as Mumford had discussed in *Culture of Cities*, this rural backwardness was the result of hyper-"urban concentration, the drift of population away from economically starved rural areas toward a small group of highly congested 'metropolitan areas'": "New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia." This concentration, according to Ward, meant a decline in the strength of trade union organization in the rural areas, and this meant "wasteful methods of agriculture" and, " . . . a socially unsound exploitation of 'cheap labor' in the interest of larger industrial and manufacturing plants." As we noted before, Ward also noted a trend toward suburbanization even in the thirties, which also discouraged trade union organization. In other words, far from challenging rural idiocy or strengthening unions, further urbanization was leading to greater social and cultural backwardness in hinterland and suburb, as well all the social problems caused by congestion in the cities.[44]

American Dream: The Technocrat Movement, 1900-1941 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 66, 79, 88.

[44] Harold Ward, "Cities that Consume Men," *Nation*, January 22, 1938, p. 91; Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, pp. 253-55; 345-46.

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Despite this imbalance, whose deplorable effects the subcommittee itself partially described, however, its report explicitly discouraged the "wholesale decentralization" of population that lay at the heart of Mumford's and Ward's radical version of regionalism. The reasons given could have been taken straight out of Herbert Croly's progressive nationalist *Promise of American Life:* decentralization did "not seem to be compatible with the effective performance of the economic and cultural role of the urban community in the life of the Nation."[45] This was of course completely antithetical to the view of such radicals as Bourne, Mumford, and Marx: in which the government, economy, and culture should serve and be accountable to the community and not the other way around.

The subcommittee's vision was one of "great cities of tomorrow, . . . a rather compact community pattern but with ample light and air adequate streets, recreational and other public spaces available in all sections; a balanced development free of building, population, or traffic congestion; etc."[46] The subcommittee's vision had the same air of unreality of Mumford's "realist" rivals in the Regional Plan Association in the 1920s (See Chapter 7). This vision would have been wonderful—if the Thomas Adams' RPA, or Wirth's subcommittee, could have just explained how their vision could be realized without substantial decentralization of the mega-city's congested population to garden cities.

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[45] National Resources Planning Board, *Our Cities in the National Economy* (1937), p. 84.
[46] NRPB, pp. 84-85.

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As I discussed in Chapter 1, the basic motive of postwar centrists like the Whites was to further and maintain their own bureaucratic positions, not to solve the basic problems of society or to really serve the people, as they claim to do. To a lesser extent, this was true of the NRPB liberals as well. Unlike the Whites, they did not deny the problems of Megalopolis. They simply promoted bureaucratic spending as the solution--while admitting that these problems would not be solved thereby. The subcommittee admitted that the enormous problems of the city had much to do with congestion. But then they turned around to argue that what the cities needed was merely more respect from the national culture and more representation in the nation's fiscal decision-making process. As if to present means to fulfill their (contradictory) vision, the NRPB subcommittee called for far greater federal spending for transportation, housing, planning, rebuilding the cities through full employment, etc. In doing so, as John Fairfield points out, the subcommittee borrowed much from the old radical republican and socialist traditions of the past, as well as their contemporary radical heirs, like Mumford and co., who made similar proposals.[47] But the federal spending these radicals called for would have gone to support the only rational solution, decentralization, not attempt to *replace* it as a solution. Under the NRPB's proposal, the money would have been spent, the facts collected, through regional and local agencies: but these agencies and their programs would not have challenged the imbalanced, hyper-centralized nature of the national government,

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[47] NRPB, pp. 73-85; Fairfield, pp. 231-35.

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the corporate economy, or the urban population, in favor of more regional, democratic arrangements.

Ward predicted that the report would foster "more and more facts, more and more education, more and more cooperation with agencies, public and private, hopelessly prevented from taking any drastic, long-range action." The problems would be better investigated and "administered," but not genuinely resolved.[48]

Ward's view summarized quite well the general problem with the middle-of-the-road, muddle-on-through corporatist style of the "regionalism" of the NRPB and the New Deal, in general. Lewis Mumford shared Ward's analysis of the New Deal. Mumford wrote Benton MacKaye that Roosevelt was a good "faith healer," but "As a surgeon, he is useless, because he doesn't believe in operations." Mumford's critique of the Suburban Resettlement Bureau, subdivision of the New Deal's "Resettlement Administration," was that it was top-down, that it "failed to gather to itself the cooperation of the local communities affected," and that it lacked "consistent executive" support.[49]

The history of the Resettlement Administration illustrates once again the wavering attitude of the New Deal toward radical regionalism. Frederick A. Delano, an advocate of Howard's garden cities, became the first head of the

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[48] Ward, p. 93. Fairfield disagrees with Ward's critique, arguing instead that the problem with the report was that the subcommittee lacked a mass constituency to fight for its "radical" proposals. But by themselves, in my opinion, mere proposals for more spending are not radical; nor do they inspire mass movements. Only radical vision can do that. The report had none, and it dismissed the radical vision of Mumford and co. See Fairfield, p. 234.

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National Resources Committee, which later became an integral part of New Deal planning. Through Delano's influence, his more famous nephew, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, as Governor of New York and then as President, was greatly sympathetic to the regional plans of the RPAA. In setting up the Resettlement Administration, FDR aimed to broaden RPAA-style regionalism throughout the nation. He sought to create the regional garden cities envisioned by Mumford and the RPAA as well as the smaller agricultural communities earlier favored by Mead, Lane, and Howe in the post World War I period, which we discussed in Chapter 1. He wanted to site all these planned communities away from the big cities, and to "include both industry and a commercial center," so as to make them autonomous from the big city and to lure population away from them. About one hundred small agricultural communities and three "garden cities" — "Greenbelt, Md., near Washington, DC, Greendale, Wisconsin, near Milwaukee; and Greenhills, Ohio, near Cincinnati, Ohio"--were actually created by the bureau. But the bureau came under the control of the more conservative Rexford Tugwell. Thus these three large communities were not really "garden cities," as Howard or Mumford envisioned them. They were designed instead to be commuter suburbs of the big cities, for the "middle-class, white collar workers" selected to live there and commute to their big city jobs. Even this, far more modest program, which did manage to implement many of the garden city,

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[49] Mumford, letter to Benton MacKaye, September 1933; MacKaye Family Papers, Dartmouth College Library, Hanover, NH, cf. Donald Miller, *Lewis Mumford: A Life*, p. 294. See also Miller,

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neighborhood-centered town planning proposals pioneered earlier by the RPAA at Sunnyside and Radburn,[50] earned the ire and declamations of the business class, especially the rentiers, who called it "Communist" and "totalitarian." Thus, like so many other New Deal programs, the Resettlement Administration fell victim to the "realist" timidity of its own leading officials as well as to the powerful opposition of the capitalists, as soon as such programs truly threatened their most vital financial and social interests. In the case of this program particularly, their interest lay in preserving a centralized mega-city/suburb formation, and thus in keeping wages low and rents high.[51]

Merriam and his NRPB issued other reports, of course, concerning other specific concerns as well as the issue of [administrative] regionalism. These amplified and documented, as I wrote before, the ideas of Stuart Chase and the RPAA about the appalling waste and irrationality of the present capitalist system of allocation. And despite their similar reluctance to deal with the political issues posed by of regional democracy, Howard Odum and Harry Moore, in their *American Regionalism,* wrote a brilliant statement of what the economic self-

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p. 297; and see Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 400.

[50] See Clarence Stein, *Toward New Towns for America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971, originally published, 1951).

[51] Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Boston: MIT Press, 1985), pp. 222-23; Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1988), pp. 130-31; D. Myhra, "Rexford Guy Tugwell: Initiator of America's Greenbelt New Towns," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners,* 40, 1974, pp. 176-88; J. R. MacFarland, "The Administration of the New Deal Greenbelt Towns," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 32, 1966, p. 221; Joseph L. Arnold, *The New Deal and the Suburbs: A History of the Greenbelt Town Program* (Ohio State University Press, 1971), pp. 24-6; and Paul K. Conkin, *Toward a New World: The New Deal Community Program* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1959).

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sufficiency of a progressive regionalism might look like. It represents one of the best accounts of the potential that Fichte had hinted at long before. For Odum, regionalism "represents the philosophy and technique of self-help, self-development, and initiative in which each areal unit is not only aided, but is committed to the full development of its own resources and capacities." This, Odum argued, is in contrast, on the one hand, "to dependency by any region upon the nation or to submarginality as compared with other regions; and, on the other hand, to exploitation from any sources from without." "The key to the redistribution of wealth and the equalization of opportunity," Odum argued, "will be found in the capacity of each region to create wealth and, through new reaches of consumption of commodities, maintain their capacity and retain that wealth in well-balanced production and consumption programs."

The book also explored the varying regional cultures of America, the irrationality of local and state divisions under the old Federalist system, and the rationality of a regional political administration.[52]

Now we move on to discuss Mumford's contribution to the regionalist philosophy. We have already dealt with his notion, upon which he worked with landscape architect Garrett Eckbo, of the "region as garden." We go on to consider other contributions Mumford made.

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[52] Howard W. Odum and Harry Estill Moore, *American Regionalism: A Cultural-Historical Approach to National Integration* (New York: Henry Holt and Co.), pp. 10-11.

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Megalopolis as Psychic Bell Jar

Like Geddes and the rest of the RPAA, Mumford believed that the genuine regionalism they desired was a threat to the present, Megalopolitan way of life. The two worldviews are inimically opposed. Building on Geddes' work, one of Mumford's important contributions was to better comprehend the psychology of metropolitanism and its conflict with a more rational regional sensibility. As Mumford writes in the *Culture of* Cities "it is precisely because our culture has reached a higher stage of development that we can no longer be satisfied with the impoverished conceptions of the environment that have hitherto satisfied the urban ego."[53]

For Mumford, the strength of the megalopolitan ideology was rooted in the isolation by the Megalopolis itself of its inhabitants from nature: an isolation which, in part, explains the ability of the ruling class to substitute support for such abstract ideologies as megalopolitanism, imperialism, militarism, etc. This process begins at the most basic, sensory level, an insight for which Mumford credits Stieglitz:

> one need only examine his photographs . . . carefully. The external change in the city itself was profound. Within the darkened alleyways of the financial district, people lost their sense of day and night. . . . Nature in its most simple form, the wonder of the morning and the night, was missing from the metropolitan routine; and *therefore* . . .

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[53] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, pp. 335-36.

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> these elements establish themselves in Stieglitz's photographs with a new force.[54]

The strength of human beings is their collective imagination, their vision. The modern gargantuan city survives by blinding its victims, with its narcissistic culture made up of paper, fabulous wealth, and omnipotent technology.[55] This creates the illusion that the megalopolis is the best of all possible worlds. Or it creates an even worse illusion—that one need not even bother to consider the world in which one lives as something which could be changed. In other words, the urban population becomes demoralized. Eventually, Mumford writes, "the *expectation* of health and wholeness, like the expectation of honesty and justice, [tends] within the great metropolis to disappear. In the course of its imperialistic expansion" Mumford continues, the metropolis degenerates economically, ethically, and hygienically. In terms developed by Spengler and Geddes, Mumford describes this process. The metropolis

> becomes a megalopolis, concentrating upon bigness and abstract magnitude and the numerical fictions of finance; megalopolis becomes parasitopolis, dominated by those secondary pecuniary processes that live on the living; and parasitopolis gives way to pathopolis, the city that ceases effectively to function and so becomes the prey of all manner of diseases, physical, social, moral. Within such a town, graft and corruption are normal processes; the greater part of the population shares the animus of the criminal, applauds when he "gets away with it," and condones his crime when he is caught red-handed.

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[54] Mumford, "The Metropolitan Milieu," *Studies in City Development* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1945), p. 43.
[55] Mumford, *ibid.*, pp. 31-35.

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This vicarious amorality is rooted in capitalist society. Speaking as might Thorstein Veblen, Mumford writes that "the city that has good words for its Commodore Vanderbilts and Tweeds and Crokers . . . is a city in which a deteriorated social life, without elementary probity or public spirit, has become normalized into the accepted routine.[56]

Readers might be sceptical of what Mumford says here about older "expectations" of "health and wholeness," vitiated by the big city. They might see this as another of Mumford's "pastoral" illusions in the past. "When did this 'Golden Age' of "expectation' occur?" they might ask cynically. But as Mumford has discussed in detail in his autobiographical sketch of his childhood in *fin-de-siecle* New York, and as other writers have confirmed, there certainly was far greater access to nature in the earlier phases of mega-urban development. There was a great deal more access in New York City to green space, including gardens, and truck farms, as well as unspoiled ocean beaches, in Walt Whitman's day than our own. As Mumford points out, Walt Whitman's New York was truly worth praising, for it really was "the city of orgies, walks and joys.[57] And as Anselm Strauss reveals, studies have shown that many people still missed this access to nature long after it was gone.[58]

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[56] Mumford, *ibid.*, pp. 34-35.
[57] See Mumford's autobiography, *Sketches from Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982), pp. 13-21; David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Random House, 1995); Mark Helprin, *A Winter's Tale* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1983).
[58] Anselm Strauss, *Images of the American City*, p. 55.

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Regionalism as Dialectical Alternative

The isolation from nature, these delusions and this cynicism, endemic to Megalopolis, rob its inhabitants of the vision they need even to consider alternatives to it. So the first task, according to Mumford in the 1925 essay, "Regions-to Live In," is to insist upon a radical proposition.

> The hope of the city lies outside itself. Focus your attention on the cities—in which more than half of us live—and the future is dismal. But lay aside the magnifying glass which reveals, for example, the hopelessness of Broadway and Forty-second Street,[59] take up a reducing glass and look at the entire region in which New York lies.

It must be admitted that the statement is not exactly a nuanced one, nor empirically accurate, any more than was Melville's "blast [the public], Jack" statement in *White Jacket*. Millions of people come to see Times Square; for them, it is certainly not "hopeless." Realist critics like Morton and Lucia White or Jane Jacobs might even call this sentiment "anti-urban" and "anti-democratic." How could all these people be wrong, and Mumford, right? Isn't Mumford's sentiment, by its very nature, elitist?

Note however, that it is not the many people that visit Times Square whom Mumford disparages: it is, rather, the "hopelessness" he sees in Times Square itself. He disparages its superficial glitz, its cheap commercialism and faddism, as compared with what a better, regionally planned, garden-urban environment

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[59] For the quotes of and discussion about Stieglitz, see Edward Abrahams, *The Lyrical Left: Randolph Bourne, Alfred Stieglitz, and the Origins of Cultural Radicalism in America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1986), p. 120, *et passim*.

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might offer us instead. Mumford's disparagement here of the "hopelessness" of Times Square was not an uncommon one among social radicals at the time, however. According to art historian Erika Doss, in his painting, *Twenty-Cent Movie* (1936), Reginald Marsh pictured "an urban crowd of pimps and punks, office girls and prostitutes in front of a 42nd Street theater," belying the Hollywood dream world presented inside.[60]

Even a cursory look at his *ouevre* will reveal that Mumford's mentor Alfred Stieglitz was just as antipathetic toward the alienation inherent in the tinsel of the mega-city as was Mumford. It may be objected that Stieglitz sought to portray the "dignity" of his lower class subjects. He said, "I dislike the superficial and artificial, and I find less of it among the lower classes. That is the reason they are more sympathetic to me as subjects." But Stieglitz found no more cause to celebrate the sordid conditions in which the poor lived, and the "superficial and artificial" mass culture manufactured *for* them, on that account than did Mumford. Along with Mumford, Stieglitz and other romantic urbanists separated the two—the "hopelessness" of present-day urban conditions and culture, vs. the dignity of the poor people who had to live in them.

Poor and working class people may indeed find "hope" in such places as Broadway because it is, in part, there, and it is a failing of Mumford's not to acknowledge this. The point he is making, however, is that the alternatives with

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[60] See Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 197-98.

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which ordinary people are presented in this society lead to their investment of *far too much* hope, a hope which is undeserved, into places like Times Square. As he wrote in his "The City" essay for Harold Stearns' symposium, *Civilization in the United States* (quoted in Chapter 1),

> Broadway, is . . . a false front. . . . .In order to cover up the vacancy of getting and spending in our cities, we have invented a thousand fresh devices for getting and spending. The principal institutions of the American city are merely distractions that take our eyes off the environment, instead of instruments which would help us to mould it creatively a little nearer to humane hopes and desires.[61]

Given the choice between rural boredom and oppression, vs. mega-urban excitement, who would not pick the latter? But this "false" choice, Mumford argues, distracts people's attention and imagination from the *regional* alternative—which really deserves our "hopes." If we want to find a basis for realistic hope, we must "lay aside the magnifying glass" that *overemphasizes* the relative splendors of big city life compared to the starved countryside. We must stop myopically focusing on sterile contrasts between the big city vs. rural areas. Instead we should "take up a reducing glass" to allow "the city" as well as the entire region to "fall into focus":

> Forests in the hill-counties, water-power in the mid-state valleys, farmland in Connecticut, cranberry bogs in New Jersey, enter the picture. To think of all these acres as merely tributary to New York, to trace and strengthen the lines of the web in which the spider-city sits unchallenged, is again to miss the clue. But to think of the region as a

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[61] Mumford, "The City," *Civilization in the United States*, ed. Harold E. Stearns (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922), p. 9.

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> whole and the city merely as one of its parts—that may hold promise.[62]

Note well: Mumford does not cal for an abandonment of the city. He merely insists that we put it into perspective, rather than regard it as the be-all and end-all of civilization as we know it. To focus exclusively on the city, to attempt to patch up the present megalopolitan system, is to make it worse. The city must be fixed: but to fix it, we have to fix the entire region in which the city is embedded, to reexamine and restructure the relations of the city with its surroundings.

Regional, comprehensive planning is the only effective antidote to the problems of Megalopolis. It does not feed nor worship the Megalopolis and the Machine; *it is sensitive to and supports life instead.* It does not ask, in "imperialistic" fashion, "how wide an area can be brought under the aegis of the metropolis. . . ." Instead, it asks "how the population and civic facilities can be distributed so as to promote and stimulate a vivid, creative life throughout a whole region. . . . " Further elaborating on this theme, Mumford writes that

> The regionalist attempts to plan such an area so that all its sites and resources, from forest to city, from highland to water level, may be soundly developed, and so that the population will be distributed so as to utilize, rather than to nullify or destroy, its natural advantages. It sees people, industry and land as a single unit.

"Instead of trying," Mumford continues, "by one desperate dodge or another, to make life a little more tolerable in the congested centers," and thus

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[62] Mumford, "Regions—to Live In," in Carl Sussman, ed., *Planning the Fourth Migration* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976), p. 88. Reprinted from *Survey Graphic* 7 (May 1925): pp.

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eventually making life far less tolerable throughout the region, "it attempts to determine what sort of equipment will be needed for the new [decentralized] centers. . . . ." Concluding, Mumford writes that "each approach [to regional planning] . . . attempts to promote a fuller kind of life, at every point in the region. No form of industry and no type of city are tolerable that take the joy out of life."[63] Here, in a nutshell, is the basic theme of Mumford's position on regionalism.

In a two-part essay for *The Sociological Review*, published in 1927, Mumford develops more extensively his conception of regionalism. Here, he argues that Western Civilization's attitude toward geographic development heretofore has been an abstraction, as bad as the old medieval flat-earth theory:

> Our attention had been engrossed by factories, markets, building, lots; and, as a geographer has said, we have treated the theatre of history, the land, as if it were a flat platform extended into interplanetary ether. . . We have planned our cities in rectangles; we have laid out great territories in quarter sections; in general, we have treated the land itself as if it were a vague shadow cast by growing cities.[64]

Mumford characterizes our era as one of "territorial neglect": "in the very act of seizing all the habitable parts of the earth, we have systematically misused and neglected our possession." This systematic neglect has gotten to the point as to create a crisis, one which jeopardizes the prospect of human survival: "The results

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151-152.

[63] Mumford, *Ibid*, p. 90.

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of this ignorance have been so wide and disastrous that we can no longer escape them." Mumford describes scenes of grotesque natural destruction and megalopolitan imbalance. He discusses how the "vast primitive forest" of Michigan has been destroyed "as the result of savage forest-mining and careless forest fires." In New York State, the "thickly congested" slums of New York City "fall far below the standard for safe and sanitary urban habituation." Yet, Mumford writes, recalling his friend Henry Wright's 1926 report to the first Housing and Regional Planning Commission (1926),[65] "In the same State there is a wide belt of land, fit for intensive agriculture and equipped with excellent water-power sites and blessed with an excellent climate: it is almost deserted." Mumford argues that the expansion of already "bloated" cities Chicago and Los Angeles will lead to greater contamination of the natural resources upon which the populations of these cities must rely:

> In order to continue its growth this masterful metropolis [Chicago] must either pollute its already dubious drinking water with sewage, or get rid of its sewage by reversing the natural drainage system of the area, in a fashion which lowers the lake level to a point that endangers the commercial existence of other lake cities. . . . for the most highly organised municipality cannot by any technological dodge overcome its inevitable dependence upon rainfall and catchment areas and forest reserves.[66]

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[64] Mumford, "Regionalism and Irregionalism," *The Sociological Review* 19 (October 1927), pp. 277.
[65] As cited by Lewis Mumford, in *Culture of Cities*, p. 307.
[66] Mumford, "Regionalism and Irregionalism," pp. 278.

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The result of this blind expansionism must be a rude awakening for humanity: "sooner or later these conditions must bring all the plans for windy growth and illimitable land-speculation *down to earth.*"[67]

Perhaps such warnings were premature in the 1920s. And some might argue that even if such dire predictions of Megalopolitan and civilization-wide collapse are true, this is not the best way to go about convincing people that they should fight for regionalism. But it should first be noted that Mumford certainly did not neglect the argument that Megalopolitanism just makes life worse, in general. Secondly, for most people, the notion that their lives are merely getting gradually worse is not enough to get them to think about alternatives to the status quo. People usually try to adapt to the status quo unless crises make this impossible. Finally, if such crises are indeed in the offing, then warnings such as these are timely. Mumford earns our thanks for showing how such crises might occur in the ecological realm. This does not by any means make him a "doom-sayer," anymore than it does Marx, Engels and Lenin for showing the inevitability of economic crises and world wars.

Such crises as Mumford discusses here are looming today. Clarence Stein's prediction that the contradictions of megalopolis would spur greater and greater suburban exodus of industry and population, resulting in fiscal urban crises, has been borne out. From all appearances, the ecological crisis predicted by Mumford and his colleagues, resulting from a continuation of such unbalanced industrial

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[67] *Ibid.*

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and megalopolitan growth, is also looming. Very recently, Mike Davis has written an excellent work, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*. In it, argues that the recent so-called "natural disasters" in the LA region—El Nino and its effects, for example—were actually caused by "market-driven urbanization," and suburban sprawl, excessively disrupting the previously more balanced patterns of relationship between man and nature there.[68] Recently there has been growing concern about the effects of global warming. It has been cited as the cause of the melting of the permafrost and consequent destruction of forests. Allegedly, it has led to an unbalanced increase in insect populations, in such places as Canada, the flooding of coastal cities, as well as the freakish weather patterns and storms including tornadoes and hurricanes that have recently killed thousands upon thousands of people in Honduras and Nicaragua. An alarming increase in cancer rates, birth defects, brain and other neurological damage, and sexual impotence has also been traced to our post-war reliance upon petrochemicals to make pesticides, plastics, etc., as well as the nuclear radiation we were told we could live with.[69]

Simply put, as Engels did in the *Dialectic of Nature*, cited earlier, we are dependent upon Nature, which is indeed a complex system that would be very difficult, if not impossible to recreate once we destroyed it. If we overburden the

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[68] Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear*.
[69] See Theo Colborn, Dianne Dumanoski, and John Peterson Myers, *Our Stolen Future: Are We Threatening Our Fertility, Intelligence, and Survival?—A Scientific Detective Story* (New York: Penguin, 1997).

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natural environment with the waste from our mega-urban, industrial, and agricultural processes, then our capacity to live and prosper will suffer. What is required is an awareness of the necessity of *balance.* This is not, as many would still argue today, automatically an argument for the social *status quo,* nor for a flight into fantasies of some lost Edenic paradise. In her landmark book on the effect of pesticides upon our environment and our health, *Silent Spring,* Rachel Carson was succinct on this point: "In some quarters nowadays," she writes, "it is fashionable to dismiss the balance of nature as a state of affairs that prevailed in an earlier, simpler world—a state that has now been so thoroughly upset that we might as well forget it." Thus anyone who talks about the balance of nature, or restoring the balance of nature, can be safely dismissed as a hopeless nostalgist, pining for a lost golden age. Thus, Carson continues, "Some find this a convenient assumption, but

> as a chart for a course of action it is highly dangerous. The balance of nature is not the same today as in Pleistocene times, but it is still there: a complex, precise, and highly integrated system of relationships between living things which cannot safely be ignored any more than the law of gravity can be defied with impunity by a man perched on the edge of a cliff.

Thus the "balance of nature," Carson concludes, "is not a *status quo;* it is a fluid ever shifting, in a constant state of adjustment. Man, too, is a part of this balance. Sometimes the balance is in his favor; sometimes not—and all too often

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through his own activities—it is shifted to his disadvantage."[70] In other words, the balance of nature is not some lost golden age. Despite our worst efforts to destroy it, it still exists; it is the precondition of our survival; and thus it is still worth fighting to maintain and restore.

Man and nature are interdependent. Because man's intelligence permits him the power to transform nature does not mean that he therefore should do so in such a way that destroys "her." It most certainly does not give him *carte blanche*, to do whatever he wants with nature, howsoever he pleases. If we destroy Nature, as Engels writes, we destroy the complex natural systems that precondition our own existence. So eventually, it is we who suffer.

Mumford writes that fundamentally, from its origins to its final fruition, the problem with modern development is one of insensitivity to the natural exigencies of human existence. In terms of its fit with nature, it is simply blind: "The blind heaping of population in metropolitan areas, the equally blind impoverishment, through bad marketing and an inadequate distribution of the population, of rural areas, cannot continue indefinitely."[71]

The expansive-exploitative view of nature, and the wasteful, insensitive mode which modern development takes as a result, can be seen in terms of the Kantian antinomy between the "in-itself" and the "thing for us." Georg Lukacs discusses this in his essay, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat."

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[70] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1962), p. 246.
[71] Mumford, "Regionalism and Irregionalism," p. 278.

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The bourgeois observer, intent upon profit, sees nature and proletarian man merely as raw material for profitable commodity production. He merely *analyzes* the productive object: breaks it down into the components he needs to "get the job done." He ignores the holistic relations between the parts of the thing—the relations that give the object its uniqueness. He ignores all those qualities of this raw material which do not conduce toward his profitable production: toward endless reproduction of the commodity already proven profitable, desired by the consumer.

As a result, our basic human awareness of our need for *organicism, mutuality, for social morality* is diminished. This blind, purely analytical, fragmenting paradigm for understanding prevails upon every realm of knowledge. In all realms of bourgeois knowledge, an ever-widening chasm opens up. This chasm widens between the capitalist's essentially selfish and exploitative comprehension of his raw material, and "das Ding-an-sich," those qualities about the "thing"—nature and man—which the capitalist, because of his position as capitalist, cannot or is unwilling to understand. Eventually, the widening chasm will culminate in disaster for the capitalist: in revolution, which permits the proletariat to build a society where human beings and nature are treated by each other as "for themselves and for each other," as Hegel would say. Nature, and all people, must be treated as "ends in themselves," as Kant originally formulated—

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all of which are worthy of respect. It is only in this way, Lukacs writes, that the antinomy of bourgeois comprehension may be overcome. [72]

In his own, environmentalist way, Mumford is attuned to the same potential for disaster—for everyone—in the modern paradigm for development. This potential is the result of the profit motive: blinding us "for a century" so that we have ignored

> the basic realities of the land: its contours and landscape, its vegetation area, its power, its mineral resources, its industry, its types of community; or rather, even when we used these resources, we used them in a blind and heedless way, achieving the gaudy abstract symbols of power and wealth. We gauged prosperity by dollars and greatness of census statistics, although, as in the burning of coal to run steam engines, more than three-fourths of the money was literally sent up the flue.[73]

How do we promote a healthy balance between man and nature, so that humanity's own long-term survival and prosperity are enhanced rather than diminished? Mumford, like Marx and Engels, understood that the imbalance between man and nature is the result of an imbalance within human society. When a few cities or nations dominate and exploit the rest of the world, when a ruling class arises which dominates and exploits the rest of the society, then the elites thus created become indifferent to the ultimate welfare of the human race. They become obsessed with their own power, profit, and privilege. Left in

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[72] Georg Lukacs, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, tr. by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), pp. 110-49.
[73] Mumford, "Regionalism and Irregionalism," p. 279.

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command, they will use the ever-greater technological capacity of mankind, which they alone control, to drive human society and its natural base to the brink of extinction, as long as such an insane policy secures their own short-term, selfish interests. To work out the balance between man and nature, we must achieve what Mumford, as we will discuss in a later chapter, called a "basic communism." In this society, the means of production are controlled by the workers as well as by the technical and scientific intelligentsia, rather than by the capitalists. But this "basic communism" cannot merely reproduce the ecological, geographical, and social imbalances of capitalism (Indeed, the horrifying natural disasters resulting from these imbalances may become one of the principle spurs for the world's masses to fight for such "basic communism.") It must instead create a new, regional balance. This involves the creation of an economic, social, and political balance between regions, to achieve far greater efficiency and a measure of self-sufficiency, rather than megalopolitan centralization, rural impoverishment, nationalist statism, and international imperialism. And it must involve the achievement of an economic balance, within the region, between city and countryside, and between industry and agriculture.

Regionalism, asserts Mumford, is the solution to the modern ecological crisis. Regionalism produces the opposite of this insensitivity. For regionalism involves a mutualistic approach to nature and men, as ends in themselves. "When we acquire the regional outlook," Mumford argues, "we reverse this whole

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process" of confusing means with ends, of fragmenting and separating in our minds what should be considered in its complex totality.

> Instead of considering separate products or resources, we think of the region as a whole, and we realise that in each geographic area a certain balance of natural resources and human institutions is possible, for the finest development of the land and the people. . . . Industry, education, housing, culture, recreation, are not separable activities; they exist within a regional complex. . . . We can no longer ignore the region, for. . . . no plan has any prospect of permanent success that is framed and executed without regard for the fundamental natural history of regions and cities.[74]

Regions: Geographic, Biological, Economic, Human

Now Mumford asks, "What is this geographic reality? What are the conditions that it imposes? What is a region considered first of all as a geographic unit?" For Mumford, man's environment (or lack thereof) has a formative effect upon man and his society. It acts upon man where he encounters it, in the region. Human beings gain their unique characters as individuals and communities within the unique natural region in which they live. The uniqueness thus achieved is by no means an exclusive, parochial one, however. A man can only attain universality if he is fully heir to a fully and freely developed local, face-to-face culture:

> These regional differentiations do not deny the facts of individuality or the facts of universality. . . . A regionalism that affected to ignore these forces would be absurd and stultifying, for the presence of universal agencies does not wipe out the realities of regional life: it merely unites them

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[74] Ibid.

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> in a greater whole. One must create an identity, a center of one's own, before one can have fruitful intercourse with other personalities.[75]

But one can only claim fully this regional inheritance of identity, if one and one's locality are beneficiaries of, and participants in, a universal, humanist culture: "The more thoroughly one knows the facts, the more keenly one becomes aware that unity and differentiation go hand in hand." Just as it did for the "Stoic in Roman times," "world-wide intercourse" gives "the ordinary man in our own day, the conception of the human race as a great collection of people whose underlying likenesses makes them at bottom one." Yet it also encourages "differentiation" between continents, nations, sub-national regions, and localities, "so that finally one reaches an irreducible individuality, from which standpoint one sees not a common Human Race, but each separate being as at once unique yet also in itself a microcosm."[76]

The region is an undeniable, *geographic* fact: it is there before man appears on the scene. On the "basis" of this "geographical region," and regardless of all artificial, arbitrary divisions, arises "the human region." This is an area "between the continent and the historic village . . . sometimes larger, sometimes smaller than the political state."[77] But before it becomes a "human region," this "natural geographic region" produces a biological region. The biology of the region is

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[75] Lewis Mumford, "Regional Planning," in *Planning the Fourth Migration*, pp. 210-202. Reprinted from Mumford's Address to Round Table on Regionalism, Institute of Public Affairs, University of Virginia), Avery Library, Columbia University, July 8, 1931

[76] Lewis Mumford, "Regionalism and Irregionalism," p. 282.

[77] Ibid.

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defined by "a complex environment in which soil, climate, vegetation, and animal life with its insects, protozoa, and bacteria, all flourish together in mutual interaction." Each region possesses "a natural balance of these elements." The particular "balance," the "configuration" of "special partnerships and associations" possessed by each biological region gives it its uniqueness.[78]

The human region—the human regional community—is a part of this biological region. Man must respect the natural limits therein created: these "special partnerships and associations" of the biological realm. "When we upset this balance by introducing a new creature, as the English sparrow was introduced into America or the jack rabbit into Australia, the whole fabric may be disrupted." "Ecology and regional geography," "two recent branches of science," have made it one of their "grand works" to trace "out . . . these basic relationships."[79] Mumford now attempts to summarize "their chief results." He seeks to elucidate the ramifications of ecological and geographic science for the human community, to comprehend the limits it must respect if man is to survive and thrive. These limits include, above all, man's economic and technological choices:

> Within the limited area of North America the geographer distinguishes ten distinct regions. Each of these regions has its definite individuality of structure, its own "physiognomy"; and on the basis of these resources, certain types of economic and human activity are appropriate, and certain other kinds of activity—the raising of the silkworm in New England, let us say, or the specialisation in dairy

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[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.

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> products on the sandy coastal plain—can be accomplished only by an undue expenditure of human effort, if at all. . . .

As a result of this regional division of labor, itself the result of geographical and biological differentiation, "each type of region fosters its own special type of community."

By "special type of community," I assume, since Mumford is a radical democratic socialist that Mumford is not talking about political or economic relativism (absolute monarchical feudalism here, petit-commodity production and Protestant theorcracy over there; slaveholding republican forms down South—though, despite my caricature, such "economic diversity" is what some "community-based economists" within the Greens seem to desire these days.[80] Instead, he is talking about different *cultures*.[81]

In the modern era, however, technological knowledge and capacity has exploded. Thus human beings have simultaneously developed the capacity to insulate themselves from nature. As a rule (there are, of course, exceptions) we are no longer immediately, naively aware of our ecological dependence upon the biological region in which we live. We are no longer aware there is such a thing as a region; or, at the very least, we try to pretend it does not exist. As the result of "the growth of machine industry and the concentration of various types of

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[80] See Steve Welzer, "Community-Based Economics," and my response, "Community-Based Economics: A Real Alternative to Socialism?" in *Synthesis/Regeneration 21* (Winter 2000), pp. 12-16. Welzer defends the alleged superiority of feudalism to capitalism and attacks socialism for advocating "a universal economic system," which Welzer claims runs counter to the philosophy of "decentralism." His idea of decentralism, and that of Mumford's and my own, are completely antithetical, however.

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manufacture in great cities, remote from the sources of supply and from their eventual markets," Mumford writes, "we have lost sight to some extent of the manner in which the region itself perpetually conditions economic activity."[82]

But in fact, machine industry merely obscures our view of these relationships: it does not actually obliterate our dependence upon the unique relationships and conditions of the region in which we live.

Mumford readily admits that a region might cease "to perform any of these primary economic functions"—in other words, cease to perform economic functions which involve a direct, metabolic relation between human society and the natural resources of the region itself. But this is by no means an ideal, stable, sustainable form of economic development. From Kropotkin, Mumford derives his idea that such regions are

> driven towards a kind of parasitism upon other regions that do perform [these primary economic functions]. This, in effect, is the course taken by both England and New England during the nineteenth century. Their highly urbanized populations ceased to produce anything like enough raw materials and agricultural produce for the upkeep and maintenance of their communities.[83]

This is the basis for a regionalist explanation of imperialist expansion and inter-imperialist conflict. The superior position of the parasitic regions is precarious.

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[81] Ibid., p. 283.
[82] Ibid., p. 285.
[83] Ibid., p. 286.

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> It rests upon a lead that these regions had in adapting the methods of modern factory organisation. Industrialism, in its spread and development, has however become world-wide in its applications: and when the exploited regions—like the Middle West of the United States, which once supplied corn and hogs in return for manufactured goods from the East—adopt the machine technique for themselves, the exploiting region must eventually lose its markets, and with this, the security of its base of supplies. The reaching out for foreign markets, and the contest for undeveloped areas and spheres of influence, must be explained geographically as the desire of unstable, overurbanised communities to ensure markets to dump their goods into, and productive areas to produce their raw materials.

To be sustainable and pacific, human civilization must become regionalist: "must be based upon a knowledge and respect for [the] fundamental economic resources" of its region. "Where these are undeveloped, misused, or destroyed," Mumford concludes, "the economic foundations of regional life are sapped," and civiliization itself is imperiled by international conflict.[84]

The rhetoric Mumford employs here, of "regional exploitation" and of "parasitism," is problematic. Mumford roots socio-economic as well as imperialist conflict in the struggle of region against region rather than of class against class. Mumford's language here is reminiscent of the fascist concept of "proletarian nations." Like Fichte, Mumford seems to idealize an imagined golden age, perhaps in the feudal era, in which the regions were once indeed balanced and all was right with the world. As Marcus Cunliffe has written, such ideas were "grist for the mill" for the *I'll Take My Stand* group, Allen Tate, John

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Crowe Ransom, and Donald Davidson. These Southern Agrarians recast the Civil War as a struggle of a culturally vibrant, "organic" rural South against an "imperialist," spiritually impoverished, industrialized New England region.[85]

Mumford seems to hint that, if he were king, he would do away with all forms of global interdependence and thus of the tremendous diversity of culture and goods that results thereby. This is not Mumford's intention, however. Skipping on in the essay, we read Mumford arguing that his economic regionalism is definitely not an attempt to impose autarky. For this ignores the global interdependency of a modern industrial economy. Such functional interdependence might have been relatively easier for Fichte to ignore in 1800. But by the twentieth century, however, it is unavoidable: "Regionalism does not aim at the economic self-sufficiency of any region: that would be an absurdity in a civilisation that is dependent upon such localised resources as rubber, iron, copper and petroleum."[86] Nor can it be defined merely as "industrial decentralization." These are not what we should want, and Mumford is quite eloquent and insightful as to why, "since there exists, under the new industrial and cultural pattern, a necessity not merely to break up old centres of congestion, but to build up new centres of concentration. Single industries, located in the

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[84] Ibid.
[85] Marcus Cunliffe, *The Literature of the United States* 3rd ed. with revisions, (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin, 1970), p. 343; Mark G. Malvasi, *The Unregenerate South: The Agrarian Thought of John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Donald Davidson* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1997).
[86] Mumford, "The Theory and Practice of Regionalism," *Sociological Review*, 20 (January 1928), p. 25.

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midst of the open country, badly equipped for social life and lacking in cultural opportunities, do not lead to a fuller and better regional life."[87]

Mumford is quite aware of the ways in which what he calls the "financial regime," can, and did, subvert the regionalist prospect for union-busting ends.

> The word decentralisation is often applied, likewise, to the moving of a factory from the centre to the outskirts of a big city, or to the actual departure of the silk industries from a single centre like Paterson to a diffuse distribution among the milltowns of Pennsylvania, in order to utilise the cheap labour of underpaid miners' families. Such efforts have nothing to do with economic regionalism: in one case the result is negligible; in the other, anti-social.[88]

Rather, Mumford conceives of economic regionalism, as with biological regionalism, in terms of "economic balance." This is a state in which population will be distributed more evenly throughout the region in order better to meet its economic needs. It is a state where "manufacture and trade will be co-ordinated" rationally, where "the size of cities will be proportioned to open spaces and recreation areas and placed in sound working relation with the countryside itself."[89] An ecological balance, as Engels discusses in the passage quoted in Chapter 3, could thus obtain between man's industrial and agricultural activities. Thus humanity could permit the natural environment to absorb the wastes accrued, beneficially.

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[87] Ibid., p. 26.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid., pp. 25-26.

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To create this balance may not, strictly speaking, be purely a process of decentralization, but rather, of yet another rational balance, between centralization and decentralization. With this balance, Mumford is interested in creating relatively self-sufficient urban *societies*:

> Economic regionalism exists just as much to promote rational centralisation, where that is needed and valuable, as it does to foster the opposite process, where that is needed. For centralisation and decentralisation are merely directions of movement; and the question for regionalism is what sort of life, at any particular point, such movements produce.[90]

Industry and Agriculture: Need for a Regional Relationship

Engels, as will be recalled from Chapter 3, spoke of the need to unite industry and agriculture on a regional basis. In the *Culture of Cities*, Mumford develops upon these themes, sketched only briefly by Engels in *On the Housing Question*. Mumford gets specific about the economic and technological considerations that increasingly make such regional unity both a tremendous opportunity for better health, as well as a practical economic necessity.

First, Mumford relates that agronomists have been arguing for a more intensive and varied use of the soil, and arguing that the single, intensive cash-crop economy diminishes the soil. He goes on to discuss how nutritionists are calling for a more varied diet, with locally and intensively grown, more

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[90] Ibid., p. 26

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perishable items—fruits, for example—to replace more imperishable, but less nourishing diets—grains, for example.[91]

As we discussed earlier, since Mumford wrote *The Culture of Cities*, far more serious health problems have arisen, problems which could also be solved by the kind of regional, ecologically friendly system he advocates. The excessive use of pesticides, among other things, which poisons our food, water, and soil, would not be necessary if we practiced the kind of intensively managed organic agriculture advocated by Engels, Kropotkin, and Mumford. Today's cash crop, corporate agribusiness is responsible for burning and clearing our forests—including the rainforests. This depletes our oxygen and destroys ecological diversity, and increases carbon dioxide, responsible for global warming. Global warming could be stopped if we moved to organic, community-based agriculture, if we reduced industrial production by recycling more and shared things more cooperatively, if we cut down transportation by creating local and regional economies, and if we relied on solar heating, biomass, and conservation. These changes could make our reliance upon the burning of coal and petroleum, as well as dangerous nuclear energy, obsolete. And the production of artificial materials like many plastics, nylon, styrofoam, etc. which can be toxic, especially when heated, and which are nearly impossible to recycle, could be substantially reduced through the use of natural, biodegradable and recyclable materials (including some plastics). But none of these measures can be carried out in the kind of

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[91] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 341.

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highly centralized, highly technological, hierarchical, impersonal, throwaway society in which we live today. Instead, these measures would require far more decentralized economic, energy, and a resource-allocations system in which local community and cooperatives would largely replace far-flung markets.[92]

Mumford goes on to argue that, to be truly productive, modern agricultural technology requires a compact urban culture:

> Most of the machines and utilities needed by modern agriculture are collective in character and they employ electric power in increasing amounts. Moreover, for their effective use they need adequate technical training and constant revision in the light of fresh scientific knowledge: all this implies the effective inter-relation of agriculture with the city. Hence the need, even purely from the standpoint of agriculture itself, for a closer pattern of settlement within rural areas, and for a regional distribution of all the modern instruments of culture and co-operation.[93]

Mumford then discusses the new neo-technics for industry: the automobile, electricity, etc. This encourages a regionalization of industry as well, as well as a new era of face-to-face popular community, for "the effect of all these instruments is to enlarge the sphere of activity at the same time that they diminish the need for physical movement and close settlement."[94] With the advent of the automobile, electricity, modern means of communication, etc., industry and the urban population can be decentralized and segregated from each other. The

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[92] See Miguel A. Altieri, "Ecological Impacts of Industrial Agriculture and the Possibilities for Truly Sustainable Farming," *Monthly Review* vol. 50, no. 3 (July/August, 1998), pp. 60-71; Murray Bookchin, *The Modern Crisis* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1987); Gary J. Coates, ed., *Resettling America: Energy, Ecology and Community* (Andover, MA: Brick House Publishing Co., 1981).

[93] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 341.

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products from dirty, smelly, noisy "nuisance" factories, as the Goodmans termed them, can still benefit the population, but set far from centers of urban population. But while human beings and pollution will be segregated, industry and agriculture will be united in the new, regional socialist society.

> Rural regions will attract industry, foster a co-operative way of life, promote biotechnic urbanism; while industry must, for the sake of life-efficiency, seek a wider rural basis. Each village nucleus will thus be the embryo of a modern city, not the discouraged, depauperate fragment of an indifferent metropolis.[95]

In the process, a new universal standard of leisure and culture will be realized, for all. "In the nineteenth century," Mumford writes, "many of these regions [that the auto will now open up] were the recreation grounds of the bourgeoisie: tomorrow they may become the favored seats of living for an enfranchised working class."[96] But the working class will not be heir simply to revitalized, pleasurable rural areas. Factory and urban existence too will become "fit for living." These environments will lend themselves

> not only to production, but to a higher standard of consumption and more vivid creative activities. Under a regime of economic regionalism, industries would be varied and balanced locally in order to secure a varied and balanced life: likewise the multiform, many-threaded cultural heritage that goes with such a life.[97]

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[94] *Ibid.*, p. 344.
[95] *Ibid.*, pp. 341-42.
[96] *Ibid.*, p. 344
[97] *Ibid.*, p. 345.

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As Fishman has written, suburbanization, fostered by the post-war Federal Highway System and the real estate industry, thwarted Mumford's hopes to use the potential of the auto and other technologies to create a system of decentralized garden cities. It has also destroyed many of the villages Mumford discusses here as well. This debacle does not, however, reveal that Mumford's schemes were futile—only that we cannot merely trust in technological developments to usher in the new decentralist dawn. All this destruction could be reversed—provided that institutions of democratic social planning replaced the market and the corporation. These villages could be rebuilt, and new decentralized, planned garden cities could be created.

The Region and the City

Mumford now goes on to work out what the relation between city and countryside under his system of "economic regionalism." In the past, the city has dominated the countryside: this domination has been paradigmatic for imperialism, all over the globe. As Mumford says,

> in an irregional state the city exists at the expense of its surrounding region, drawing upon it for water and milk, for building sites, for sporting domains and for perennial vigour of youthful immigrants, but contributing not to the enhancement of life except within its own municipal limits.[98]

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[98] Mumford, "The Theory and Practice of Regionalism," p. 27.

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But even with these municipal limits, life has not prospered, exactly. This process of megalopolitan concentration leaves

> the rural areas and the cities that serve them sink into a state of apathy or decay, with an exodus of the intelligent and the able and the cultured among the rural population. The result is a poor and depressed life in the slums of the spreading centres, and an equally poor and depressed life in the rural regions, deprived of intimate local intercourse with all the more civilising tendencies of the city itself. And this process of urban hypertrophy and rural debilitation has been the outstanding feature of the Industrial Revolution. . . .[99]

Yet the city has uses for humankind which transcend their perverted, destructive uses under capitalism. These uses are easily overlooked among all the ugliness cities wreak today. But they form, as much as the more pastoral desire to get back to nature, the basis for a new consciousness of the possibility and desirability of regionalist alternatives. "Under favourable conditions," Mumford writes, "the city is the node of a region; it is the place where all its resources and advantages are brought together and made available for the whole population.[100] Under a regional regime the city is in active partnership with the region:"[101]

If, as Comte writes, every society has its drama, a field for the interaction of "temporal and spiritual powers,"[102] the city is ideally its center stage, where the drama, the system of meanings of the society, are concentrated. If the institutions of the city, like the parts, players, staging, and lighting, of a good play, "work

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[99] *Ibid.*, p. 32.
[100] *Ibid.*, p. 26.
[101] Mumford, p. 27.

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harmoniously, the germ of a city exists, even though the population be as small as a village." But without this harmony within this most "dramatic" part of society,

> to the extent that these institutions do not exist, or antagonize each other, or are insufficient in quantity and defective in quality, the city itself is merely potential, is sunk in somnolence, or even non-existent, though people be as closely packed together as in the insulae of old Rome or the slums of New York."[103]

To paraphrase Shakespeare, this is when life becomes "mere dumb show, signifying nothing."[104]

To harmonize the parts, an organic relationship, not a dominative one, should characterize the relation between city and country. The organic relation Mumford imagines has very little to do with feudal hierarchy. It is close instead to that of Rousseau. He talks in his *Discourse on Political Economy*[105] of the need for republican "communication" of all the parts of the body, lest the body die, or the kind of relationship the romantic, anti-feudal Fichte sought in his idealistic view of the medieval city, with its mutualistic relation to the countryside. As did Fichte, Mumford territoralizes Rousseau's egalitarian "organic" ideal.

> The road diffuses; the city concentrates. Their relation is that of heart and artery; and in order to work organically, heart and artery must be related to all the members and organs of a region, pumping goods, services, knowledge,

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[102] As quoted in Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 471.
[103] Mumford, "Theory and Practice," p. 27.
[104] Note that Mumford is not arguing here that such slums are culturally sterile. He is merely saying that what culture that is created in the slums, takes place *despite of* and in *protest against* these slum conditions, this complete lack of *institutional* basis for community, for people coming together, socially, culturally, politically, to *create* a vital culture.
[105] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "A Discourse on Political Economy," *The Social Contract and the Discourses*, tr. By G.D.H. Cole (Dutton: New York, 1973), p. 120.

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> imagery, ideals, modes of recreation and enjoyment. . . . above all. . . . men and women, from the city to the remotest country district, and in turn gathering together all that the countryside and its villages produce, in order to make these things available at central points.[106]

Such organicist language might give some readers pause. It may remind of them of feudal, Thomist "natural law" ideology. But look carefully: Mumford is not talking about creating a new social hierarchy here: he talks instead about building a new level of freedom: where each citizen would be the master of the region in which he lived: and secure in himself.

The real enemy of Mumford's organicist regionalism is the bourgeois cult of the Machine. According to Mumford, our lives must no longer be guided by what we imagine the machine "demands" of us. As he writes in the *Culture of Cities*, "so long as the machine was uppermost, people thought quantitatively in terms of expansion, extension, progress, mechanical multiplication, power." But in a society where the ideal of "organism" is "uppermost, we begin to think qualitatively in terms of growth, norms, shapes, inter-relationships, implications, associations, and societies." The reign of "organism" makes us human rather than dehumanizes: "We realize that the aim of the social process is not to make men more powerful, but to make them more completely developed, more human, more capable of carrying on the specifically human attributes of culture—neither snarling carnivores nor insensate robots." It is either or, however: either the

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[106] Mumford, "Theory and Practics, p.27.

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human organism or the machine must dominate. "The vital and social order must subsume the mechanical one, and dominate it: in practice as well as in thought." And "in social terms, this means a re-orientation not only from mechanism to organism, but from despotism to symbiotic association, from capitalism and fascism to co-operation and basic communism.[107]

Medieval organicism, and even the organicism of modern conservatives like Comte, encouraged what Comte called a "wise resignation" to the status quo, whose naturalness was accepted as an *a priori*.[108] Mumford's view is, rather, a prescription for creative social action. Mumford attempts to understand society itself as an "environment," created by human beings, mediating between the natural-regional environment and ourselves. He attempts to eliminate the reification of this social environment as a machine, as something outside both human control and fulfillment, and opposed to the natural-regional environment.

> There is one further important consequence of this recognition of the organic: that is, the disappearance of the boundary walls between the inner and the outer, the conscious and the unconscious, the external and the internal environment. With man there is no outer environment available except through the medium of society. . . . In order for the outer environment to function effectively, man must face it, seize it, assimilate it: and when that is done, it is no longer an *outer* environment.[109]

Mumford argued that democratic, social regionalism, given man's increasing technological powers, is not only desirable, but also increasingly the

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[107] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 303.
[108] Alan Swingewood, *Short History of Sociological Thought*, pp. 47-48.

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only possible choice we have to avert catastrophe. As man gains greater control over his social and natural environment, it becomes imperative that his decisions become wise. For as his powers grow, the price of failure in establishing a rational society increasingly become a matter of life or death for humankind itself. Mumford's description of such failure sounds frighteningly contemporary:

> imperialistic wars, internal and external, result in starvation, epidemics of disease, demoralization of life: uncertainty hangs over every prospect of the future: armed protection increases all the hazards of life. Municipal and state bankruptcy. Drain of local taxes to service increasing load of local debt. Necessity to appeal to the state for further aid in periods of economic disorganization: loss of autonomy. Drain of national taxes to support the growing military establishment of the state. This burden penalizes the remnants of honest industry and agriculture, and further disrupts the supply of elementary material goods. . . . Attempt to create order by external by external means: rise of gangster-dictators (Hitler, Mussolini) with active consent of the bourgeoisie and systematic terrorism by praetorian guards. . . .[110]

Mumford derived this apocalyptic fear from Geddes. Both men shared this fear with Spengler. But Geddes and Mumford do not share Spengler's pessimism about this fate—and certainly not his celebration of it. In his *The Condition of Man*, Mumford accuses Spengler of hypnotizing intellectuals after World War I into paralysis with the "soothing words, *downfall, doom, death.*" Mumford valued Spengler for making us aware that "downfall, doom and death" *might* await us if we do nothing. Mumford's complaint was that Spengler's counsel is to resign

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[109] Mumford. *Culture of Cities*, p. 303.
[110] Ibid., p. 291.

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ourselves to such a fate. Spengler counseled us to "soothe" ourselves into believing that that there is nothing we can do to stop this fate, that perhaps we might as well indulge in the bloody, sadistic rituals and wars that must soon come, with or without us. Mumford argues instead that although this terrible fate is indeed a real possibility, it is not inevitable if we engage in political and social action to thwart it. But

> the postwar challenge to effective, purposive action, action in the light of human ideals, action in behalf of a better life, was dissipated by Spengler's very doctrine of "pure" action—that is, action without rational motive or ideal content: the work of expansion and aggrandizement as practiced by the masters of the machine.[111]

Though Geddes and Mumford recognized the dangers for modern society discussed by Spengler, they rejected his perverse fatalism. In this, they were far closer to Freud than to Spengler. For they insisted upon the need to oppose creativity, eros, and rationality to the forces threatening to destroy civilization.

As the Cold War intensified in the late 1940s, Mumford became increasingly preoccupied with this imperative. In his 1954 collection of essays from this period, *In the Name of Sanity*, he spoke of our need to employ "the powers of Prospero"—love and creative intelligence--over the "Uprising of Caliban"—the irrationality and barbarism arising from the cult of the machine.

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[111] Mumford, *The Condition of Man* (London: Martin Secke and Warburg, 1944), p. 373.

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According to Mumford, this cult had metamorphosed into the cult of the A-bomb.[112]

As Freud argued, at the end of Civilization and its Discontents:

> The fateful question for the human species seems to me to be whether and to what extent their cultural development will succeed in mastering the disturbance of their communal life by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction. . . . Men have gained control over the forces of nature to such an extent that with their help they would have no difficulty in exterminating one another to the last man. . . . And now it is to be expected that the other of the two 'Heavenly Powers', eternal Eros, will make an effort to assert himself in the struggle with his equally immortal adversary [Thanatos, the death instinct]. But who can foresee with what success and with what results?[113]

Similarly, Mumford writes that

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[112] Lewis Mumford, *In the Name of Sanity* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1954). See also Mumford, *The Pentagon of Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1970). In this work, Mumford joined middle class Western youth of the 1960s in opposing the Cold War and the Vietnam War. But he was scathing in his criticism of much of the culture of the youth movement, whose "disorder" represented merely a "counter-drive in over-stimulation and over-excitement" to the "depressing monotony of megatechnic society," a "disorder" which served "admirably to stabilize the power system" rather than challenge it. Mumford invites us to contrast this "multi-media delirium with the intelligent, emotionally healthy plans of the Peace Moratorium" at the Pentagon in November 1969 and at Washington Square during the same period. In the picture Mumford presents from this latter nighttime demonstration, the demonstrators surround a water fountain with candles, "an ancient religious symbol, carrying human echoes that go back to the paleolithic caves." This demonstration symbolized for Mumford the potential for "a more vital counter-culture, centered in alert, clear-minded, articulate human beings in full possession of all their faculties; ready to act, in the words of ancient Athens' Ephebic Oath, "single handed or with the support of all." *Pentagon of Power*, Illustration 27: "Rituals of Counter-Culture," between pp. 340-41.

Mumford's ideal, genuine "counter-culturalist," on the other hand, respected the values of individual autonomy and rationality as well as community and emotional life and pleasure. Perhaps most important for Mumford, as this example illustrates, was the Moratorium's intelligent respect for historical meaning and tradition, with their use of candles. Not only that: but the fact that the demonstration was held in Washington Square, which Mumford had fought to protect alongside other urban activists in the early 1960s against the bulldozer, must have had particular resonance for him.

[113] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: Norton, 1961), p. 104.

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> within its figure on the web of life, each organism is by nature selective: it extracts from the total environment, its potential field of action, just those elements that can be taken in and that promote growth or security. When it makes bad selections its life is impaired: and when it goes on making them, it ultimately dies."

Man is unique because, as a result of his culture, "an ever greater part is played by deliberate selection, and by the collective reconstruction of the environment in terms of man's needs, desires, and purposes. . . ." Mumford now views the development of the city and of society through this perspective:

> Just as man himself is the most triumphant example of man's domestication of animals, so society is the result of man's long experiment in refining the processes of animal association. One might almost define the city as the structure through which domestication and association were purposively united.[114]

The decision to move toward a regional socialism thus becomes more and more imperative, *just because* of the growth of technological forces that make it increasingly *possible*. These forces can now be used either to sunder humanity further from nature, including our own human nature, our capacity for pleasure and sociability. Or they can be used to restore our connection to these capacities. We can destroy or liberate ourselves. As Mumford writes in "Regions—To Live In" (1925), we can and must strive for a "civic objective" which brings personal and collective "joy" rather than chaos to our lives. To live and thrive, we need to fulfill humane and urbane requirements, needs, and standards: clean air, peace and quiet, friendly intimacy with strangers, connection to nature. By its very

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nature as a crucible for capitalist profit, the megalopolitan/suburban form must *ignore* such requirements, needs, and standards. In such mega-urban

> communities. . . courtship is furtive. . . babies are an unwelcome handicap, . . . education, lacking in the touch of nature and of real occupations, harden into a blank routine, . . people achieve adventure only on wheels and happiness only by having their minds 'taken off' their everyday lives—communities like these do not sufficiently justify our modern advances in science and invention.

But in our planned garden cities and regions, we can achieve

> fuller development of the more humane arts and sciences . . . all that is good in our modern mechanical developments, but also all that was left out in this one-sided existence, all the things that fifth century Athens or thirteenth century Florence, for all their physical crudity, possessed.

It is just such a Greek ideal of human and civic-"centeredness, gracefulness, and balance" or *sophrosyne*, which Richard Sennett claims to promote in his book *The Conscience of the Eye*. The difference is that Sennett, like the Whites, seems to think we can achieve this ideal merely by "loving" the existing state of affairs, or tinkering with it, rather than averting our "eyes" from it and fearing it.[115] But such an ideal requires a lot more than just a new quasi-religious acceptance of the city-as-is, or even just a little tinkering. It requires a ***radical modification*** of the

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[114] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 304.

[115] Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye*, p. 9, *et passim*. John Ely Burchard shares a similar, extremely limited approach. He brusquely dismisses the possibility that garden cities could ever provide a suitable level of urbanity. He fails to grapple with the possibility that mega-cities are fundamentally unable to provide it, anyway. But he nevertheless recognizes, like Sennett, the need for "joy" in our urban arrangement. See John Ely Burchard, "The Limitations of Utilitarianism as a Basis for Determining Urban Joy," in Elizabeth Geen, Jeanne R. Lowe,

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present urban form. We need to replace it with planned garden cities and regions. so that local resources can be allocated to fulfill the needs of the entire community, so that we may build congenial, convivial, rather than congested urban space. To achieve this "civic objective" within the garden city, we require a regional balance of agriculture and industry, and a conservative attitude toward the natural resources and cultural resources, within the entire region:

> Permanent agriculture instead of land-skinning, permanent forestry, instead of timber mining, permanent human communities, dedicated to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, instead of camps and squatter-settlements, and to stable buildings, instead of the scantling and falsework of our "go-ahead communities"—all this is embodied in regional planning.[116]

In the next section of this paper, I wish to turn to Mumford's strategy for putting his plans into action.

Kenneth Walker, eds., *Man and the Modern City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1963), pp. 7-24

[116] Mumford, "Regions to Live In," in Carl Sussman, *Planning the Fourth Migration*, p. 90.

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ELITIST AND DEMOCRATIC PLANNING

How can socialists mobilize the masses to fight for a regional socialist alternative to the problems of present-day society?

Previously in our chapter (Chapter 2) about Mumford's first book, *The Story of Utopias*, we saw Mumford develop his basic views on the necessary reconstruction of science and art. We noted the naiveté of Mumford's faith, at that time, in the individual artistic genius to bring about the cultural changes he sought. As the decade of the 1920s wore on, the sphere which seems to have really seized Mumford's imagination, as a field for a really effective strategy for raising popular consciousness, was planning itself: urban planning, architectural planning, regional planning.

As I mentioned before, Mumford's RPAA's associates Henry Wright and Clarence Stein were part of a new generation in the 1920s of radical architects and planners. Their radicalism came from popular protest of such organizations as the Greater New Yorker tenants League, whose politics were socialist, and which engaged in a series of rent strikes at the end of World War II. In response, the American Institute of Architects, according to Richard Plunz, "took an active role in the effort to force Congress to continue government housing programs" which they had previously engaged in to house workers for wartime production "in peacetime." In response to its membership's "firsthand" experience "of the tenants' extraordinary struggle," "the New York chapter was especially active."

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"even endorsed the New York Labor party housing platform. which appeared to call for a complete government takeover of housing production." This did not occur. But in the decade of the 1920s, radical architects like Thomas. Ackerman. Goldhammer, Springstein, Stein. and Wright guided private housing construction of apartment houses and communities in the outer boroughs of New York City. In so doing. these architects promoted high standards for enjoyment of ample communal garden and park space. air and sunlight. They also designed cooperative housing projects for socialist workers groups. These projects included the Workers Cooperative Colony and the Shalom Aleichem Houses. And through the RPAA. architects Stein and Wright designed innovative communities in Sunnyside. Queens and Radburn. NJ.[1]

These movements among worker-tenants, architects and planners in the 1920s inspired Mumford. He realized that the *concept* of popular planning itself could offer a very effective way of challenging the present system's sway over popular consciousness. To present the outlines of such social planning might do the same job. politically. that Stieglitz attempted aesthetically. Like Stieglitz's art, such presentation might reawaken the "senses." They would make the fulfillment of people's basic needs—like man's natural desire to be connected to nature; to live without excessive levels of congestion, noise, stress; to have adequate housing, food, neighborly social relationships, etc.—seem feasible rather than seem a mere "infantile fantasy." Thus such plans will mobilize the masses to

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[1] Richard Plunz. *A History of Housing in New York City*. pp. 122-173.

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participate in and to fight for the enactment of such plans. The product—planning—would itself be part of the political process leading to planning. To paraphrase Marx, planning would itself become a political force for planning, once the plans themselves seized the imagination of the masses.

Thus the presentation of regional socialist planning, as Gramsci might say, must be "political,"—militant, critical—not "diplomatic." The task of genuinely alternative planning involves neither more nor less than the task of building a new society. Thus the task of genuine planning must involve a fight against the *ancien regime*, with those who hold a selfish interest in the present, exploitative, destructive course of society. In such a situation, the task of planning is not to sell out to vested interests, so as merely to "accomplish something," in the immediate sense. Rather, planners must "stick to their guns": their principles. We must formulate our planning as both the goal, and as the means of mobilizing the *broader society* to fight for it. These ideas were developed and articulated by Mumford in his disappointed response to the publication of the "Regional Plan of New York."

Mumford's Critique of the Regional Plan of New York, and the Problems with Elitist Planning

At the end of 1931, "the last volume of the 'Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs' appeared." It was sponsored by the Russell Sage Foundation. This was the very same Russell Sage Foundation, the reader should note, that Mumford, in his 1925 article "Regions to Live in," praised as pursuing a

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"regional" aim.[2] It might be inferred that Mumford consequently expected great things from this "Regional Plan." That might be inferred from the scathingly critical response he wrote when it finally came out.

Up to at least 1925, Mumford seemed optimistic about the possibility that enlightened industrialists and their representatives in such bodies as the Russell Sage Foundation might offer genuine support for his regionalist ideas. With his critique of this Plan, appearing in the *New Republic* in June 1932, his concept of regional planning became decidedly more critical and more radical.

Mumford begins his critique of the Plan by noting the aura lent to it by the fact it was worked on by "a whole corps of city planners, engineers, statisticians, economists, lawyers and municipal experts, . . . supported by the Russell Sage Foundation; and . . . it cost over a million and a quarter dollars." As a result, "New York's Regional Plan has been pretty generally accepted as the last word on the subject of city planning and regional development."[3] The founder, the "guiding spirit," of the RPA, in fact, was none other than the illustrious Thomas Adams, "an experienced city planner and administrator" who actually implemented Ebenezer Howard's scheme for garden cities in Great Britain. According to Mumford, "He directed the surveys, wrote a good part of the reports and gathered the results together into a final volume. No one can confront the imposing staff of authorities and experts that assisted him without a feeling of genuine deference." With a hint of mockery beginning to creep into his tone,

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[2] Lewis Mumford, "Regions—to Live In," Carl Sussman, ed. *Planning the Fourth Migration*, p. 92.

[3] Mumford, "The Plan of New York," *Planning the Fourth Migration*, p. 225.

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Mumford now asks, "If they are wrong, who can be right? If they are muddled, who can be clear?"[4]

Mumford here is offering a critique of the mystical aura of authority around Science and "scientific" planning within bourgeois society. His mentor, Randolph Bourne, had termed the "State" a confusion of the democratic community of the people with the power of the national government. In similar terms, Mumford implies that the Plan is presented in such a way as to encourage people to confuse the authority of wealth, credentials, power and prestige with the more democratic authority won through intellectual rigor. As he continues, "Still, authorities must finally be judged by the same criterion that applies to everyone else: what is the quality of their thought and what is the validity of their conclusions?"[5]

Mumford answers his rhetorical question decidedly in the negative: "After a painstaking examination of this tremendous work, and after due consultation with many other authorities, I am frank to say at the outset that the Regional Plan . . . is a disappointment."[6] Mumford admits that there are some positive, albeit insignificant, aspects to the Plan. But in general, according to Mumford, the plan "fails," both "as a specific enterprise for the benefit of New York," as well as "an example" for future planners and regions, as "Mr. Adams, indeed, [had] hopes. . . ." It is a failure because, firstly, the results are inconsistent with the aims. There has been no unity of theory and application: "it is precisely in the broader aspect

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[4] *Ibid.*
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.*

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of regional survey and regional plan that the report is fundamentally weak: it . . . fails to demonstrate valid principles and useful methods of procedure."[8] What Mumford implies is one of several basic principles of planning he seeks to elucidate here: that planning requires a sincere application of general theories and principles if it is to have socially beneficial results, as opposed to simply narrowly beneficial, "specific" results.

To understand this passage, I feel the need to draw upon the theory of Herbert Marcuse. To challenge and resist a destructive status quo, according to Marcuse, one must first *conceive* of it as a *system*, as a *totality*. This, *theoretical* conception must transcend what we perceive merely with our senses. Otherwise, we are stuck with what is: the existing, unjust world in which we live.

According to Marcuse, in *Reason and Revolution*, what differentiated the modern era from previous eras was that "man came to rely upon his mind and dared to submit the given reality to standards of reason. . . . Man has set out to organize reality according to the demands of his free rational thinking instead of simply accommodating his thoughts to the existing order and the prevailing values."[9]

Injustice and oppression thrive upon the alienation of man from the potentialities latent in himself and his world. The existing order, with its world of "brute facts," oppresses man. But as Marcuse writes, "Man is a thinking being. His reason enables him to recognize his own potentialities and those of his world.

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[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 225-26.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 226.

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He is thus not at the mercy of the facts that surround him, but is capable of subjecting them to a higher standard, that of reason. . . . Reason could lead beyond the brute fact of what is, to the realization of what ought to be, only by virtue of the universality and necessity of its concepts (which in turn are the criteria of its truth)."[10]

The British empiricists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, by contrast, deny "the universality and necessity of" the concepts of Reason. Instead, they attempted to show that such concepts were purely derived from "brute facts," or, as Locke says, "the inventions and creatures of the understanding. . . ." And, for Hume, as Marcuse writes further,

> general ideas are abstracted from the particular, and 'represent' the particular and the particular only. This. . . . confined men within the limits of the 'given', within the existing order of things and events. *Whence could man obtain the right to go beyond not some particular within this order, but beyond the entire order itself?*[my emphasis].[11]

In Mumford's eyes, this is precisely what Thomas Adams and the RPA had done by disconnecting their ideals of planning from their concrete plans. General theory provides the resources necessary for planning to "stand against experience," to confront and to radically transform the existing, destructive order, and thus to avert disaster and to heal society and men's relation to nature. What the RPA had done was to pull its punches, to separate theory from application. By so doing, they surrendered "the right to go beyond not some particular within this

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[9] Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 6.
[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 19.

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order, but beyond the entire order itself." As Marcuse paraphrases Hegel's critique of empiricism.

> As long as the things-in themselves were beyond the capacity of reason, reason remained a mere subjective principle without power over the objective structure of reality. And the world thus fell into separate parts, subjectivity and objectivity, understanding and sense, thought and existence.[12]

Recall, from my introduction and from Chapter 1, our discussion of Randolph Bourne's attack upon the "realism" of the "war intellectuals." In hopes of getting something accomplished, Bourne charged, these realists rejected their responsibility, as intellectuals, to evaluate the war according to the humanistic "values"—peace, human life, the welfare of the entire world society--which should have guided them and informed their thought. As a result, they accomplished nothing; instead, they supported tremendous military destruction as well as domestic repression.[13]

Mumford bases his critique of the RPA realists, I would argue, upon Bourne's critique of the war-realists. If regional planning is going to really work, if it is to do more than simply become an appendage to the existant, to fine tune this or that "specific" detail within the existing order, then the planners, Mumford argues, have to have guts. They must have theoretical principles, based upon a commitment to the good of the whole of society, to which they adhere throughout

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[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 23.
[13] Randolph Bourne, "The War and the Intellectuals," *The Radical Will: Selected Writings*, ed. Olaf Hansen (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), p. 316.

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the planning endeavor. But because the RPA rejects such principles, their "planning" becomes mere ameliorism.

Mumford first characterizes the RPA's Plan as a "Pauline effort to be all things to all men." This includes both "the advocate of the garden city" and "the advocate of the skyscraper"; in addition,

> those who believe in industrial decentralization will find considerable ground for their interest, and those who believe that New York is destined to greater concentration will also be backed: the believer in the social control of land values and the speculator who would like no control at all: the housing expert who knows that nothing can be done for the masses without a state subsidy and the old-fashioned business man who still thinks that housing can be done by private interests: the believer in organic communities—all these can find exactly the words they are lacking for in some corner of this report.[14]

Mumford accuses the Planners, operating out of this people-pleasing mentality, of a "failure to think clearly and to follow a train of thought to its conclusion." This "neutralize[s] the effect of any particular proposal." It produces merely "*drift,*" instead. But the "drift" produced by such people-pleasing seldom leads to radicalism: and the Plan is no exception. It leads the Planners instead to ignore the basic problems and realities of the New York metropolitan area, in order to avoid *displeasing* their wealthy and powerful sponsors and supporters. This is made abundantly clear by Adams's shockingly cavalier attitude toward the housing problems of the poor:

> "The housing problem in New York," says Mr. Adams blandly, "differs in character and in some of its divisions and origins from that of other great cities. This is particularly so in its economic aspects. For example, the

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[14] Lewis Mumford, "The Plan of New York," *Planning the Fourth Migration*, p. 227.

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> problem is less associated with real poverty than it is in great European cities. It might almost be said that the greatest problem in New York up to the present has been to provide more healthful accommodation for those having sufficient income to pay an economic rent, whereas the great problem in European countries has been to make provisions for those who cannot pay an economic rent."

As Mumford responds:

> When one remembers that there are still 66,000 insanitary old-law tenements in New York, when one remembers that the New York State Housing and Regional Planning Commission, more closely and authoritatively in touch with the problem than Mr. Adams, stated that two-thirds of the population could not afford housing that met modern standards of sanitation and decency, one wonders whether the rest of Mr. Adams' generalizations are as subjective and unreal as those he makes on housing.[15]

Whether or not his facile generalizations are true, however, seems irrelevant to Adams anyway. The welfare of the people of New York City is not really Adams's concern. For Adams, according to Mumford, "dismisses the basic housing problem in this area by simply placing it in the category of a general social problem whose solution lies outside the province of the planner." This is because "he believes that [Mumford quotes Adams here] 'all housing should be economic, in the respect that it should it yield a fair return on the investment in building and land'."[16]

It is questionable, however, how "pragmatic" such a position is, even in the Jamesian sense. In William James usage, "cash-value" was, at least, merely a rhetorical metaphor, at most, merely an indice: an indice he naively took to

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[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 245-46.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 246.

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measure benefit, both for the individual and for society. It is an economic indice, in other words, of social benefit, in the service of discovering that benefit. In Adams's usage, however, cash-value becomes not just roughly equated with social benefit. It *supplants* the goal of social benefit itself. In fact, it becomes the exclusive goal for *social* planning. All other goals, including social benefit itself, are dismissed as so much "morality."

In Mumford's view, there is a relationship between this desire of the Planners to please vested interests and the lack of regional comprehension in their Plan. Mumford argues that "in their anxiety to arrive at tangible [i.e., "realistic"] recommendations for the Plan," the Planners fail to really start with the *region* as the basis of their inquiry and their planning. Thus they fail to "deal systematically with more than a fraction of the forces that have created the present complex of cities and that condition any attempt to effect their improvement." In fact, what the Planners do is to introduce more of the same old megalopolitan, urban-imperialist blindness to such regional forces: a blindness which has gotten us into the present "chaos" in the first place. What they have done is to simply attach the name "regional" to their Plan, without including any of the substance: "In geography, the word *region* has a fairly exact connotation; but the Russell Sage planners have used it to describe an arbitrarily chosen area of metropolitan influence."[17]

In his *Democracy and Education,* John Dewey has the habit of using the metaphor of farming to discuss his ideals of planning curricula for education.

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[17] *Ibid.*, p. 228.

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Perhaps the most succinct statement of Dewey's own planning ideals is in reference to farming. in Chapter eight. which is entitled "Aims in Education." Dewey writes.

> A farmer who should passively accept things just as he finds them would make as great a mistake as he who framed his plans in complete disregard of what soil, climate, etc., permit." One of the evils of an abstract or remote external aim in education is that its very inapplicability in practice is likely to react into a haphazard snatching at immediate conditions. A good aim surveys the present state of experience of pupils, and forming a tentative plan of treatment, keeps the plan constantly in view and yet modifies it as conditions develop.[18]

By failing to truly survey the region as a whole, by including instead only the immediate environs of NYC, the Planners seem guilty of just such "haphazard snatching at immediate conditions." From what Dewey argues, this would indicate the presence of a "remote external aim" for the Plan of the RPA--an aim removed from aims which would truly benefit the majority of the inhabitants. Why, indeed, Mumford wonders, "was an area within a forty-mile radius from the center taken as the basis of the Survey and the Plan?" According to Mumford, "the intentions and purposes which were in the planners' minds in choosing such an area are nowhere very clearly expressed or cogently accounted for."[19] But from Mumford's summary, it is obvious that the basic reason for drawing the boundary at this distance is simply to continue to expand the present destructive, megalopolitan way of life, while skirting the vital question of how long such expansion can continue to be a "solution." By failing to really consider the

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[18] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 105.
[19] Mumford, "The Plan of New York," *Planning the Fourth Migration*, p. 228.

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region, the Planners, in effect, transform it into a "black hole," an area of seemingly infinite magnitude and capacity, into which the problems of megalopolitan expansion can safely be dumped. The regional limits to such expansion, in terms of taxing natural resources as well as sheer spatial considerations, need never be considered. The problems of Megalopolis thus need never be confronted.

In Dewey's terms, quoted above, the Planners are guilty of both the traps Dewey mentions; they are "react[ing] into a haphazard snatching at immediate conditions" *in order to* "passively accept things just as [they] find them." In the name of science, they counsel shortsightedness, not only to preserve, but also to further the status quo. The basic rationale for the Plan is to ease the congestion a bit, for the time being; and to make a not insubstantial portion of the surrounding countryside, watersheds, and waterways accessible to citizen-commuter involved with that way of life. There is no challenge here to the basic megalopolitan trend itself, neither to its one-sided, "imperialist" relation with the rest of the region, nor to the wastefulness practiced and the malaise experienced by its urban occupants. The Planners accept all the dominant assumptions: for example, the notion that a 2-hour commute is not an unreasonable expenditure of time and effort for office workers to make on a daily basis. The Planners come to grips with neither the problems of megalopolitan life, nor the danger that these problems will intensify. They make no effort to ensure that "growth" does not lead to further congestion in these outlying areas within the 40-mile radius chosen as boundary if the Plan is put into effect, for example. As Mumford remarks:

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> This question becomes all the more pertinent when one observes how often in the report the low *average* density of population for the forty-mile area is cited—as if this were in some fashion a palliation for the indecent congestion of the metropolis itself or an earnest [illusion] of the possibility that future growth, arising out of similar causes, would be less congested.[20]

Tacitly, however, the Planners accept as a *fait accompli* that congestive trends will continue rather than abate: that there is really no long-term solution to the problem of congestion. The only solution possible is the short-term solution of further geographic expansion for the megalopolitan population—which in turn must, of course, lead to greater congestion. This acceptance of congestion as a *fait accompli* is due to the fact that, in the tradition of trend-chasing sociology, the Planners assume human beings to be on a par with "fruitflies." According to Mumford:

> The boundary line suggested by the Russell Sage planners takes the place of the walls of the bottle in which Dr. Raymond Pearl bred his fruitflies: by a metaphorical process, he assumed that the curve of growth which accounts for the multiplication of Drosophilia in a closed container will also account, by and large, for the future growth of population in the New York region—if that be regarded as a closed container.[21]

Such a narrow view of sociological trends provides the perfect justification for the Planners' failure to challenge those trends. If such trends are indeed inevitable, then all that any planners can do is to bow to them, and suggest mere temporary palliatives. The pessimism as well as absurdity of such sociology is revealed when we think of its frightening endpoint. Someday, the entire planet

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[20] *Ibid.*

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"must" become one giant megalopolis—a prospect which, as we saw in the Introduction, did not seem to frighten Adams' realist descendants, Morton and Lucia White.[22]

Mumford prefaces his critique of this assumption by stating that "sociologically speaking," it "is valueless. . . ." It does not include all the facts necessary to make a truly scientific determination. Certainly, it does include many important facts, such as:

> the biological ratio of births over deaths: . . . the social and economic forces that have acted in the past . . . industrial movements, changes in the form of labor organization, as governing immigration, the rate structures established for railroads and for giant power:

But these so-called "objective" factors are not comprehensive. The Planners have failied factor in the most important facor: the subjective factor, "*the very plans and policies that are made to meet an anticipated increase or decrease in population.*" The omission of the role of the Planners themselves in the "trends" the forecast amounts, as Mumford indicates, to a conservative self-fulfilling prophesy, a game of self-justification: "psychologically speaking, it must be classed as 'wish fulfillment'".[23]

If this is wish fulfillment, as I agree with Mumford that it is, then it is a passive form of wish fulfillment. The planners and their predecessors program their plans for more population congestion, increase it, and then talk about this

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[21] *Ibid.*, p. 229.
[22] See Morton and Lucia White, *Intellectual vs. the City*, p. 239, where, as I quoted them before, they conclude their work by arguing that "All the world's a city now, and there is no escaping urbanization, not even in outer space."
[23] Mumford, "Plan of New York," pp. 229-30.

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increasing "trend" as a given, as if it could not be reversed. The hand conducting the sociological survey fails to acknowledge what the hand doing the planning is doing.

This omission results from the fact that the Planners confuse different sciences and the respective role that observation and judgment ought to play within each. In the physical sciences, observations by the scientist are after the fact: they cannot affect the eventual outcome of the processes studied. But for Mumford, following Dewey, social observation can and should play a far more active role in the processes of social life:

> Judgments about the social future differ from other forms of scientific prediction. Dr. John Dewey has called them "judgments of practice" and has pointed out that the hypothesis that is provisionally assumed is also one of the factors that contribute to the results.[24]

For Mumford, for the Planners to "assume that growth within an arbitrary metropolitan area will continue automatically in the future, under the same conditions that prevailed in the past," i.e., to accept current social trends as a given, is a praxis which "beg[s] the whole question" fundamental to the field of *planning* itself. For it places "a premium upon inertia and routine and to register a vote against those possibilities of social control which a plan, by its very nature, must conjure up."[25]

The Planners are engaged here in a realist distortion of social "science." Realists take the present structure of society for granted. They accept as a given the particular and by no means foreordained dominant "modernizing" trends

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[24] *Ibid.*, p. 233.

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within our society. Consciously or unconsciously, they subjectively identify with these trends and champion them. They do so disingenuously, however, because they resort to what one might call scientistic "triumphalism." They treat the success of these trends as an empirically ascertained and therefore "objective" certainty that cannot be questioned. The essential role of science and planning, to gather information in order to *make choices among different possible projects*, is obscured by realism in order to justify the continued pursuit of the current project—that which serves the ruling interests of society at present. What occurs, then, is a self-serving and ruling-class-serving, mystification, not science, nor "objectivity." What occurs is, as Marcuse would say, a "one-dimensionalizing" of thought, which severely cripples our capacity, in fact, to think politically. What is obscured is the fact that existing reality and its dominant trends are themselves the result of choice; choices which could have been made differently, and could be remade. "The Regional Plan's difficulties on the fundamental matters of area and population derive," in part, from the fact that "they have accepted a 'automatic' and 'inevitable' a process of metropolitan aggrandizement which has been in good part deliberate: the outcome of consciously formulated plans and purposes." As an example, Mumford cites the work of "Professor [and RPA writer] Haig, discussing the economic conditions of metropolitanism. . . "In projecting greater congestion from existing trends in congestion, Haig, according to Mumford,

> ignores the part played by the [active] efforts [on the part of powerful elites] to promote congestion, such as the

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[25] *Ibid.*, p. 230.

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> pyramiding of ground rents in the business districts and the establishment of differential freight rates in favor of the Port of New York, and within that Port, of Manhattan Island. Nor does he distinguish between urbanism in general and metropolitanism: hence, for him, the increase in the proportion of city dwellers to agricultural workers is a justification of the process of metropolitan expansion—as if that were the sole mode of city development![26]

The second factor which Mumford claims leads the Planners astray is that they ignore trends, actually *present* within current social reality. They ignore the trends that would contradict their unexamined assumptions about the allegedly objective basis for continued expansion. By examining the statistics presented by the Planners themselves, Mumford comes up with some startling facts. Between 1900 and 1917, in the New York "region as a whole," "factory workers increased more rapidly than the [general] population," between 1917 and 1922, "the population increased more rapidly than the factory workers." To Mumford, this proves that

> there has been a steady decrease in the rate of industrial growth since 1912: a process which has nothing whatever to do, of course, with the present depression. There is reason to believe that the peak of industrial centralization occurred at about 1910, and that since that time new technological factors, particularly electric power, the telephone, the motor car and the new methods of corporate direction, have been making themselves felt.[27]

According to Mumford, the Planners blinded themselves to the implications of this fact, for "with the myth of New York's greatness and the desire for

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[26] *Ibid.*
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 231.

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metropolitan concentration to spur them, they looked for no other evidence and admitted no other necessities." He asks rhetorically,

> Is it any wonder that from the beginning the Russell Sage planners tended to belittle the new social conditions and the new technological innovations which might, if socially applied and controlled, act as a brake upon metropolitan growth? The influence of the telephone, the radio, the automobile, the airplane, giant power, skilled industrial planning and rationalization, in flattening out the "advantages" of the metropolis, even the dubious advantage of a large labor market, part of it chronically unemployed—none of these factors has been completely canvassed and candidly assessed.[28]

Through the magic of "realism" the Planners have transformed present trends into certainties, and "planned" on that basis. They take such "realism" to be "scientific planning." But what they have done, instead, is to act like perpetually unprepared, powerless primitives:

> Accepting the extension and the congestion of the metropolitan area as inevitable, these planners are in the position of a community on the lower Mississippi when the river is rising: it is too late to control the flood and the only possible form of effort is to create stouter levees and to remove one's household back from the river to higher ground.[29]

According to Mumford, this is why

> All the more tangible hopes for the Regional Plan for better living conditions lie in the outlying suburban areas. . . . Unfortunately, the forces which have created a mess in the center are at work, likewise, in the outer fringe. If the regional planners have no plan for controlling these forces

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[28] *Ibid.*, p. 232.
[29] *Ibid.*

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> at the center, why should they be more sanguine of their abilities on the periphery.[30]

Because the Planners do not acknowledge the possibility of choices, they do not even "state the problem correctly," which should be "the capital use of a comprehensive survey." Instead of surveying the problem adequately and scientifically, the Planners use their "planning" to avoid it. Instead of moving from a comprehensive evaluation of the problem, to a careful weighing of alternative proposals for dealing with it, and then to a choice, the Planners begin and end with short-term non-solutions, which never challenge the current reality. Comprehensive appraisals, alternative solutions or "hypotheses" about the way things could be made to go to avert disaster, would just get in the way of what is essentially an effort of evasion and propaganda for continuing along the current disastrous path. As Mumford complains,

> It may be that under terms acceptable to our present financial interests no effective planning can be done within the metropolitan district, and no solution in the interest of public health and welfare and amenity and the good life generally is possible. But this is no reason for evading the problem itself or for hiding the essential facts with illusory hopes and false promises.[31]

In addition, the Planners evade their planning responsibilities by conflating the various levels of problems facing our cities. According to Mumford,

> One of the needs of a fundamental survey is to delimit those problems which can be handled immediately, those which can be dealt with by current methods once public opinion and official authority have been educated sufficiently, and those which cannot be handled at all until

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[30] *Ibid.*
[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 232-33.

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> there is a complete reorientation in our civilization. The last is by no means the least important.[32]

Mumford argues here that the most important problems faced by our cities are problems fundamental to our present civilization. It is the responsibility of real planners to solve them, and to do this, they have to be willing to engage in political confrontation, which in turn must involve public education. But the RPA does the opposite--they stick to the immediate problems, and propose for these immediate solutions which solve nothing. As for the other, vastly more important problems, these are ignored, or deemed irrelevant to the concerns of "realistic" planners. Their role, whether they are conscious of it or not, is one of political obfuscation, not of education. As Mumford writes:

> While providing a plan which was to operate over a period of at least thirty-five years, the Regional Plan has cast its solution as far as possible into terms which would admit of their immediate fulfillment. This mode of forecast and planning not merely allows precious little for changes in our economy and our institutions: it does not allow for the education and political possibilities of a well digested plan.[33]

The Planners want to have their cake and eat it too: to solve the problems of Megalopolis, an increasingly destructive social form as we discussed in Chapter 2, while remaining within its boundaries. But as Mumford argues, "Any effort to relieve or reconstitute the metropolis must go *against* the basic pattern; for to carry it further is only to broaden its capacities for mischief."[34] We have come to the proverbial fork in the road. The divide is not just between Megalopolitanism

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[32] *Ibid.*, p. 233.
[33] *Ibid.*

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and Regionalism. It also yawns, between the capitalist class, who by and large support the former because it is in their short-term economic interest to do so, and the lower and middle classes, whose interest—the long term interests of human society—is to support the latter. Further Megalopolitanism will not benefit the larger society; only genuine regional planning can do that. It thus becomes the obligation of socially responsible planners to educate the lower classes about this truth, in order to galvanize them as a political force for the implementation of such planning, against the resistance of the ruling class. The Planners, however, refuse to admit this increasingly obvious truth. For the social interests to which they have allied themselves prohibit such clarity and honesty.

> It may be more *effective*, as well as more clear-sighted and honest, to say that no comprehensive planning for the improvement of living conditions can be done as long as property values and private enterprise are looked upon as sacred, than it is to draw pictures of parks that may never be built, playgrounds that may never be opened to children, and garden cities that will never be financed.[35]

Mumford quite ably reveals such improvements to be inevitably doomed. The palliatives that Adams seeks are purely mechanical. His thought is not dialectical because it is not regionally comprehensive. He does not take into account the dynamics that will be set up for the outlying regions by higher levels of central congestion, if Megalopolitan trends are permitted to continue. With the high level of office building congestion proposed by Adams for the center, such peripheral improvements will probably never be built, according to the dialectical

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[34] *Ibid.*, p. 249.

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rules of thumb which Mumford establishes" "congestion in the center demands wider and wider areas for commutation. . . ." A system of "commutation"—where workers must commute from suburbs to get to work in the metropolitan center—"is not merely costly in the matter of supplying new transit facilities and new terminals. . . In order to make these expensive lines pay, the maximum degree of congestion must be created in the outlying areas. . . ." This is the reason why, ultimately, "open spaces cannot be maintained in the suburbs so long as intensive growth is localized and encouraged in the central areas." Therefore, "if the sky is the limit in the metropolis, parks and gardens and parkways and playgrounds will not be the final result in the suburbs. That is an illusion. " Mumford then scolds, "the Regional Plan does ill to foster it. Under this regime the suburb is merely a temporary transitional area, awaiting the last degree of metropolitan exploitation: those who wish the advantages of a semi-rural environment must always be on the move."[36]

The Power of the Plan as a Potential Educational Tool

Mumford believed that the fundamental problems facing cities could be solved only by a comprehensive regionalist solution, which in turn could only be put into place by a popular political movement, which must be engendered by political education. Education can change what we might term the "balance of forces" in society, to one favorable to sanative planning rather than adverse to it. Without such an educational effort, planning becomes reduced to pipe dreams, to

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[35] *Ibid.*, p. 233.
[36] *Ibid.*, pp. 241-42.

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the drawing of "pictures of parks that may never be built, playgrounds that may never be opened to children, and garden cities that will never be financed."

Fine. But what social agency did Mumford envision should carry out this educational task? He believed that one of the most important functions of regional planning, itself, was to do this. In the political sense, planning must give birth to itself: it cannot rely upon the possibility of immediate acceptance, or of finding a niche with the existing political and social environment. For to solve the fundamental problems faced by our cities, radical solutions must be posed, solutions to which the existing "balance of forces" is inimical.

Does Mumford appear "unrealistic" here? Certainly it appear that way to the Planners, whose definition of "realism" meant leaving one's theory, principles, integrity, and passion outside the planning room, in order to be "experimental."[37] But as Mumford tried to show, this "realism" is really a contradictory ideology. It is based upon an evasion of uncomfortable political truths.

A far healthier, more courageous version of political "realism" was developed by the man who basically founded the idea in the modern era: Niccolo Machiavelli. No doubt: Machiavelli would have approved heartily of Mumford's profoundly political "realism." Mumford's ideal planner is much like Machiavelli's Prince. Both are involved in a labor of *innovazione*: political innovation. The first rule of such endeavor is to recognize that the goal is to

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change existing society. Because society is defined by politics, by the human will and by political power, this means that things must change *politically*. But politics is about interest and power. Thus, the extent that one compromises with the existing, corrupt system of interest and power: to that extent, one *fails*.[38] Therefore, Machiavelli counsels his aspiring Prince to build up his own power, independent of the existing system of power: the nobility. Those who have power now are corrupt; they have a definite interest in maintaining society the way it is. Thus, if one wants to change things for the better, one must draw upon the potential power of those who are currently powerless: the *people*, the *mass*. Having no stake in the present corrupt system, being the members of society who will benefit from Machiavelli's desire for national unification, the people have no interest in betraying the Prince.

Mumford applies the same, healthily *political* realism to the modern attempt at planning. If planners are to be "prophets," they had first better understand their endeavor to be political, to involve political struggle with the existing system. Second, they must be "armed prophets": armed against the capacity of the present "financial regime" to keep society on its present fatal course. Like the Prince, the principled planner must rely upon a new potential source of political power in society: the people. Machiavelli counseled the Prince to arm the people, with military weapons. How realistic is this for modern planners? Machiavelli himself

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[37] See Thomas Adams, "A Communication: In Defense of the Regional Plan," in Sussman, *Planning the Fourth Migration*, pp. 260-67.

[38] This is not to say that one should never make compromises. But what the Planners, and other such contemporary self-styled "realists," fail to grasp, is that one should not make a virtue out of necessity. One should not compromise unless and until one must.

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indicates a better model for modern planners. According to Gramsci, Machiavelli's works, including *The Prince* itself, as well as the *Discorsi*, themselves represented such an attempt. Before they even got military weapons, Machiavelli attempted to arm the people with *knowledge of the political process—through political education.*[39]

For their "arms," the planners have nothing but their planning. To Mumford, however, *radical* planning can be as powerful an educational tool as anything that Machiavelli wrote, or even the military arms he wanted distributed. It can provide a vision of alternatives, far more rational and beneficial than the existing destructive system can ever offer. Carefully articulated, such planning can literally wake people up!—up and out of their confusion, their ignorance, their blind faith in bad leaders, their apathy, their despair.

To be clear, Mumford is neither Machiavelli, nor Marx. He does not exactly call here for armed popular revolution. But what he is talking about is at least the need of planners to try to build a reformist movement among existing politicians and officials, backed up by popular electoral support. The Plan itself might have aroused such support. Thus the special disappointment felt by Mumford upon encountering the Regional Plan. For in place of radical planning as political education, he encountered compromises with the existing power structure instead. Through such compromises, the Planners hoped to gain the acquiescence of the power structure to a planning philosophy inimical to it. But this is an inherently

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[39] For this interpretation of Machiavelli and Gramsci, see Benedetto Fontana, *Hegemony and Power: On the Relation between Gramsci and Machiavelli* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

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futile strategy, as Mumford discusses in the section on "building heights and congestion":

> Here Mr. Adams has taken the standpoint of the practical administrator, faced with an immediate problem and forced to compromise with all the existing interests and pressures. If the present Regional Plan were an official one, if it were to be put in force immediately, and if these proposals were the last step in drafting ordinances and proceedings to legislative action, the final results he achieves would be a regrettable—but so far understandable—attempt to make the best of a bad situation.

Adams, however, is in a position to offer alternatives that would challenge these "interests and pressures." Instead, according to Mumford,

> Mr. Adams proceeds to lay down merely "practicable" standards on the basis of the existing structure of values and the existing methods. He therefore provides no sufficient impulse to change the framework and the ideas, the structure and the standards; and the very interests he has already compromised within his report will, encouraged by his timidity, exact further compromises and concessions from any municipal officials who might actually attempt to put these ideas into practice.[40]

As an example, Mumford writes that Adams

> says of the quarters in which two million people spend at least eight hours a day on Manhattan Island alone, that "they may have less space about them for light and air than residential buildings because of the greater opportunities they present, as a rule, for artificially overcoming deficiencies in natural light and ventilation."

Mumford responds,

> As a matter of cold fact, the office worker is far more confined than is the housewife or the school child. From the standpoint of health and efficiency of the office worker and the loft worker, it is highly important to have plenty of

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[40] Lewis Mumford, "The Plan of New York," *Planning the Fourth Migration*, p. 238-39.

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> sunlight and air. all the more because their resistance is lowered and the chances of infection greatly increased by daily travel in crowded subway lines.

Adams' standards seem to be based upon Big Business's complacency about the alleged capacity of the mechanized ventilation and artificial lighting in their office buildings and lofts to be employed as a substitute for natural lighting and fresh air. It is not based, as Mumford implies, upon a realistic consideration of the actual health needs of human beings. Thus, as Mumford further reports, "even in areas of predominantly low building," such as Paterson, NJ, the Regional Plan "does not hesitate to assign high ones: see the development of the civic and business center in Paterson. . . ." Mumford further states that "the Plan, whenever it has a concrete step to propose, automatically assumes the existence of congestion and generously provides for it." For examples of this, Mumford mentions the Plan's proposals for high-rise developments in "Columbia Heights, Brooklyn . . . the Upper East Side Water Front, . . . the Civic Center for Manhattan, with its vast tower, 1,000 feet high. . . ."[41]

In his response to Mumford's criticisms, Adams argues that Mumford's "visionary" idea of planning is something "which experience has taught me to distrust profoundly as affording a desirable social objective." "I have found that movement is essential to progress in reform," Adams argued further," and that one must keep to the road, and as nearly the middle as possible, if any improvement is to be made." According to Adams, rather than "stand still and talk ideals," as, he alleged, Mumford advocated, we must "move forward and get

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as much realization of our ideals as possible in a necessarily imperfect society, capable only of imperfect solutions of its problems." Adams rejected the notion that "definite theory" or a willingness to go "further than it is reasonable to expect opinion to go, or government to authorize in the future," was necessary to achieve such objectives. Indeed, Adams implied, such radical goals were to be seen more as an obstacle to rather than a necessity for effective social reform. Hyperbolically, Adams wrote that Mumford had unfairly charged Adams with seeking "to find a solution . . . acceptable to . . . a caste of bankers." In response to this caricature of the critique that Mumford had actually written, Adams argued that "our studies have been from the beginning a simple search for the truth, and our conclusions uninfluenced by any other consideration."[41]

For Adams, the problems of planning in an unjust society are more akin to that of a carpenter, who failed to measure a space adequately before cutting his boards, or encounters a bit of shrinking or expansion after he cuts them. The carpenter will merely trim the board. Mumford, and his mentor, Dewey, recognized the need to continually adapt one's means to the conditions one encountered in the pursuit of one's aims. But Adams' adaptation represents capitulation, according to Mumford. He is "experimentally" throwing the baby out with the bath water: not just trimming the board, but tossing it out into the trash, and using cardboard instead. He is sacrificing, not a rigid insensitivity to

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[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 240-41.

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"conditions," but his integrity in the face of losing his financial sponsorship by social elites. Meaningful planning involves political struggle. One does not win a struggle against the "imperfections" of our society by "trimming" off one's principles and goals to those who defend and profit from such imperfections: one *loses*. Adams argues that sticking to the "middle of the road" represents a "simple search" for the disinterested "truth." For Adams, such middling is the best strategy to gain as much benefit for everyone as is humanly possible. But Adams fails to acknowledge the enormous pressure exerted by the present powerful financial interests upon the political and social system. Thus Adams' disinterested realism, in reality, means pulling his punches, means surrender. It means a drift to the right, a transformation of good intentions into so much window-dressing for the dominant, destructive interests, a loss of potential allies who might support radical planning if presented with it. "By attempting to be practical and hard-boiled," Mumford writes, "Mr. Adams, so far from helping the practical administrator, has actually made his task more difficult." This is because Adams ignores the need for values, and the presence of social conflict within the realm of planning itself. Planning is *not* a value-neutral endeavor: it is engulfed in class struggle, and therefore involves things like strategy, tactics, courage, knowing when to fight hard to appeal for support from powerful potential allies, knowing that unconditional surrender before the battle accomplishes nothing for the principled planner:

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[42] Thomas Adams. "A Communication: In Defense of the Regional Plan," in Sussman, ed., *Planning the Fourth Migration*, pp. 260-67. Originally in *The New Republic*, 71 (July 6, 1932): pp. 207-10.

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> The time for compromise is not when one is thinking out a problem; for by hauling down one's flag to the enemy as soon as one has surveyed the field and counted his forces, one lacks the power not merely to reinforce one's friends in their attack, but to win over such of the enemy as may have sympathies in the other camp. There are business men, for example, who are not convinced that buildings that buildings over twenty stories high are desirable forms of investment, just as there are plenty of architects who do not believe that the skyscraper is the chief boast of American architecture or the only way in which to house office workers. The Regional Plan, with its genius for premature compromise, gives these people no effective aid.[43]

The "realistic" RPA fails to acknowledge the potential for mass struggle for radical planning. But it also ignores the possibilities for *internal* dissent, against the dominant paradigm of ever-greater congestion and ever-taller buildings. Even an appeal made among the lower rungs of the business class itself, not to mention among professional architects, might yield a movement against this paradigm, a pregnant possibility to which the Planners have blinded themselves.

Democratic Planning

In the first section of this chapter, we saw ample evidence for the old saw that "a bad plan is often worse than no plan at all." In this section, we will discuss the political, social, and economic bases for good planning. Good planning, for Mumford, meant the fulfillment of the needs of all. This was the core value of his vision of a new, progressive civilization to replace capitalism. That vision was best expressed in Mumford's book, *The Culture of Cities* (1938).

Democratic Participation

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[43] Lewis Mumford, "The Plan of New York," *Planning the Fourth Migration*, p. 239.

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To meet the basic human needs of all the people in the society required rational and participatory social planning. To be truly rational, it would need be, not just "scientific," but far more importantly, *democratic*. For otherwise, the benefits of planning would be monopolized, once again, by the planning elite—like the Stalinist bureaucrats— or rather, the exploitative class whom this elite represented: like the RPA, in the final analysis, represented its elite financial sponsors rather than the entire society it claimed to represent. As we have seen in Mumford's critique of the RPA, the facade of scientific omniscience is used in our present society to mask the injustice of undemocratic planning. While science is the proper servant for democracy, it is no substitute for democracy. As Mumford writes in *The Culture of Cities*, "Planning . . . is a selective process: it demands evaluation and choice. Though the values that are to issue from effective regional planning must ultimately harmonize with actuality, they do not automatically derive from the immediate situation: they may, on the contrary, deliberately work against it." Here again, Mumford hints at class struggle and oppressive present realities, "against" which the principled planner must "work." To do so effectively, he must rely upon the passions, the interests, and the collective wisdom of the oppressed *masses* of ordinary people[44] as much or more than upon allegedly "value-neutral" scientific expertise:

> It is naive to think that geographers, sociologists, or engineers can by themselves formulate the social needs and

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[44] Recall the title of this dissertation!: "Megalopolis vs. the Masses," and Mumford's admiration for such figures as Jack Reed and Randolph Bourne, who wrote for and were around and imbibed the spirit of the radical newspaper, *The Masses*.

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> purposes that underlie a good regional plan: the work of the philosopher, the educator, the artist, the common man, is no less essential; and unless they are actively brought into the process of planning, as both critics and creators, the values that will be imported into the plan, when it is finally made, will be merely those that have been carried over from past situations and past needs, without critical revision: old dominants, not fresh emergents.[45]

However, to be both genuinely democratic and sensitive to people's needs, it is not sufficient merely that the *demos* merely ratify plans, or even that they have significant input into their initial formulation. For the plans, lastly, must be made visible and revisable by everyone in the society.

For Mumford, only democratic planning is flexible, because it involves the whole community as an intelligent formulator, interpreter and executor of the plan. And only such flexible planning is successful planning, because no planner can foresee all the rough adjustments that must be made, all the problems, big and small, that must be solved.

According to Mumford, the basic fallacy of the Planners was to gear their Plan toward grand designs for expansionism, at the expense of the concrete needs of the people for whom they were allegedly planning. Besides their social elitism, the Planners were too ambitious in planning for the future. Thus they failed to address the foreseeable, basic social problems of resulting from their pro-mega-urban assumptions. Thus they foreclosed alternatives which might have begun to address these problems. Finally, by being too ambitious in formulating their Plan, the Planners made it more difficult for the people of New York to address the

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[45] Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, p. 377.

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additional, unforeseen problems that will inevitably arise in the future, with or without a good basic Plan, to begin with.[46]

If planning is to flexibly resolve unforeseen problems and situations, it must leave room for such resolution. This means, above all, that ordinary people must be involved with implementing as well as formulating the plan, and thus be able to revise it successively as these unforeseen problems and situations unfold. It is perhaps a given that planning must always initially be conducted by professionals. But if these professional planners wish to be democratic, then they must concern themselves, above all, with planning *the creation of popular communities*. Such communities have two basic functions for the ideal democratic society: functions that intertwine. In such communities, ordinary people can meet their basic need for culture and society, and popular politics and planning can occur.

Mumford's term for such community, a community of citizens rather than exploited objects, is "organic." The Planners' basic commitment to a program of megalopolitan expansion was completely *inimical* to this sort of community, however:

> The [Planners] were thinking either of the physical city alone, or of those even greater abstractions, the plots and values and investments and trends of population. Meanwhile, *they completely neglected the sociological fact of the city*—a collection of groups, within a limited area, housed in appropriate permanent structures, serving the common life in related institutions.[47]

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[46] Lewis Mumford, "The Plan of New York," p. 255.
[47] *Ibid.*, p. 256.

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At bottom, the failure of the Regional Plan is due to a lack of civic awareness. The Planners ideology is anti-democratic, and they virtually ignore sociology and geography.

> "Men come together," said Aristotle, "in order to live" they remain together in order to live the good life." Until the planner has a guiding notion as to what the good life in his generation is, how it is expressed in communities, what organs must be created for it, his elaborate surveys and his vast engineering projects will remain disoriented—disoriented and wasteful. The lack of a sociological concept of the city is at one with the planners' lack of an organic geographic concept of the region: it means a failure to approach the problem scientifically and to make use of such tentative results as already have been achieved.[48]

Regional, democratic, community-based planning would change all that, according to Mumford. In the *Culture of Cities*, Mumford outlines four stages of a planning process that is democratic, participatory, scientific, and political. Drawing upon the work of Geddes, Mumford writes, "the first stage is that of survey. This means disclosing, by first-hand visual exploration and by systematic fact-gathering, all the relevant data on the regional complex." These include economic, social, geographic, and historical data about the needs, problems, and relationships in the area. The more people that are involved in this initial survey, the better it becomes. After the data has been gathered, "The orderly arrangement and graphic presentation of these data, through maps, statistical charts, and photographs, are important aids for clearing the mind of confusion, partial

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[48] *Ibid.*, p. 258.

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observation, and misleading generalizations formed on the basis of insufficient evidence."[49]

The "second stage in planning is the critical outline of needs and activities in terms of social ideals and purposes," a political task which only the entire people, through a radically democratic process, can justly perform, not just the scientific planners—as we discussed above. Then comes "the third stage of planning":

> that of imaginative reconstruction and projection. On the basis of known facts, observed trends, estimated needs, critically formulated purposes, a new picture of regional life is now developed. In this picture a host of dispersed projects—the dredging of a river here, the extension of a library service, the shifting of an industry to a better location—are for the first time set down in a fashion that discloses their essential spatial and temporal inter-relationships. . . .
>
> Here plan finally appears in the accepted sense of the word. For a good part of these projects can be graphically drawn up.[50]

Even at this point, however, Mumford is careful to insist that the process is still ongoing: it must never become a *fait accompli* nor an abstraction, over and above the fluid, organic processes of the physical, biological, economic, and social region for which it means to plan: "Such plans, however, are instrumental, not final: what is planned is not simply a location or an area: what is planned is an activity-in-an-area, or an area-through-an-activity."[51]

Yet, important as they are, these first three stages, "survey, evaluation, and the plan proper," are *still* "only preliminary" to a final stage, "which involves the

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[49] Lewis Mumford. *The Culture of Cities*, p. 376.
[50] *Ibid.*, p. 378.

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intelligent absorption of the plan by the community and its translation into action through the appropriate political and economic agencies. In this stage, the plan undergoes a readaptation as it encounters the traditions, the conventions, the resistances, and sometimes the unexpected opportunities of actual life."

Far from justifying moral timidity in the previous stages, however, as the Planners might argue, in order to anticipate adjustments down the road in advance, this final stage of adjustment demands, in dialectical fashion, a bold initial plan. It requires an openness to future adjustment, not an obsessive desire to "micro-manage" them in advance. As Mumford writes,

> No plan can automatically foresee all the contingencies: moreover, it loses some of its efficacy as plan if it sacrifices, at the beginning, the clarity of the ideal by timidly anticipating all the qualifications and reductions that ideals are subject to in the course of their translation.

"Nor can a plan, as such," Mumford writes, "provide for its own fulfillment." Again, this task of fulfillment must be left to the masses of ordinary citizens as well as to the period of concrete implementation. That is why the implementation and adjustment process itself must be conducted democratically. The most that an initial plan, product of a single individual's mind or of a planning committee, can do in order "to emerge as a reorganizing agent," is to "help conjure up and re-educate the very groups and personalities that will bring it to fruition." Thus "Weak plans, which hesitate to leave solid ground at all, are

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[51] *Ibid.*, pp. 378-79.

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often far less effective than overbold ones that awaken the popular imagination. . . ."

Here of course we can see Aristotle's famous argument for democracy. In arguing for an enlightened, benevolent despotism, Plato had argued that the multitude could be capable of only "opinion," not true "knowledge," and that the ideal house, for example, could be made by the ideal housebuilder if he was left alone to perceive the transcendental essence of the ideal house. Aristotle pointed out, however, in his *Politics*, that "the many, of whom each individual is but an ordinary person, when they meet together may very likely be better [i.e., more knowledgeable, virtuous, and wiser] than the few good,"[52] and that "the knowledge of the house is not limited to the builder only; the user. . . of the house will even be a better judge than the builder."[53] In the concrete application of the plan, the masses must be consulted, because all of us are harmed by the consequences of poor implementation of even a good initial plan.

But to be effective in their implementation of the plan, the masses of ordinary citizens must comprehend it. Therefore, it must be created with mass education in mind: and the surest way to educate is to involve participation, to invite rather than foreclose choice: "Plan, then is not a substitute for intelligent choice, decision, or invention on the part of those who must execute it in detail: it rather assumes the existence of these qualities and organizes the milieu in which they can most effectively work." It is in this fourth stage of adaptation that the

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[52] Aristotle, "The Politics," *Introduction to Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1947), P. 597, section 1281, lines 1-6.
[53] Ibid. p. 599, section 1282, lines 18-22.

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plan has its most educational effect. Mumford writes, unless this happens, the plan will fail.

> Regional plans are instruments of communal education; and without that education, they can look forward only to partial achievement. Failing intelligent participation and understanding, at every stage in the process, from the smallest unit up, regional plans must remain inert.

"Hence the need," Mumford insists, "for positive organs of assimilation": for building choices about how ordinary people might adapt the plan to their own particular circumstances, in their localities, in the plan itself. As Mumford concludes:

> Regional plans must provide in their very constitution the means of future adjustments. The plan that does not leave the way open to change is scarcely less disorderly than the aimless empiricism that rejects plan. Renewal: flexibility: adjustment: these are essential attributes of all organic plans.[54]

Are Ordinary People Capable of Democratic Social Planning?

Mumford's vision of regional planning, then, is in the best rather than the worst tradition of utopianism. Mumford's utopianism is radically democratic, *anti*-totalitarian, not proto-totalitarian, utopianism. While planners play an important role in Mumford's vision, as he claims they must in any rational modern society, they most certainly do not have the final say, as with the far more bureaucratic models put forward by the Bolsheviks and institutionalized under Stalin. Mumford's utopianism, although it exists "no where" today, is an attempt

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[54] *Ibid.*, pp. 380-81.

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to empower all the members of human society as they are, not to remold them in the image or the pawns of the "godlike legislator" of the totalitarian tradition.

Still, being utopian, being "no where," not real, right now, Mumford's vision still presents a problem. How to get there from here? The people and the planners have become disposed, from birth, to accept the present reality: the elitist, hierarchical, private, anti-participatory ideology and social decision-making processes of capitalism. How can we change this disposition? It was this dilemma that moved Machiavelli, Rousseau, and their totalitarian interpreters, such as Mao (as opposed to their democratic interpreters, such as Marx and Engels, and Mumford) down the path toward advocating a "godlike legislator." The Legislator had the magical capacity to bring the people from their selfish concern with the "here and now" to a consciousness of the "there and then." Thus transformed, the people could then become conscious participants in the formation of a society-wide "general will" as opposed to their present, selfish wills. They would learn to at least include, if not replace, self-concern with "virtue. "[55] It is the penchant of bourgeois thinkers to argue that such a project is inherently unrealistic and impossible, that it must lead either to totalitarianism, and/or a restoration of the free or regulated market. Certainly such thinkers are correct to argue that no one should or can legislate morality, especially not one allegedly selfless, omnipotent man. But their basic assumption is that there is no alternative. People are inherently selfish. They cannot even be led, let alone

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forced, to adopt the consciousness necessary for collective self-rule. The market alone, no matter how destructive it becomes, creates the best of all possible worlds. It is the fairest regulator of an incorrigibly selfish human interest.

Radical democratic theorists, like Mumford, can accept neither of these alternatives, because of the devastation they fear will be the ultimate result of either. The historic examples of genuine self-management have been few and far between, crushed as they were by capitalism or Stalinism. Still, these thinkers believe that the human race cannot afford not to make the attempt, over and over again, to forge a third, democratic way, based on the assumption that the mass of human beings are not inherently stupid and selfish. Rather, if they are this way now, Mumford insists, they are made so by present society, by its dependencies and "tyrannical compulsions." The totalitarianism of fascism, and by extension, Stalinism, pitched as an alternative to the "anarchy" of capitalist society, is merely an extension of the normal, everyday, "tyrannical compulsive" functioning, and consequent popular libidinal frustrations and fixations, of the capitalist "power state":

> The totalitarian state has but two important functions: to prepare for war and to keep power in the hands of the governing party. This is not in the least a new form of politics: it is merely the old form, shamelessly reduced to its naked reality.
>
> The fascist state may be defined as the war dictatorship of the power state frozen into a permanent

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[55]Bruce Mazlich, *The Revolutionary Ascetic: Evolution of a Political Type* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), pp. 15-21.

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> form: opinion governed by war censorship, all law converted, openly or implicitly, into martial law.[56]

The only survivable alternative is popular participation. To permit this requires a decentralization and opening up of governmental processes and power to the people:

> The real alternative to the empty political patterns of the nineteenth century lies, not in totalitarianism, but in just the opposite of this: the restoration of the human scale in government, the multiplication of the units of autonomous service, the widening of the co-operative processes of government, the general reduction of the area of arbitrary compulsion, the restoration of the processes of persuasion and rational agreement.

Democracy makes political participation easy for the ordinary citizen.

> Political life, instead of being the monopoly of remote specialists, must become as constant a process in daily living as the housewife's visit to the grocer or the butcher, and more frequent than the man's visit to the barber. If the leisure that man has been promised by the machine counts for anything, it must count for the extension of the privilege of being an active political animal.

Such ease of political participation is important, Mumford argues, because "every phase of group activity, industrial, professional, educational, has its political aspect: each activity raises special problems of power, organization, control and discipline—problems that cry for intelligent and orderly solutions."[57] And how much intelligent is the solution, as Aristotle might have argued if he had taken his argument to its logical conclusion and become a radical democrat like Mumford, if we all are allowed to participate in political decision-making!

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[56] Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, pp. 380-82.

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The anarchy of capitalist society represents neither real freedom, nor the best that ordinary people can do. Real freedom for everyone requires conscious social coordination, which can be achieved through a process of education. But this educational process opens and expands the awareness of the citizens of their needs, desires, and possibilities—opens rather than restricts, as would the Rousseauvian "godlike legislator," instructor in a completely selfless, state-loving "virtue." As I have already quoted him several times before, Mumford argues that

> The opposite of tyrannical compulsion is not unconditional "freedom" but the systematic practice of rational discipline through education and co-operative service: through education the curve of the individual career may be ultimately harmonized with that of the community, not by a mere restriction of response to that desired by a governing despot, but by a widening of personal scope and opportunity, in those spheres of rational understanding and administrative action which are properly the concern of the citizen and the polity.[58]

In Mumford's conception, freedom must involve a balance between personal and social concerns. To forfeit either one in order to pursue either other will not bring real freedom. These are illusions promoted by bosses, bureaucrats, and despots. These people hypocritically claim an imaginary capacity for enlightened selflessness, exclusively for themselves, as the antidote to the alleged intractable irrationality of the masses. "That human conduct is full of irrational residues does not lessen this need [for democratic accountability]: for what is true

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[57] *Ibid.*, pp. 382-83.
[58] *Ibid.*, p. 383.

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of human beings in the mass is equally true of self-elected rulers and leaders. . . ."[59]

Society is a single, organic entity, in which we all have to live. Therefore, genuine social rationality cannot be produced where the mass is consigned to permanent exclusion from power and thus to irrationality. Mumford writes, "in any case, the problem is to increase the area of rational judgments and rational political activity, and to divert or sublimate those forces which are inimical to co-operation."[60]

The masses' irrationality and selfishness is a function of the existence and tyranny of these exploitative, hypocritical elites themselves: remove one, and you remove the ground for the other:

> To the extent that political power becomes rationally conditioned and successfully diffused by education, the individual citizen will be reluctant to sacrifice his own initiatives and his own judgments to the terroristic monopoly of dictatorship. The impotence of the many is the power of the few—and vice-versa.[61]

Under a genuinely democratic planning regime, the irrationality and authoritarianism once thought inherent in the nature of the mass of human beings, if not in their "betters," will surely and swiftly disappear.

Common Ownership

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[59] *Ibid.*
[60] *Ibid.*
[61] *Ibid.*

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To truly benefit all the people in the society, to make their relationships, no longer exploitative and destructive, the means of production would need to be owned in common. As Mumford writes in *The Culture of Cities*,

> No community is rich enough to redeem its own land as a whole at the prices asked by the present owners. Hence, except in Soviet Russia, where a revolutionary change in ownership took place, the most important steps in making the earth a permanent and satisfactory human home are halted by a small privileged class.[62]

Mumford formulated his basic program for a democratic communism in his unpublished 1931 essay (which will be the subject of our next chapter), a "Preface to Action":

> We seek an order which will release and give fresh objectives to energies that are now stagnant. What are the basic political and economic principles of such an order?
>
> One: The earth is the unalienable property of all its inhabitants: the right to occupy it and work it and utilize it must be based upon social functions. This applies to both individuals and communities.
>
> Two: The right to life includes a proportionate share of the annual income of the community, without respect to status or merit or ability to work. This minimum would be sufficient to maintain life in health and wholeness: it should cover both subsistence and culture. Without such a constant, based upon needs, not upon differential earning power, planned production is impossible.
>
> Corollary: above this constant, goods and services should be proportioned to merit and social effort in any single year. Except in the form of personal property or consumable goods, no portion of this surplus should be set at the disposal of the individual beyond the current year.
>
> Three: Capital, and its power obtained by setting aside capital, is a function of the productive order, not of distribution. Private capital earnings must be expropriated. . . . Production must be kept flexible and adaptive as

[62] *Ibid.*, pp. 330-31.

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> technique, but the kind, the quantity, and the quality of the product must be periodically determined by the community.
>
> Four: The right to association and corporate organization is inherent in groups. . . . Every economic group, consumptive and productive, must have corporate representation in the political life of the community.[63]

Democratic Representation

The latter point mentioned above, about representation, deserves special consideration. In considering it, Mumford harks back to an earlier essay, written right after World War I, entitled "The Status of the State." In this essay, along with another written at the same time, "Wardom and the State," Mumford attacked all forms of centralized state power, ranging from the most absolutist or despotic to the parliamentary regime. According to Mumford, no centralized state could truly "represent" the ordinary citizen nor serve his or her interests. Instead, centralization of power produces arrogance, authoritarianism, insulation from the people, and corruption by what Mumford termed at the time "classes and interests": the "active economic minorities." Following his mentor Bourne, Mumford argued that ultimately, centralized power and its corruption led to war.[64]

What alternative scheme of representation would avoid these problems? Mumford writes: "That the groups which guide the state must be made responsible goes without saying. But how are the purposes of these groups to be

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[63] Mumford, "Preface to Action." Unpublished mss., 1931, Lewis Mumford archive, Van Pelt-Dietrich Library, University of Pennsylvania, pp. 18-19.
[64] Mumford, "The Status of the State," *Dial*, July 26, 1919, pp. 59-61; "Wardom and the State," *Dial*, October 4, 1919, pp. 303-05.

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formulated: how are their wills to be carried out?"[65] How, in other words, are the "representatives" to be made truly accountable to all the people? Recall, from Bourne and Marx's analysis the problem with centralized state power: that it masked the predominant influence of economic elites. Even in a "socialist" society, where Capital has been expropriated, state power can be wielded by minorities for their own benefit, in the name of the majority: witness the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union! Following sociologist Charles Cooley, Mumford assumes that the existence of groups, with their varying interests, sentiments, and egotism, is a permanent feature of human society. To ignore the existence of such groups and to centralize state power, as does the purely parliamentary scheme of representation, is to invite trouble. For then you permit a single clique, or a bloc, to control the State and thus the society, as it were, behind the scenes. Thus, instead, state power must be decentralized to the local community and region. And universal representation, for Mumford, must also be balanced by representation of economic and social groups. How, Mumford asks, might this mixed representation be structured?

First, Mumford considers the contemporary representation schemes of trade union bureaucrats, as well as those of consumerist movements. Both still want centralized parliaments, representing either workers or consumers. Harold Laski (whose book is one of two which Mumford reviews in "The Status of the State"), advocates both, in a bicameral, albeit still national, parliament. Mumford sees

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[65] Mumford, "The Status of the State," p. 61.

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drawbacks to such schemes, however, in the conflict that might 534

arise from a divided sovereignty:

> If representation by locality, however, be the fiction we have asserted, this bicameral conception is unworkable; for it would represent a cleavage between economic groups functioning through occupational associations and economic groups functioning through political associations, and in case of conflict there could be no other kind of agreement than that enforced by superior physical power.[66]

Yet there is still hope, however, once we abandon the centralized framework—as the trade union movement seemed to be learning when Mumford wrote these words.

> Developments within the trade-union movement during the last half decade show that there is still a third possibility. In many cases the workers have found that organization by highly centralized national unions has the same defect that organization by centralized national states is guilty of—it ignores regional needs, peculiarities, and differences, and carries controlling power too far away from those most concerned in its immediate application.

Mumford now refers to the new "soviet" movement, which, in 1920, had not yet been either crushed by the bourgeoisie or coopted by the Russian "Soviet" bureaucracy":

> The shop steward in England, the shop committee in America, and the factory Soviet in Hungary and Russia suggest that economic interests themselves must be organized primarily on a local basis. The federation of these local units within a single city or region, and the federation of regional labor associations into national or transnational bodies seem the more desirable methods of organization.[67]

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[66] *Ibid.*
[67] *Ibid.*

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devolves back to the ordinary citizen. Thus the problem of dual soveregnty is solved:

> This suggests plainly a reconciliation of the individual's interests as a worker and as a citizen, as the member of an industrial and the member of a political society. Both current theories leave these functions unintegrated: the politician would have the individual forget his class interests; the international trades-union executive would have him ignore his place interests.[68]

As we already quoted him in Chapter 1, Marx described this democratic communist life, to which Mumford aspires, at the end of his essay, "On the Jewish Question":

> Human emancipation will only be complete when the real, individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen: when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a *species-being;* and when he has recognized and organized his own powers (*forces propres)* as *social* powers so that he no longer separates this social power from himself as *political* power.[69]

Quite similarly, as we have already quoted above, Mumford writes in *The Culture of Cities* that

> Political life, instead of being the monopoly of remote specialists, must become as constant a process in daily living as the housewife's visit to the grocer or the butcher, and more frequent than the man's visit to the barber. If the leisure that man has been promised by the machine counts for anything, it must count for the extension of the privilege of being an active political animal.[70]

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[68] *Ibid.*
[69] Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 46.
[70] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, pp. 382-83.

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How do we create the kind of momentum for planning we need, before the soviets arise? Certainly the RPA was, to say the least, inadequate as a vehicle for the kind of radical planning and popular mobilization which Mumford desired. What sort of organization, however, would do the job? To answer this question in our next chapter, we turn to Mumford's unpublished 1931 essay, entitled "Preface to Action.

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CHAPTER 9

"A PREFACE TO ACTION": 'NEO-SCIPIAN' LEADERSHIP

The crisis brought upon American society by the Great Depression naturally stimulated a crisis in the minds of radical intellectuals, such as Lewis Mumford himself. Initially, in the winter of 1928, Mumford actually welcomed a new Depression for the opportunities it would bring for radicals such as himself. He wrote Victor Branford.

> There are various signs that the criticisms and constructive proposals we've made during the last five years are about to bear fruit. We are in for a period of industrial depression in America; unemployment has already begun in the big cities. . . . we will be forced to think a little more furiously and effectively: men will suffer but ideas will prosper."[1]

Ideas certainly abounded during the Great Depression. They also abounded in Mumford's own mind and writings. And like the ideas in the larger society, Mumford's ideas were not exactly harmonious with one another. He was rather firm and consistent about his "criticisms" of modern capitalist society, and the "constructive proposals" he sought to present in order to resolve that society's endemic problems. The point of Mumford's internal dissension, however was how those ideas might best be implemented, and by whom. Could the working class be relied upon to carry out the necessary transformation, through

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revolution? As we discussed in our introduction, Mumford, in *Technics and Civilization* (1934), explicitly presented this class and this strategy as the proper one.

Or was it? Mumford seems to have disagreed with himself on this point. For elsewhere, he looks to a middle class of "consumers," technicians, scientists, managers, etc. Agreeing with Walter Weyl,[2] Alfred Bingham,[3] and Stuart Chase,[4] Mumford thought the middle class was gaining in social importance while the working class was declining. These writers certainly did not wish to exclude the working class from their organizing efforts. But they aimed to concentrate their focus upon the middle class, whom they felt might be organized as a force for effective political pressure upon the government for progressive reform.

Throughout the decade, and especially during the year 1931, Mumford seems to have swung quite freely between the two poles: of middle class vs. working class leadership, of revolutionism vs. reformism. In the years 1930-31, Mumford published at least two essays forswearing the very concept of revolution, at least in its traditional incarnation as a seizure of power. In his November 1930 contribution to a series of articles in *Forum*, entitled "What I Believe: Living Philosophies," Mumford writes nostalgically that

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[1] Mumford, letter to Victor Branford, February 22, 1928, Lewis Mumford Collection, Van Pelt Library Center, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Cf. Donald Miller, *Lewis Mumford: a Life*, p. 292

[2] Charles Forcey, *The Crossroads of Liberalism: Croly, Weyl, Lippmann and the Progressive Era, 1900-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, *1961*), pp. 82-83.

[3] Alfred M. Bingham, *Insurgent America: Revolt of the Middle Classes* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1935).

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> When Europe went to war, I was eighteen, and I believed in the revolution. Living in a world choked with injustice and poverty and class strife, I looked forward to an uprising on the part of the downtrodden, who would overthrow the master class and bring about a regime of equality and brotherhood.

But then Mumford writes, in somewhat mysterious, Hegelian fashion,

> In the subsequent years I learned the difference between a mass uprising and the prolonged spiritual travail and creation of a revolution; politically, I am no longer naive to believe that an uprising can change the face of the world. But I have never been a Liberal, nor do I subscribe to the notion that justice and liberty are best achieved in homeopathic doses. If I cannot call myself a revolutionist now, it is not because the current programs for change seem to me to go too far: the reason is rather because they are superficial and do not go far enough. . . .
>
> It is a new life I would aim at, not simply a new balance of power. Such a life would leave less of the present world standing than Soviet Russia has left.[5]

Mumford devotes the remainder of the essay to discuss what appears to be purely a "strategy' of spiritual renewal and voluntary simplicity on the part of individuals.

In the Winter 1930-31 edition of the *Modern Quarterly*, Mumford had published an essay entitled "A Challenge to American Intellectuals: A Controversy. The Evolutionary Approach." As outlined in this essay, Mumford's "evolutionary approach" ran along the lines outlined originally by *New Republic* editor Walter Weyl as well as Mumford's mentor, Victor Branford. This was a

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[4] Stuart Chase, *A New Deal* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932).
[5] Mumford, "What I Believe: Living Philosophies XIV," *Forum*, November 1930.

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reformist strategy of "continuous pressure of organized economic groups, working toward concrete ends, the control of industry, the socialization of a municipal utility, the nationalization of a resource, the planning of great public works."[6]

Yet, as we shall now discuss, Mumford supports a more revolutionary strategy in an unpublished essay he also writes in 1931. To be sure, this is not a strategy for working class revolution, or at least not a revolution led by workers. Instead it is more along the lines of the strategy proposed by Thorstein Veblen before he died: a revolution led by the middle class intelligentsia and professionals, but staffed and supported by workers. This essay seems to synthesize the ideas of the two essays we just discussed, and push them in a more revolutionary and Leninist, vanguardist direction. Yet, as we shall also see, this strategy ultimately relies upon enlisting the aid of enlightened local capitalists, who, according to Mumford, might see that planning is somehow more in their interest than the free market.

To the orthodox and even heterodox Marxist, studying Mumford's confusion might seem pointless. They would be termed the aimless wanderings of someone Trotsky would have called a "centrist": someone who enjoys the glamour of styling himself revolutionary, but who is at heart a reformist. While such an estimation is perhaps accurate, Mumford's most radical strategy and

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[6] See Mumford, "A Challenge to American Intellectuals: A Controversy. The Evolutionary Approach," *Modern Quarterly*, Winter 1930-31, pp. 407-08.

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ideas in "Preface to Action" are nevertheless profoundly interesting and worth paying attention to.

In "Preface to Action," Mumford outlines his most radical political strategy and program for the early 1930's. He has little faith in any existing political and social formal institutions and partisan movements whatsoever. He seeks unequivocally to sweep these aside through a strategy he terms "revolutionary."[7] He begins the essay with the following stark pronouncement:

> Without a series of profound political and economic changes our society cannot go on. Going on without these changes means going deeper into social depression, economic uncertainty, financial tyranny, exacerbations, wars, international chaos.
>
> . . . only one problem concerns men of good will today: on what terms can we transform the present social order? None of the existing political orggrams [a typo here, probably an amalgam of "organizations" and "programs"-- TS] meets our needs. We demand a fresh basis in thought and a new plan of action.[8]

Now, Mumford sets down the rationale for building some kind of revolutionary vanguard, with a forthrightness that might impress even Lenin or Gramsci: "Politically speaking, the great mass of any community is inert and receptive."[9]

By "receptive" Mumford assuredly means, "vulnerable, *at present,* to the ideological manipulation of the present ruling class." He cannot be arguing that

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[7] Mumford, "Preface to Action," (Unpublished Mss., 1931. The Lewis Mumford Collection in the Van Pelt Library of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, PA), p. 1.
[8] *Ibid.*
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

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this vulnerability is a good thing, that the masses are putty in the hands of any leadership that comes along to fool them. For the very next sentence begins with democratic concerns: "The difficulty of democratic government has been to reconcile this quality with the duties of active politics."[10]

It is the "duty" of the masses to be politically active. Unfortunately, in 1931, they are merely "receptive": passive. How to get them active? This must, purely by default, be the task initially of some minority: "A revolution, like an election, is always a contest between minorities for the purpose of establishing the right of leadership." If an election must be led by a minority, however, then even more so for a revolution. That is because "a revolution differs in this essential respect from the normal routine of government: when it is successful it establishes a new orientation in every department and function of society." Because "majorities" have become acclimated to the existing state of affairs, therefore, "majorities do not produce a revolution: it is futile to wait for them." Instead, "it is the revolution which creates a new majority."[11]

Thus the question becomes: "Who are to be the new leaders? Who has the intelligence and passion and imagination to engineer the necessary changes, and to change our potential revolution into a dynamic and active one which will focus the powers that are now available?"[12]

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[10] *Ibid.*
[11] *Ibid.*
[12] *Ibid.*

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Mumford a Leninist? This may surprise readers. But as a young man, as he himself admits in the passage quoted above, Mumford was profoundly shaken by the First World War, and by the "injustice and poverty and class strife" of the early part of the twentieth century. He began his intellectual career as a bohemian intellectual in Greenwich Village. Among his associates at that time was Irving Granitch, who later, under the name Mike Gold, wrote a radical memoir of his boyhood in the Jewish ghetto on the Lower East Side, *Jews Without Money*. Gold went on to become the chief editor of the Stalinist *New Masses* in the thirties as well as the chief promoter of the Soviet-inspired school of "proletarian realism" in fiction. But in the Greenwich Village days of his friendship with Mumford, Gold joined the Wobblies: the anarcho-syndicalist International Workers of the World.

Mumford, Gold and their friends would often go out to eat at Polly's, on Fourth Street between MacDougal and Sixth Avenue. On the second floor there met the New York branch of the Liberal Club. This was, in fact, the meeting place for the *Reds* of Warren Beatty's film:

> the Village meeting place of Emma Goldman, John Reed, Lincoln Steffens, Theodore Dreiser, Eugene O'Neill, and Randolph Bourne. From their table . . . Mumford and his impressionable little band of literary achievers occasionally caught a glimpse of one of these legends of the Left sitting at another table, or talking with Polly in the kitchen, . . .[13]

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[13] Miller, *Lewis Mumford: A Life*, pp. 96-97.

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Mumford and his friends were great fans of this early radical group. Several of these early radicals became great admirers of Lenin. Jack Reed wrote *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1919), perhaps the most famous, celebratory account of the Bolshevik victory in October 1917. And Max Eastman, the editor of the *Masses*, wrote *Marx, Lenin, and the Science of Revolution* (1926). In it, Eastman popularized the notion that Lenin was a great "engineer" who pioneered the "science of revolution."[14]

If Mumford was a Leninist, however, he was decidedly a neo-Leninist. Notice the credentials Mumford establishes, from the beginning, for the sort of leadership he wants to see develop: intelligence, passion, and imagination. This is not a mere Leninist party he wants to build. In the tradition of the revolutionary saints, Lenin put doctrinal clarity about Marxism ahead of everything else. Whether he realized it at the time or not, and despite the enormous energy and talent of associates like Trotsky, Bukharin, Radek, etc., Lenin built a bureaucratic leadership party, which later, after he died, metamorphosed into Stalinism. But Mumford seeks a democratic party, which holds up individual autonomy, initiative, and creativity as absolute necessary to build his vision of a regional, self-managing society.

In the 1920s, Mumford broadened his coterie of radical friends significantly beyond Mike Gold. Mumford creates the visionary group of

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[14] John Reed, *Ten Days That Shook the World* (New York: International Publishers, 1967), Max Eastman, *Marx, Lenin, and the Science of Revolution* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.,

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architects and planners in the RPAA. As for his friends among radical literary intellectuals, these included Malcolm Cowley, Edmund Wilson, and Waldo Frank. While this latter group embraced communism as a basic social philosophy, and joined the Popular Front's "League of American Writers" later in the decade, they had a good deal of distaste for the dogmatism and toadyism, vis. the Soviet bureaucrats, of the Communist Party. On the other hand, they were vitally interested in the Marxist strategy for social change. In a letter to Theodore Dreiser, on May 2nd, 1932, Wilson states that "without the collaboration or knowledge of the Communists," "Lewis Mumford, Waldo Frank, Dos Passos, Sherwood Anderson, and" himself had written and signed a "manifesto." The authors of the manifesto fuse traditional Marxist ideas with their own concerns as middle class intellectuals and artists. They write that the "present crisis of the world . . . is something more than a mere crisis of politics or economics. . . It is a crisis of human culture." But "the need of a new economy in which men and nations can live and build and grow is the focal point of the human crisis in response to the contemporary economic crisis," that along with "exploitation of the many for the profit of the few," the problem with the system is that "it neglects or makes eccentric to the main stream of life these creative impulses which are as fundamental in all men as the impulse toward acquisition," and that "the need for human growth is, therefore, inextricable from the need of a new

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1926). See also Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front*, p. 426.

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social-economic order." Thus, they "subscribe to certain lines of action as immediately urgent:"

> a. The ruling class, hopelessly corrupted by the very conditions of their emergence, must be expelled from their present position.
> b. A temporary dictatorship of the class-conscious workers must be set up, as the necessary instrument for abolishing all classes based on material wealth.
> c. A new order must be established, as swiftly as can be, in which economic rivalry and private profit are barred; and in which competition will be lifted from the animal plane of acquisition to the human plane of cultural creation.[15]

The manifesto was never published, however. Most of its signers, with the exception of Mumford, chose to work instead on a substitute pamphlet, mainly written by Lewis Corey (nee Louis Fraina, co-founder of and expatriate from the Communist Party and now a leading Marxist intellectual).[16] The manifesto was titled *Culture and the Crisis: An Open Letter to the Writers, Artists, Teachers, Physicians, Engineers, Scientists, and Other Professional Workers of America.* In Daniel Aaron's summary, the writers "denounced the two parties as 'hopelessly corrupt', rejected the socialists as a do-nothing party, and declared their support for the Communist Party, which also sought to defend the dispossessed classes

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[15] "Manifesto" from Edmund Wilson, letter to Theodore Dreiser, May 22, 1932, *Letters on Literature and Politics: 1912-1972*, ed. Eleana Wilson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), pp. 222-23. The fact that Mumford was willing to sign this manifesto should give pause to anyone who has heretofore accepted Leo Marx's and others' contention that Mumford had no interest in viewing the lower classes as a vehicle for social transformation.
[16] Denning, p. 99.

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and establish an equitable society."[17] It was because this pamphlet supported the Communist Party that Mumford refused to sign it. Wilson, who signed the pamphlet, suggested privately to Mumford that the group "take Communism away from the Communists".[18] His private strategy seems to have been to create a subversive dynamic, by the "unprecedented" fact, as Aaron writes, that "fifty-three writers and artists, many of them well known, were prepared to renounce their bourgeois allegiances, to affiliate as 'brain workers' with the only other class they deemed worthy of respect—'the muscle workers'. . . ."[19] Not only would this align the intellectuals and the lower tiers with the industrial working class—the cornerstone of Lewis Corey's Marxist strategy for the United States. But perhaps, by organizing such cultural workers into a political force, it might also simultaneously supplant Communist influence, too strong on the Left at this time to confront head on.

Wilson and Corey's strategy was similar to Mumford's purpose in writing "Preface to Action." But there is an important difference. Though Mumford's pamphlet was never published, it was far more openly critical of the Communist Party than was the final *Culture and the Crisis* project. Mumford was far more hostile than was Wilson to the CP. Edmund Wilson and Malcolm Cowley asked Mumford to read the 1932 electoral platform of the CP, so as to encourage him to

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[17] Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, orig. published 1961), p. 196.
[18] Miller, pp. 294-95.
[19] Aaron, p. 196.

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get on board the *Culture and the Crisis* group and sign the pamphlet. But Mumford refused, replying that he saw no point "in being tied up even temporarily" with the CP. Perhaps, as we shall see later in this chapter, Mumford was hostile because this was the era when the Communist Party, under the leadership of Mumford's former roommate, *New Masses* editor Mike Gold (as well as of Stalin, of course), embraced "proletarian realism." This was a crude, anti-intellectual romance of the muscle-bound worker and a contempt for the arts and the intellect so cherished by Mumford. "We must have something better than the official Communist party in this country, even if you and I have to take off our shirts and create it," Mumford wrote Wilson.[20] The document, "Preface to Action," seems to be a prospectus as to how Mumford hoped to accomplish this.

In "Preface to Action," Mumford proceeds "to canvass the existing [leadership] groups in the United States," from the fascists to the communists. As to be expected, Mumford "rejects" the fascists: "They would stabilize the existing order by discarding the clumsy hypocrisies that partly disguise the fact that the State is a tool whereby those who are in financial or military control preserve their power."[21] Turning to the liberals, Mumford writes about them in the same fashion as he did about the liberals of the RPA. They are "incapable of leadership, almost by definition." The most that can be said for them is that

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[20] Mumford, letter to Edmund Wilson and Malcolm Cowley, August 17, 1932, in the Malcolm Cowley Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois. Cf. Aaron, p. 258, and Miller, p. 298.
[21] Mumford, "Preface to Action," p. 2.

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> By historic tradition and in fact liberals represent the more tolerant and amiable forms of conservatism, less opposed to change, less passionate about the exclusive interests of property, more concerned for humanitarian principles.

They are conservative opportunists, who act to confuse and befuddle those sincerely interested in social change:

> . . . in America since 1914 liberalism has stood for a vague atmosphere of good intentions: it has never formulated clear principles and purposes which would stand as a basis for action. Liberalism would be another name for intelligent opportunism, were it not for the fact that opportunism without any principles of reference can hardly be intelligent. . .

It is their "opportunism," their willingness to make needless concessions to the economically powerful to "get things done," their lack of firm principle, which makes them, in essence, conservative, an obstacle to change: "a liberal cannot become an opportunist without becoming a conservative. Even as he cooperates with more radical groups, his practical mission is to serve as a brake."[22] Mumford takes issue with the ideology of "moderation" that is the essential component of liberal ideology. In response to "the real complexities and contradictions of society itself, the liberal has prided himself on keeping his principles equally complex and incoherent." But that's exactly the wrong approach, Mumford argues. "Principles are [necessary] points of direction" within this social complexity. Therefore,"they should be as definite and fixed as the points of the compass." Yet "the only principle upon which liberalism is fixed" is

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virtually no principle at all; instead they believe in something called "moderation." "Believing in compromise and the middle road," liberals make "a virtue of falling between two stools." But because it sticks to principle, Mumford argues, "an extreme position may be nearer to truth than a middle position and more close to effective practice than one that stops half way." Without commitment to a clear "purpose . . . the liberal has been forced to adopt those [purposes] which are dominant in society at any given moment. . . " This incapacitates the liberal from engaging in genuine social reform. Instead, it leads him to seek "small remedies which will cause the existing system to work with less friction and waste," and to "distrust . . . those who propose more fundamental changes not given in the existing order."[23]

Despite its pretensions to neutrality, liberalism is for the capitalists, only.

> As a working creed, liberalism should be adopted only by those already in power, who wish to prolong their own tenure and promote the safety of their institutions by making tactical retreats, when necessary, in the direction of worker's pensions, unemployment insurance, profit distribution, and even industrial planning.

"The worker," Mumford concludes, "cannot afford to be a liberal, or he will not even get the rewards of liberalism. As for our intellectuals they cannot afford to be liberals, either: as a moral posture, this has ceased to be respectable.[24]

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[22] *Ibid.*, p. 4.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

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Like Dewey, in *Liberalism and Social Action,* Mumford is not arguing, with this damning indictment of contemporary liberalism, that the basic, original tenets of liberalism are all bad: just their penchant for opportunism. For he adds: "All that is valid in the old liberalism is [its] rationalism[:]—the respect for the experimental intelligence and the belief in liberty itself as a proper attribute for any tolerable human life."[25]

Mumford then discusses the "new agrarians": a movement which comprised, in the late 1920s and early 30s, the "Twelve Southerners," led by John Crowe Ransom and Allan Tate, who praised the Old South and rejected modernity in their work, *I'll Take My Stand* (1930).[26] It also included Ralph Borsodi's "back-to-the-land" movement, otherwise known as the "Distributists." In the early part of the Depression, Borsodi encouraged people to leave the big city to start homesteads and practice "self-sufficiency."[27]

Mumford calls these agrarians "all that is left of the old fashioned individualists." Their individualism is an anachronism, however, not because a commitment to individual freedom is bad, per se, but because in the modern world, socialism rather than private property is its proper basis. Moreover, the social, or rather, anti-social, vision of the small farmer, bound as he is to small-

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[25] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
[26] See Marcus Cunliffe, *The Literature of the United States,* 3rd ed., with revisions, (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1970), pp. 342-46.
[27] Paul K. Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1959), pp. 25-26.

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property "self-sufficiency," would represent a regression rather than an advance upon the level of civilization achieved under capitalism:

> the new agrarianism cannot really thrive unless it faces and solves the problems of our industrial civilization. Moreover, one suspects the impulse to retreat [instead]: these tactics are haunted by the wistful phantoms of the past—the gentry, Episcopalianism, feudalism, a narrow nativism.

Such "agrarians" are not very important today. But Mumford's discussion of them leads to an interesting aside about the proper relationship between town and country, government and citizen, in the regional socialist society he envisions. He now states that "the new agrarians have one virtue, lacking in all the current programs: they are not cockney."

"Cockney" is defined as a "native of London." In *Redburn,* Melville uses the term to connote the insularity of Londoners like Harry Bolton, "a spice of a Cockney," who believes that "we Yankees lived in wigwams, and wore bear-skins." [28] For Mumford, it means the arrogance common to city-dwellers toward country-dwellers. And while it is true that the Southern Agrarians were urbanites, unlike many urban intellectuals, they sentimentalized rather than disdained farmers.

Mumford continues,

> Just as most interpretations of life and morals have left out the specific standpoint of women, so most political programs have left out the farmer. Even for the communists, the farmer is at best a potential industrial

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[28] Melville, *Redburn* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1959), p. 269.

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> worker, at worst a minion of the urban bureaucracy who, in return for quota of crops, will receive an equivalent in manufactured goods.[29]

This is a telling indictment. At base, when it comes to the relationship between town and country, the Bolsheviks were no better than the capitalists. They still treat the farmers and peasants in instrumentalist, bureaucratic fashion, as pawns rather than as partners and participants. This attitude quickly became generalized to include all sectors of society, including the workers as well.[30] As I wrote in chapter 5, Mumford believed that such instrumental attitudes are implicit, not just in capitalism, but in the millennia-long division between town and country, especially in the modern Megalopolitan mindset. They can only be challenged through a philosophy of democratic regionalism.

For Mumford, a "return to agrarianism" is out of the question. Nevertheless, Mumford argues that, as part of a broader, "vital program of economic change," the interests and way of life of farmers and peasants has more importance to the working class then has been thought traditionally by socialists. Yet Mumford implies that Marx and Engels, Mumford did not themselves underestimate such things. For, echoing Marx's and Engels's own program in the *Communist Manifesto* and *On the Housing Question*, Mumford writes:

> Meanwhile, the landlessness of the urban proletariat not only makes their lives precarious when our institutions of exchange break down, but deprives them of a healthy

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[29] Mumford, p. 6.
[30] See my article, "Beyond Hero Worship: A Marxist Critique of Bolshevik Terror and Its Indebtedness to Jacobinism," *Socialism and Democracy* vol. 10, no. 1 (Summer 1996), pp. 47-82.

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> and educative and sanifying[31] occupation. The remedy for this is not a return to a primitive unorganized barter economy: it consists [of] the breakup of Megalopolis, the colonization of industry in relation to agriculture, and the wider distribution of the basic means of livelihood.[32]

Mumford turns next to the "parliamentary socialists," the leaders of the Socialist Party in America or their counterparts in German social democracy or British Labour. Mumford credits them with being "the most successful," and thanks them for their "educational efforts." He also praises their results: "the spread of municipal socialism, the building of free schools and libraries and colleges, the acquisition of public parks and forests and recreation areas, the conservation of electric power sites and the safeguarding of public health, . . ."[33]

These socialists' achievements are extremely limited, however. For "the secret of their success is that they have not directly achieved power in government." These positive results represent, to Mumford, only "every part of the socialist program that does not involve a change in the basis of production and distribution."[34]

Unlike the liberals, the socialists are not wedded to the principle of not having principles. But their socialist principles "weaken" through their use of the "indirect processes" of bourgeois politics: "Triumph by oratorical persuasion, election by political majorities, the mechanism of parliamentary government. . .

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[31] "sanifying"=sanitizing, clean.
[32] Mumford, "Preface to Action," pp. 7-8.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 8.
[34] *Ibid.*

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."[35] Thus "only as a losing party can parliamentary socialism claim victories." But as the losing party, they are not much better. Mumford writes that their victories are ineffectual, because

> Formulas like the eventual socialization of the means of production and distribution provide no apparatus of action: they indefinitely postpone the day of reckoning. Meanwhile, the status of the propertied classes remain unaffected: the impossible task of buying them out, presented as the goal of peaceful revolution, actually removes the opening for effective action.

As an aside: I find it ironic to read these words, since the socialist gradualism which Mumford so effectively critiques here is precisely what he espouses for much of the rest of his life! In any case, Mumford continues,

> The difficulty is that parliamentary socialism, whether revisionist or orthodox Marxian, demands only a verbal profession of faith, an occasional registration of belief at the polling booth, not a change in daily life and practice. . .

A mere "faith in political socialism by itself," Mumford concludes, "is not sufficient to produce the necessary changes of men, of minds, of hearts, that are demanded by our present situation. . . It goes with the crowd: it weakens with the crowd. This is not leadership."[36]

The socialists are not all bad. Mumford values their educational efforts, and their results. But as he had in *Story of Utopias,* Mumford notices an abstract quality about their educational method. There is a split between their ultimate aims and their day to day practices. This, asserts Mumford, is because such

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[35] *Ibid.*

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socialists fear that practical revolutionary action will lead to conflict with the ruling class. What Mumford wants is a practical method of socialist education, which mediates between the abstract knowledge and moral principles of the socialists, and the "daily life and practice" of the masses. He wants to bridge the gap between the socialist vision of a future paradise, and the actions and methods required, in the here and now, to bring it about.

Finally, Mumford turns to the Communists, obviously referring to the Stalinized CPUSA as well as their counterparts around the world. Their method, too, is fatally flawed by this split between the socialist ideal, the means to attain it, and the "daily life and practice" of the ordinary people they claim to lead.[37]

Mumford credits the Communists, at least, with their "will to lead," and to lead fearlessly in order to "translate" their "beliefs into action." But the source of this fearlessness is their "religious" nature, their "war-psychology." This psychology, along with "the prestige of Russia," "has kept them from understanding the nature of their own problems here and creating a strategy adapted to it." The paradox is that this war-psychology" has made the Communists ineffectual, impotent, because sectarian. It has made them

> more conscious of their enemies than of the objective they seek to reach by defeating them. In their present impotence, they waste a good part of their energy denouncing other groups who are moving in the same direction as themselves: they transfer their self-reproach for their own frustration and impotence upon those who, like

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[36] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[37] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

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> the liberals and the political socialists, are equally impotent. Meanwhile, Wall Street gambles, imperialism exploits, wars threaten, men starve, mine guards shoot, racketeers prey, politicians shilly-shally, and the moral life of the country becomes more deeply rotten.[38]

Though Mumford believes that the communists are justified in believing in the existence of a class war, he faults them for not comprehending that "to dramatise the forces of the struggle is one thing: to create concrete plans and objectives is another."[39]

Thus the communists are just as unable to come up with the kind of transitional strategies and educational methods Mumford looking for, as are the parliamentary socialists. The "war psychology" of the communists makes them authoritarian, rigid, and uncreative. "Within the present communist organization," Mumford writes, "discipline, an iron discipline, is its chief card: every word and action is subject to party authority." There is sometimes a rationale for this, Mumford admits: it "is a necessity of warfare." But "the tactics of warfare stultify thought and give authority to unflinching stupid men. As the routine of peace, these tactics are absurd."[40]

These men are not "creative"; rather, "they take their doctrines, their strategy, and their tactics from Soviet Russia. This means that they are not dealing with real life, but life as it would be in the United States if its intellectual and social history had been that of Russia." This imparts to the communists their

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[38] *Ibid.*
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

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tendency to "dramatize" rather than think creatively. It makes their thought "curiously unreal" and their gestures "faintly theatrical."[41]

Mumford believes in the stated, ultimate goals of the Communists: a socialist society, with expropriation of private capital, collective ownership of the means of production, justice, freedom, and equality.[42] He admires their unique willingness to lead us out of the present crisis, to "mean business,": "they are ready to man the boat and guide it away from the rocks." He is not even opposed to their collective discipline. Somewhat confusedly, although he just implied that the present-day sitation is one of "peacetime," Mumford now admits that "the class war is a reality, and it will remain a reality until we have established, by justice and intelligence, the basis of an enduring peace." Thus, in the face of class war, "In so far as the mythology of war makes the communist attack relatively compact and well-organized, in so far as it promotes discipline and concentrates purpose, it has plenty of justification."[43]

Clearly, Mumford believes, along with Lenin that such collective discipline can be an important check upon the opportunism of the liberals and the parliamentary socialists. But the Communists place too much emphasis on discipline, not enough on creativity. If the communists are correct to believe that there is war in society, still, their fundamental mistake is to believe that it is the

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[40] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 18.
[43] *Ibid.*

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same sort of war as the military kind, between nations. If the social situation is war, it is also, paradoxically, a situation of peace: so much so that the communists' extreme, militaristic, authoritarian version of collective discipline appears "absurd." If this is war, it is plainly a different kind of war, even from the kind of civil war fought by the Bolsheviks successfully in 1917. This different kind of war demands a kind of strategy and party organization that is very different from that found in traditional war or during the Russian Revolution.[44]

At the heart of the communists' failure lies their unwillingness to acknowledge the ideological and technical importance of the middle class to the revolutionary process in the advanced capitalist societies. Mumford writes that

> No program for transforming our economic society can hope for success in America if it does not call forth the active sympathy and cooperation of a strong nucleus of economists, engineers, production managers, administrators, architects, community planners, foresters, doctors.

Mumford then writes that "unlike Russia, we cannot import these men." This is a somewhat baffling idea, since the West has far more technicians and scientists in it than did Russia: perhaps Mumford meant to write "need not." He continues "and unlike Russia again, we would starve more bitterly than the

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[44] The similarities with Gramsci's thought in prison are striking. Gramsci's name for class struggle in modern, advanced societies was the "war of position" vs. the "war of movement": social "trench" warfare as opposed to the barricade warfare of 1871 and 1917. The "war of position" must be fought in the different set of circumstances in which communists find themselves in the advanced capitalist societies. Such societies have vastly more sophisticated means of securing consent from the citizens: they may rely not only upon the police, but more importantly and far more often, upon modern ideologies which obscure the coercive, alienated, and exploitative relationship of the capitalist class to the working class.

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Russians did with even a year's disorganization of the technique of production and supply." This makes more sense: Russia was still a largely agrarian economy whose workers still had roots in the countryside and could work there on farms in response to urban starvation; the workers of more advanced industrial nations would not find it so easy. Mumford argues that "Large numbers of technicians are ready to take their places in a communist society." The problem is that "the Marxian communist ideology does not attract them, and the present communist tactics turn them off." Mumford is certainly right about Leninist-Stalinist tactics, which involved, at best, suppression of the political rights of the middle class. As for Marxism, however, I think that Mumford is writing from his usual prejudice against Marx. One could make an argument—as did Kautsky and Lenin--that most of the Marxists over the last century and a half have come from the middle class. In any case, Mumford concludes, "So much the worse for them [the middle class]? Perhaps: but even more, so much the worse for communism."[45]

Mumford rejected the notion that communism could be imported out of Russia and adopted by the working class of any nation, no matter how different, ready-made. To be adopted, it at least must be adapted, to the culture of the given society. Mumford also, however, implies a critique of the crude Russian "Soviet" model—for Russia itself. The ideal of communism of "the sort of social life that a better order would make possible" must be salvaged from the spiritual straitjacket it received from the Russian model—and can be, in America. If it is to succeed,

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[45] *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

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> Communism in America cannot be an imitation of the Russian variety: it must appeal to the pride and self-confidence of the American, connect with his own traditions of revolution and equality, give play to his residual individualism, recognize his experimentalism and his capacity for self-help, summon to itself spiritual energies from such relevant sources as Thoreau and Whitman.

As Gramsci also wrote, communism must strike roots in the national culture: it cannot be imported wholesale:

> In short, communism, to live, must be a living idea, capable of assimilating fresh experiences and reacting against our own special background. Revolutions cannot be made without myths, and a myth has deeper roots than the contemporary economic order or any equally temporary discontent over its failure. This fundamental psychology of America has never been essentially proletarian and servile. Due to the original existence of free lands and equal opportunity, the American worker still possesses an abstract sense of equality.[46]

While it is debatable whether the psychology and culture of the Russian worker was any more or less "servile" than his American brethren, we should not be blinded by this bit of national chauvanism to the more important point implicit here. While Mumford does not come out and say it, he is clearly not saddened by the fact that American culture is not as "servile" as the Communists would like it to be. Plainly, he plainly thinks that the kind of communism that might evolve in the freer American air would be a far better form of communism, not just for the Americans, but for the Russians, too. The middle class heritage of American

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[46] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

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culture is not something to lament, as so many orthodox communists have asserted. It is something to celebrate!

Not servility, but desire and vision, is what Mumford wants:

> Every basic change involves a fresh interpretation of the possibilities of human life. Revolutions . . . are conceived by people of generous vision who are frustrated by the existing institutions: every candid writer, every honest scientist, every able technician, has the sense of human possibilities curbed and perverted by institutions designed to maintain the comfortable status of the ruling classes. The frustration of these leaders is the frustration of their whole society. [47]

Such frustration is not limited to workers. Nor does Mumford look primarily to workers for vision:

> The worker has been satisfied with a livelihood: usually bare, sometimes embellished with tiled bathroom and radio sets. There is no power behind such wants. Starvation is more imperious, but it is too easily satisfied. Bread begets timidity. . . . .

Further on, Mumford writes:

> As a result of the industrial revolution, the industrial workers have been exiles from life. Their self-reliance has been curbed, their emotional life has been impoverished: they have few songs, fewer dances, a poorer sense of their manliness and womanliness: often a diminished sense of vitality. The mistake of earlier revolutionary thought was to make this state of exile the basis of the promised land.[48]

This goes beyond Lenin's original idea, in *What is to be Done,* that the socialist movement must draw its *leaders* from among the "bourgeois," middle

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[47] *Ibid.*
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

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class intellectuals.[49] Mumford seems to argue that such leaders cannot even rely upon the workers to form the main army of resistance and rebellion against capitalism. He seems to be writing off the working class, altogether, and rely upon the middle class for everything. But Mumford's logic here is dubious. The first two sentences of the second paragraph of this passage may indeed by true about many, maybe even most workers most of the time. Yet the final sentence does not follow at all—especially if we examine history rather than remain content with Mumford's pessimistic surface impressions. There was tremendous cultural and political vitality among socialist workers in the period during and after World War I, in Russia, in Europe, in America. In New York City, as I wrote before, there were massive tenant strikes after the war. In the 1920s, in the Shalom Aleichem housing, the Workers Cooperative Colony, and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union Lower East Side projects, housing constructed by workers' cooperatives and unions, there were plenty of songs and dances, plays and discussions. All this workers' activity had an impact upon radical architects like Henry Wright and Clarence Stein—Mumford's associates in the Regional Planning Association of America.[50]

Mumford himself was born in genteel poverty—his mother was a domestic servant, and then ran a boarding house.[51] Yet this did not stop Mumford from becoming a great intellectual. Why was he so ready to dismiss the

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[49] Lenin, "What is to be Done," *The Lenin Anthology* (Norton: New York, 1975), pp. 23-27.
[50] Richard Plunz, *History of Housing in New York City*, pp. 126, 151-59.

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possibility of similar capabilities among other members with a working class background? Why didn't he see that "exile" can indeed breed inspiration, an aspiration for freedom and dignity? Perhaps it was the case that Mumford suffered from a malady typical among those who rise out of the working class: a contempt for one's former associates, born of an unconscious sense or fear of his own social inferiority because of his own impoverished background. According to biographer Donald Miller, Mumford felt neglected by his mother, and disdained the penchant of his mother and her relatives for horse-track betting and poker playing. He dismissed them much later, in a letter to life-long friend, Dartmouth English Professor Stearns Morse in 1950, as "a breed of gamblers, wastrels, cheap sports, adulterers on an almost professional level."[52] Such childhood resentments against his mother and her crowd must have had not a little to do with Mumford's poor esteem for workers, in general.

A little later, Mumford argues that industrial workers are on the decline: "A industry becomes more skilled, more rationalized, more co-ordinated, the demand for the unskilled and mentally stunted workers will decrease." This is the notion of Bingham and Chase: the notion that automation is increasing the importance and numbers of the middle class; decreasing and diminishing the importance of the working class. This notion is, again, a rather dubious one, if we examine the statistical work of Lewis Corey in *The Crisis of the Middle Class*

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[51] See Donald Miller, *Lewis Mumford: A Life*, pp. 7-13.

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(1935),[53] and then Harry Braverman, in the 1970s (*Labor and Monopoly Capital),* who dispute this claim.[54]

Mumford, I would argue, is reacting rather than dealing critically with the Communists' workerist romanticism and anti-intellectualism. The Communists employed this romanticism of the worker as a muscle-bound ascetic in order to impose their bureaucratic dictatorship over him. Lenin had said that the worker was superior to the "petit-bourgeois" because the factory "disciplined" him (to take orders from the Party). Mumford was right to reject this bureaucratism. But he accepts the Communists' caricatured view of workers as stupid brutes. On that basis, Mumford blames both the workers and the Communists for this bureaucratism. To be sure, there had to have been a basis, in the workers' misery and degradation, for their acceptance of Communist bureaucracy and brutality. But Mumford might have responded by calling upon the workers' latent capacities to resist such bureaucratism, upon their heretofore-alienated capability for creativity and independence, as already evidenced during and after World War I. Instead, he seems to write the workers off as a force for democracy and creativity altogether. He looks to the middle class instead, and seems to look toward, not the triumph of the proletariat through socialist revolution, but their eventual replacement, through the processes of capitalist society itself, by middle

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[52] Miller, pp. 16-19; Miller's quote is from Lewis Mumford's letter to his friend Stearns Morse, November 15, 1950.
[53] Lewis Corey, *The Crisis of the Middle Class* (New York: Covici and Friede, 1935) pp. 273-75.
[54] Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), pp. 377-86.

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class professionals, "an intelligent society of amateurs." Mumford continues, "Skilled machine workers can be created in a few months; able office workers in even shorter time; . . . Only in the higher ranges of professional skill is longer training and experience proportionally more effective." He seems oblivious to the fact that when, *under capitalism*, workers are replaced by middle class professionals—engineers, for example—the net effect, over the long haul, is chronic unemployment. Thus while the vision of a "society of intelligent amateurs" is vitally important to socialists, his confusion of this vision with present day schemes to replace workers wholesale with machines and engineers in order to reap more profits severely compromises this vision Yet the vision itself, as a vision of socialism, is quite imaginative and exciting: "The industrial worker will be an amateur: only those whose occupation is an amusement will pursue it with the intensity of professionals—physicians, jugglers, ski-jumpers, bacteriologists, philosophers, painters, tap-dancers!"

And as advice for socialists in integrating the socialist ideal into American culture, it is also important:

> Plans for the future of industry cannot be based upon backward industries and inferior techniques. Russia, still at the beginnings of her industrial revolution, is close to Marx and Samuel Smiles: America, further advanced technically, is closer to Leonardo and Plato. In making over industry, we must conceive it as part of an integrated way of life.[55]

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[55] Mumford, "Preface to Action, p. 16.

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In basing their vision of socialism on the asceticism and misery of the working class, the Bolsheviks forgot and eliminated from their vision this erotic, playful, "amateurish" nature of the future socialist society. A society of intelligent amateurs is quite different from a society of ascetic purists, of bureaucrats and worker-ants. The Bolsheviks' workerism put them out of touch with the society of the future. Though Mumford fails to recognize the fact, this workerism also put the Communists' out of touch even with present-day workers, even in Russia.[56] But Mumford is correct to argue that it also puts the Communists out of touch, increasingly, with the more advanced capitalist societies and workers of the present, in the West: where the relative role of science in the labor process is growing rather than diminishing.

Mumford writes that the psychology necessary for revolution is not "proletarian," but instead, "aristocratic": "Nothing short of an aristocratic demand for the best life possible can start or continue a fundamental change in our social order."[57] This is, I suspect, a reference to Nietzsche's idea of the "superman." While Nietzsche was anti-democratic, we can also see here the influence of Melville's idea, which we discussed in chapter 1, of a self-willed aristocracy in the service of the demos. The task of this heroic individual is to overcome his inner limitations rather than merely submit to the outer conditions that dehumanize him, and make him less than what he could be. What is dubious here

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[56] See Frederick I. Kaplan, *Bolshevik Ideology and the Ethics of Soviet Labor, 1917-1920: the Formative Years* (New York: Michigan State University, 1968), esp. pp. 310-34.

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is Mumford's implication that the proletariat cannot be heroic, but that middle class intellectuals like himself can be, perhaps because they are educated and intelligent enough to want to be, and because they are "frustrated" by the irrationality of modern capitalism. Certainly, there can be found heroic qualities and great socialists among the middle class. Here, Mumford's ideas are not very different from Lenin's or Marx and Engels'. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels argue that in the course of the revolutionary process, "entire sections of the ruling classes are, by the advance of industry, precipitated into the proletariat, or are at least threatened in their conditions of existence." Thus these elements "also supply the proletariat with fresh elements of enlightenment and progress."[58] But why should we, as Mumford further argues, expect the middle class, who enjoy relative privilege, to risk these privileges to be heroes, *instead of rely upon the working class*? Marx's theory is far more credible. In Marx's theory, the heroism necessary for the overthrow of Capital comes, indeed, from the "exile from life," and the consequent *quest* for life, that the workers experience under capitalism. Whether he knew it or not, Mumford, with his argument for an "aristocratic" sentiment, echoed Marx's ebullience over the "nobility" of the workmen he first encountered in Paris: "In the meetings of the

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[57] Mumford, "Preface to Action," p. 15.
[58] Marx and Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," *Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 481.

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communist artisans, brotherhood is not a phrase but the truth, and nobility shines from the labor-hardened faces."[59]

The problem with the Communists is not that they base themselves upon the working class, as Mumford argued, but that they fail to. They fail to draw upon and encourage the desire and capability of workers everywhere for freedom and dignity. This aspiration is what propelled the Communists to power in Russia in the first place; but they turned around and squelched it with their calls upon the individual to sacrifice it for the good of the collective. In the name of heroism, they promoted bureaucratic despotism.

Mumford does not seem to understand that there was real tension, not affinity, between the despotism of the Communist Party and the basic (democratic) impulses of the working class. But his notion of what a healthy party requires, in terms of an alternative psychology and structure, is nevertheless interesting. Mumford argues that heroic aspirations and capabilities are ultimately individual, not collective. The collective can be structured so that each individual will be encouraged, as much as possible, to feel and act upon such heroic values. But ultimately, each individual must decide for himself whether he wants to embody them. An authoritarian "discipline" is the surest means of stifling such values, of ensuring instead that cowardice and mediocrity will be encouraged, at the top most of all.

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[59] Marx, as quoted in Saul K. Padover, *Karl Marx: An Intimate Biography* (New York: McGraw, 1978), p. 183.

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Instead of writing off the working class, Mumford might better have argued that the Marxists of his time needed, firstly, to become radical again. They needed to call upon the nobility of the working class, their capacity to fight for freedom and dignity, once again. Secondly, they needed to rethink their attitude toward the working class as *exclusively* revolutionary. He is correct to argue, which he does here, that the independence of dissident middle class intellectuals and professionals should be encouraged, not ridiculed or feared. To allow for such independence, among intellectuals and workers alike, the structure and ethos of the revolutionary party should be far more open and tolerant to such intellectuals, and such attitudes, rather than closed to all but the revolutionary theologian and his faithful "proletarian" minions. Indeed, the party should not just be tolerant of such attitudes: it should be constructed, structured, and maintained with the idea of *encouraging* such independent-mindedness and courage. Mumford writes that "To build up a sufficient supply of scientific understanding, technical skill, disciplined imaginative effort, and to create a sufficient basis in spiritual assent we must abandon the sterile didacticism of the orthodox communists."[60] He also writes that "The scientist, the administrator, the professional man, the artist are as important to a revolutionary group as the industrial worker."[61]

Mumford insists upon his fundamental animus toward the "omnipotent and all-competent God-state," and its counterpart inside the Communist party—

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[60] Mumford, "Preface to Action," p. 14.
[61] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

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bureaucratic discipline. He terms such attitudes "a neurotic figment of the mind." Mumford insists that upon the ideals of political pluralism: "Conflict, opposition, heresy, dissent, are as necessary to social health as order and discipline. The business of political society is to find orderly and effective channels for their expression. Precisely here lies a disastrous weakness in both Fascism and Communism."[62]

Yet, at the same time, Mumford recognizes the dangers that the reformist political tendencies of such groups pose for the party. He writes that "we must not drop [the communists'] dominant note: the note of militancy. And we must not lose their contempt for half-measures and their fundamental faith in passionate minorities." While professionals must be included and encouraged, "they must not carry their bourgeois prejudices and timidities and inhibitions along with them."[63]

While Mumford does not discuss the structure of his proposed new kind of revolutionary party, it would conceivably be more decentralized in its structure than Lenin's formulation. While it would demand adherence to standards of conduct and to certain general socialist principles, it would allow for far more flexibility and freedom for individuals, factions, local branches and regional associations, than Lenin, let alone Stalin, was willing to see flourish.

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[62] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[63] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

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Mumford focuses the rest of the essay upon the ethos that such a party should encourage among its members. In doing so, Mumford contradicts what he has earlier written. Though he seems to write off the working class earlier, Mumford now seems to recognize that the workers have an important role to play and that they do indeed have the capability to play an active role. He insists that the worker cannot be allowed to continue to be passive anymore than the bourgeois tendencies of the professional class ought to be indulged. All have to learn how to overcome their past inner limitations. *A la* Nietzsche, all must "overcome" rather than submerge themselves:

> The worker must see more, travel more, think more, plan more: in short, he must educate himself up to mastership. A revolutionary doctrine is not enough; a militant party program is not enough: all these things will remain impotent until they are at the command of an integral education. The workers weaknesses are too easily passed off and palliated as the strength of his masters. This grossly flatters his masters.[64]

This notion of the dialectic of workers consciousness, which makes workers themselves rather than material forces alone responsible for a transformation of their consciousness, is a deserved revival, I would argue, of the Hegelian "master-slave" dialectic which originally animated Marx's thought on the subject. The workers, indeed, need more than bread, if they are to achieve social mastery. But this does not leave the professionals off the hook. They, too,

> must seek and practice social solidarity. To share the routine and diaper-work of our civilization is an elementary

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[64] *Ibid.*

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> necessity of social health. Industrial workers must learn to think, plan, direct: professional workers must learn to perform bread labor and take over their share of the remaining drudgery. This is the basis of cooperative intelligence.

For Mumford, the daily habits of the middle and working classes under capitalism are both equally objectionable, and it is only by changing them that both classes can in earnest give up their stake in present-day society and fight for socialism:

> The bourgeois is as the bourgeois does: he wants comfort. The servile worker is as the servile does: he wants to be fed and kept free from responsibility and released from the necessity of thinking. Comfort and responsibility are the enemies. Only those who disdain them are ready for a new life.[65]

Once again, we must note that Mumford contradicts himself here. Earlier, he had attacked the asceticism of the Communists romantic ideal of the workers, and accepted their view of the workers as naturally ascetic, yet saw this as a bad thing. Now, he urges useful labor and self-denial upon the professionals and workers, and asserts that neither group accepts such an ethos willingly or even naturally. This is not to deny the value of such an ethos. But I would merely like to argue that these contradictions are evidence that Mumford has not carefully thought through these matters, and that he was mistaken to accept the Communists' romantic notions about workers, in the first place.

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[65] *Ibid.*

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Mumford defines the method of this revolutionary party as follows: "Direct action in terms of creative planning toward the concrete fulfillment of real goods and vital ends, without respect to financial, proprietary, customary, or caste lines is revolution." As opposed to the abstractness of the communists and reformists, this is a really practical, transitional program. There is no gap between the means and ultimate goal, between the concrete lives of individuals now and the future, planned society. Thus such a program is comprehensible to the masses and workable by them. Rather than leave it all up to the party leaders, this program makes demands upon everyone: "The best life possible is one that makes a maximum demand upon our intelligence, our vitality, our emotions and imaginations, our capacity for experience."[66]

The program is not only practical: it is simultaneously educational. For to be practical it must be educational, otherwise "direct action" will be limited to small conspiratorial groups. To be educational, the program must be practical; otherwise it will have no pedagogic appeal. As Mumford writes, "The beginning of any revolutionary change lies in education; its goal in terms of experience is a fuller education."[67]

What are the institutional and personal forms that will permit this educational revolutionary process? To resist the tendency to party herdism, Mumford insists upon starting with the personal:

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[66] *Ibid.*, p. 20.
[67] *Ibid.*

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> To begin with: a discipline for the daily life. No change can be effective which does not immediately alter the life of the individual and make him, day by day, the developing image of the society he would create. We must transform abstract belief into definite preparations and actions. A minimum income, abstention from luxury, non-participation in bourgeois routine: these are pledges of faith. A cultivation of talent or aptitude along lines useful to the commonwealth: this is a second step.[68]

This view anticipates the work of C. Wright Mills on the same subject. In his essay, "The Social Role of the Intellectuals," Mills, in 1944, wrote that the present state of intellectuals was one of alienation and powerlessness. To transcend these conditions, "If we demand that" the "realms of intellect and personal morals . . . be geared to our activities which make a public difference, then personal morals and political interests become closely related; any philosophy that is not a personal escape involves taking a political stand. If this is true," Mills wrote, then the political must become the personal: "it places great responsibility upon our political thinking. Because of the expanded reach" of modern, bureaucratic politics and power, "it is our own personal style of life and reflection we are thinking about when we think about politics."[69]

Like Mumford, Mills also believed that the working class required leadership from creative intellectuals: "The independent artist and intellectual are among the few remaining personalities equipped to resist and to fight the stereotyping and consequent death of genuinely lively things." But to so "resist

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[68] *Ibid.*

[69] C. Wright Mills, "The Social Role of the Intellectual," *Power, Politics and People*, p. 299.

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and fight," the intellectuals had to really engage their minds: "Fresh perception now involves the capacity continually to unmask and to smash the stereotypes of vision and intellect with which modern communications swamp us. These worlds of mass-art and mass-thought are increasingly geared to the demands of politics. That is why it is in politics that intellectual solidarity and effort must be centered," Mills concluded. Thus, like Mumford, Mills believed that this act of self-emancipation must be a collective effort of mutual education and a sacrifice of complacency, in favor of attitudes of "solidarity and effort."[70]

But back to "Preface to Action." Mumford now moves on to the institutional forms where this mutual educational process must be situated. His proposal hints at the workers council system he championed in his 1919 *Dial* essays, "The Status of the State" and "Wardom and the State," which we discussed in chapter 7: "Second: we need a method of group action on all levels. For the worker, special units within his union or industry, with a program directed away from mere wage-bargaining toward understanding, control, planning, responsibilities. "[71]

To this workers council organization, Mumford adds his mentor Geddes' proposal for education through the survey. In Mumford's scheme, squads of workers, technicians, scientists, etc. would go directly out into the neighborhood,

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[70] *Ibid.*
[71] Mumford, "Preface to Action," p. 20.

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the city, the region, on "field trips" to collectively survey social problems and the resources necessary for solutions and improvements.[72]

Here is a means for the workers to embrace those aspects of society which "transcend the factory" and the present, degraded, purely urban, purely industrial focus of working class existence. And Mumford proposes other group activities for working people to participate fully in the culture of the larger society.

> Industrial regional survey as a means of education: voir pour prevoir, prevoir pour pouvoir.[73] This group activity must not remain merely on a practical and industrial level: it must include dance, walks, encampments, gymnastic activities, theaters, directed toward a common life. The immediate program is education within the unit; the ultimate program is the passage of this education into action throughout the community and upon every part of our civilization.[74]

To distinguish the members of such "units" from the old Communists, Mumford proposes the term, "Scipians." He derives this name from Scipio Africanus, Stoic thinker and brilliant Roman general who destroyed Carthage. Mumford got the idea of Scipians from Walter Fuller, a student of Roman history, the managing editor of the *Freeman* (successor to the *Masses)* and a native of Manchester, England. Along with Mumford, Fuller had been involved with Harold Stearns' symposium on the lack of *Civilization in the United States.* Fuller wanted to term a projected a series of "Scipian Pamphlets" to further the

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[72] Lenin speaks of creating such squads, too, in "Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?" (1917). But in Lenin's scheme, such squads would be use to terrorize the families of class engineers into housing the poor in their middle class apartments. See *The Lenin Anthology* ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1975), pp. 399-406.

[73] In English: "See to be able to foresee, foresee to be able to do."

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explorations, analyses, and invocations of social change made by Stearns' symposium. Mumford and Fuller admired Scipio, who, in Mumford's words, "made frontal attacks and brilliant dashes was the exact of opposite of Fabius, shrewdly dilatory and roundabout."[75] Fuller liked Scipio particularly because he contrasted so well with "Fabius," another Roman general, who was famous for his retreating tactics, and was the idol of the Fabians: the British parliamentary socialists.[76] As early as

The Story of Utopias, Mumford criticized the "dereliction" of the "leaders of the trade unions and the Labor Party," and the fact that these were drawn from a "narrower group" than in the United States, a group characterized by their "perpetual movement into the bourgeoisie."[77] As we shall discuss in the next chapter, Mumford's romantic partner Catherine Bauer, presumably under his tutelage, attacked the timidity of the Fabian socialists in her book, *Modern Housing* (1934).[78]

Mumford's idea, so far, sounds like a tremendous advance. But in the very next paragraph, Mumford lurches back into a position dangerously close, if not

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[74] Mumford, "Preface to Action," pp. 20-21

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 21. The name "Scipio" would not be a name, of course, whose meaning most workers would readily grasp. That is perhaps precisely Mumford's point in coining it: to encourage them to educate themselves about it. Nevertheless, the fact that Fuller's and Mumford's choice of hero was both responsible for tremendous loss of life (as well as regret afterwards, it should be noted) and was unknown to many workers indicates, perhaps, an elitist insensitivity typical among their middle class intellectuals. It is hard to imagine Marx idolizing such an historical figure; for "audacity," Engels looked to the French revolutionary, Danton.

[76] See Donald Miller, *Lewis Mumford, a Life,* p. 156.

[77] Mumford, *Story of Utopias,* p. 243.

[78] Catherine Bauer, *Modern Housing* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside, 1934), p. 102.

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identical, to the reformism he criticized earlier, as he discusses how these "Scipian units" ought to operate. "Every Scipian unit," Mumford writes, shall be

> the focus of its own region and its own industrial activity. The unit must prepare surveys and plans for its region and its industries. . . .What takes place among Scipians in the factory, must take place equally in the university and the city. The actual reconnaissance, survey, and planning are an important part of the re-education toward reality which will carry us away from our abstract financial and mechanical technique.

All of this is quite radical and good—except this part:

> In case these plans are recognized or used by the existing owners of industries, the price for cooperation should be, first, power and responsibility, second a rise in pay for all whose pay is below the basic standard. Scipians whose pay is above the basic standard contribute the surplus to a common fund, to be divided among other Scipians. This is the first direct step toward establishing this principle in society at large.[79]

The goal of raising pay for all workers is a laudable one. But the notion that the Scipians can work with "existing owners of industry" is very dubious. This might indeed have worked when Mumford's Regional Planning Association of America would ask wealthy investors, like Alfred Bingham, for funds for their very limited garden city projects, at Radburn and Sunnyside.[80] But one can easily see the limitations that would set in with such a strategy, once it began to encroach upon the capitalist system and its imperatives. What does Mumford propose to offer these people in return for their "cooperation"? Though he seems,

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[79] Mumford, "Preface to Action," pp. 21-22.
[80] See Miller, p. 201.

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in the next sentence, to be outlining these rewards, he is instead discussing the further exactions to be demanded from these owners. He seems to think that the offer of planning, from the Scipians, will somehow be useful and rewarding, in its own right, to the individual owners, operating as they do in the private market! It is true that many corporations in the 30s were not really interested much in planning (recall FDR's joke that the capitalists would have to be "dragged kicking and screaming into the twentieth century). What planning the capitalists did need, however, for their own enterprises could easily be purchased from those many unemployed salaried professionals who would not join the Scipians.

Mumford seems to base this fantasy upon the notion, which he quotes from Whitman, "I and mine [can] not convince by argument: we [must] convince by our presence." The problem with this idea, as Mumford interprets it, is that, until the power relations in society are transformed, socialists have no means by which to "demonstrate" the superiority of their planning to capitalist decision-making. Whether they are workers or skilled planning professionals is immaterial. They have no power to manifest such "presence." For the capitalists, at present, hold all the cards, hold all the means by which to realize or not realize such plans. They will not cooperate with socialists unless they are forced to, for to give the socialists cooperation means to surrender control of society to them. Thus Mumford is mistaken to imply that it is through such fanciful cooperation that his Scipians will gain power over the capitalists themselves. He is again caught up in

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his old Populist illusion: that while the "financial class" is hopelessly corrupt, the industrialists would somehow be receptive to a leftist economic program.

To convince workers and professionals of the superiority of socialist planning, we cannot actually realize our plans, in the here and now. This does not mean, however, that such planning is useless, that we cannot use it to make our "presence" felt," to educate our fellow citizens. Socialists cannot do this, however, by trying to encourage local industrialists to adopt our plans. Instead, we need to publicize our plans among the working class, to make demands whose rationality and practicality will appeal to them, encouraging them to question and to challenge, through mass strike action, the ever-more-obvious irrationality of present, capitalist planning. This was one of Trotsky's major contribution to the communist movement, in his *Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution* (1938).[81]

There is indeed a strong hint of such a "transitional method" in these last paragraphs of this unfinished essay. But it is deplorably weak, almost supplanted by the curious notion that the professionals, with the imagined cooperation of the bosses, can go it alone. In this, Mumford seems to follow in the footsteps of his mentor Patrick Geddes, and even more his collaborator, Victor Branford. As I wrote before, Branford's pamphlet, "The Drift of Revolution," had called for a "Third Alternative," to both the party of privileged, corrupt bourgeois "order" and

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[81] Leon Trotsky, *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1974).

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the party of working class "revolution." According to Branford as well as his admirer Mumford, these parties were both sterile. In their conflict between each other, they created nothing but deadlock and a succession of alternating right- and left-wing despotisms. Instead, what was needed, according to Branford, was, in Mumford's approving words:

> a composition of forces: not a compromise which would achieve nothing that either party sought, but a disinterested effort to get beyond the regime of power into one which would depend more completely upon the verified knowledge of science, and that non-partisan good will, which is latent in all the arts and professions. . . .

Branford, Mumford writes, "had no doubt that finance and industry could bring forth disinterested minds quite as [had] medicine and science: indeed, he was one of them. . . ." Mumford finds praiseworthy about Branford his idealization of class compromise:

> Though he had much in common with Thorstein Veblen. . . he was far from placing his hopes for more vital and better integrated society in the ministrations of some single class, such as the engineers. He knew that social counterpoint was a complex matter; and his ideal figure for a fine society was that of a symphony orchestra.

In the first place, Branford and Mumford's ecumenicism gets a little too broad when it includes the bourgeoisie. It may indeed be true that individuals from the bourgeoisie--like Victor Branford, or the supporter of the RPAA, Alfred Bingham, even Friederich Engels was one of these—can transcend their class background to embrace socialism, or, at least, far-sighted support for expanded housing provision. But as a class, the bourgeoisie no longer have any progressive,

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rational, scientific interest with which progressives or workers can reach any sort of real compromise.

In the second place, on close analysis, this metaphor of a "symphony orchestra" reveals yet again an elitist streak. Such orchestras require a single conductor; who does Branford and Mumford want that conductor to be? The engineers, perhaps, or, more broadly, the professional middle class? Indeed, for Mumford approvingly goes on to report that Branford's "Third Alternative," composed, it would seem, largely of professionals, would put forward "concrete, realizable aims: reforestation, better houses, more adequately designed towns, cooperative agriculture, socialized credit, regenerated schools."[82] In the "Preface to Action" after Mumford asks rhetorically, on the last page, "Who are these [Scipian] leaders?" In reply, he mentions the job titles of professionals only: "engineers and educators and planners and economists and scientists and philosophers and artists who, in addition to learning their technique, have been trying to understand the world about them and its human relationships."[83] No mention of industrialists, and that is a good thing: but there is no longer mention of industrial workers, either. The workers can be led, but they cannot lead, apparently.

As Lewis Corey pointed out, the professional class, operating as it does between the workers and the bosses, tries in vain to work out such

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[82] Mumford, "Victor Branford," *New Republic* August 27, 1930, p. 44.
[83] Mumford, "Preface to Action," p. 23.

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"compromises." In the process, the bourgeoisie gain the advantage they need to crush working class revolution and thus to preserve their basically irrational system and interests. The professionals cannot lead; at most, they can only share leadership with working class leaders, all of whom must be directly accountable to the rank and file through a democratic workers-council organization, lest they be coopted by such illusions (or outright bribes!).[84]

In turning away from the working class, in thinking the middle class could go it alone, or alternately, rely upon the "progressive bourgeoisie" instead, Mumford broke one of C. Wright Mills' cardinal rules regarding the "social role of the intellectual." As Mills writes,

> If he is to think politically in a realistic way, the intellectual must constantly know his own social position. This is necessary in order that he may be aware of the sphere of strategy that is really open to his influence. If he forgets this, his thinking may exceed his sphere of strategy so far as to make impossible any translation of his thought into action, his own or that of others. His thought may thus become fantastic.[85]

As both Mills and Corey agreed, by adopting the role of gentle persuaders toward further progress of alleged "progressive" strata of the bourgeoisie, intellectuals like Branford and Mumford were basically kidding themselves. Rather, the real "social position" of the progressive intellectual was as a member and as a democratic cultural leader of the sleeping giant: a potentially powerful, rebellious working class.

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[84] Corey, pp. 244-277.

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In his *The Cultural Front,* Michael Denning employs the historical experience of the 1930s to answer Mills' question as to the possible "sphere of strategy that is really open to" the intellectual's "influence" as the result of their real social position. As cultural workers, intellectuals can form unions. Trade unions of cultural workers, as communities for resistance and rebellion, can make far more of an impact upon the culture than they can as mere individuals. Such power can be formulated and manifested in the schools, meetings, publications and collective statements of the cultural workers' union, on a day-to-day basis—as was evidenced in the radical Screen Actors' Guild during the 30s. Such institutions can also align themselves with and organize the skills and voluntary efforts of cultural workers for socialist parties: as the Communist Party employed in its Popular Front. In turn, the socialist party itself can collect the funds necessary to sponsor whole theatrical and mass media productions. Orson Welles' Mercury Theater was a prime example of this.[86] But this power is most apparent when cultural workers, as workers, *go on strike.* In the 1941 strike against Walt Disney studios, for example, the cartoonists organized their own production of alternative, radical cartoons, calling the public's attention to the reactionary politics and labor management practices of Disney and co. In part as a result of

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[85] Mills, "The Social Role of the Intellectuals," p. 300.
[86] Denning, pp. 362-402.

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this communicative creativity, the strike was settled by government arbitration favorable to the union.[87]

Mumford was himself a member of the "League for American Writers," a key organization in the cultural arm of the Communist Party's Popular Front. We might see his unpublished essay as a forerunner for the far less heavy-handed manner that the CP adopted for dealing with intellectuals, later in the decade. Unfortunately, for various reasons, Mumford, unlike Mills or radical cultural theorist Kenneth Burke,[88] never himself moved on to consider the powerful and exciting implications of what the CP and the CIO built, culturally speaking, at that time. Perhaps this was because Mumford himself moved increasingly *away* from whatever allegiance he still had to the strategy of proletarian revolution, as he and other intellectuals became increasingly frightened of the menace of Nazism. Rather than provide leadership for such intellectuals, the CP zigzagged into their outrageous alliance with Hitler in 1939, alienating many of Mumford's generation from not only the CP, but also the "Marxian analysis," in general.[89]

Even though the final results of Mumford's most radical essay are somewhat disappointing, still, there is a great deal here to that is valuable and relevant. Mumford, in 1931, anyway, saw the need for revolutionary organization among advocates of social planning. He saw that these advocates needed to

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[87] Denning, pp. 403-22, and see photo of radical cartoon, "Who's Afraid of Big Bad Walt?", appearing after p. 268, Figure 16.
[88] See Denning, pp. 110-14, 434-44.
[89] See Mumford, *Sketches from Life*, p. 116.

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educate the working class about how to and why they should fight for his regional socialist ideals. And he saw that this pedagogy should be addressed to workers' concrete needs and problems, and that it should include the workers in surveying the locality and region in order to create new, rational plans for a more rational society. We now turn to Mumford's and Catherine Bauer's application of this theory of transitional education, while they were members of the Regional Planning Association of America, to the area they thought was key: planned public housing.

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CHAPTER 10

BASES FOR TRANSITION TO THE NEW REGIME

Now we come to consider Mumford's thought upon how to get there from here, in *The Culture of Cities*. Mumford discusses three bases for the New Society within the old order. There is the school, which, as we discussed, is at the center of the new society. There is the "Scipian" organization, whose design Mumford formulated in his unpublished "Preface to Action," which we discussed in Chapter 8. Finally, there is the idea of standards of need fulfillment, presented to the masses, in order to inspire them to political struggle. In this regard, Mumford, along with Catherine Bauer, was most specifically interested in standards of housing. In this chapter, we will discuss all three of these proposed potential bases for social change.

But first, however, we need to discuss Mumford's basic view of the relationship between social change and the modern state. I would argue that Mumford is inconsistent and somewhat confused about this relationship.

Mumford's Confusion about the State

As we discussed in Chapter 1, Mumford was influenced by Geddes and Branford, in the tradition of the pastoralists and some Romantics, to adopt a gradualist, "evolutionary" view of social change. In our discussion of "Preface to Action," for example, we saw Mumford propose that his Scipian vanguard rely upon local capitalists to carry out their plans.

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This evolutionary view was counterpoised at times, in Mumford's own mind, to a more revolutionary approach, of course, especially as the Great Depression wore on. As we discussed in the introduction, Mumford, in *Technics and Civilization*, called for "a fight not only against a sessile administrative bureaucracy within the trade unions themselves; [but] more importantly . . . an outright battle with the guardians of capital."[1]

But the evolutionary strand was the stronger. We can see it as early as 1915, when Mumford composed another unpublished manuscript, the "Essay on Socialism." In it, we see Mumford first develop his long-running notion, which can be seen in *Culture of Cities* (1938), that the modern, bourgeois state could be transformed--by mass pressure, by the scientific rationality of agency personnel, and by the exigencies of rule itself--to become an agent of progressive social change. This notion of the modern State, as we shall discuss here, is a quintessentially "Progressive" one—part and parcel of the ideology of Progressives like Richard Ely, and Herbert Croly, Walter Lippmann, and Walter Weyl, the editors of one of Mumford's favorite magazines, *The New Republic*.[2]

Even in his "Essay on Socialism," however, Mumford moves uneasily between this Progressive view and radicals like Marx and Mumford's idol, Randolph Bourne. For Mumford begins the essay by admitting the truth of

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[1] Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich, 1934), pp. 418-19.
[2] See Richard T. Ely, "Report of the Organization of the American Economic Association," (1886), in Michael B. Levy, ed., *Political Thought in America: An Anthology* (Chicago, IL:

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Bourne's and Marx's analysis of the bourgeois state. In this state, "the political power is in the hands of the possessing class." This is because they alone have "the leisure to attend to political matters." And while the bourgeoisie may share this political power, "nominally," with the working class, the reality is that "through the limitations of political representation, the real power remains in the hands of the possessing classes, which furnish campaign funds, and from whom the nominees for office are selected."[3]

Though he understands the Marx-Bourne position, however, Mumford immediately moves toward the liberal nationalist position of Bourne's Progressive opponents. Mumford's attempt to reconcile the two opposing views, progressive and socialist, is strongly reminiscent of the pre-war evolutionary socialist William English Walling (though Mumford never refers to Walling in any text of which I am aware). As does Mumford in this unpublished essay, Walling, in such works as *Socialism as It Is* (1912) and *The Larger Aspects of Socialism* (1913) had dismissed the Hegelian, dialectical, revolutionary aspects of Marxism as outdated. Walling, however, did not dismiss the reality of class struggle. But he did not believe that this struggle would ever lead to revolution. Rather, it would lead to ever more profound, albeit reformist, economic transformations of capitalism, within the broad political contours of the existing

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Dorsey Press, 1988), pp. 346-49; Charles B. Forcey, *The Crossroads of Liberalism: Croly, Weyl, Lippmann and the Progressive Era, 1900-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961).

[3] Lewis Mumford, "Essay on Socialism," unpublished essay, 1915,Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, p. 13.

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system. This was because of "the possibilities of transformation and progress that still inhere" in capitalism. Anticipating Keynes, Walling felt that the key to such possibilities was "the increased unity and power" capitalism would gain through greater intervention of the state into the capitalist economy: "'State Capitalism,' and the increased wealth that will come through a beneficent and scientific policy of producing."[4] According to Walling, as summarized by Paul Buhle,

> the system would be successively transformed by the mechanics of a complex class struggle. A State Capitalism, under the hegemony of the big and petite bourgeoisie, would be supplanted by a State Socialism guided by the petite bourgeoisie and skilled workers; only later would this large process point toward a true socialism.[5]

As a result especially of the impending, imperialist, and horrific First World War, Marxists such as Louis Fraina (later renaming himself Lewis Corey) ridiculed such notions of a benevolent capitalism at the time.[6] Apparently, however, Mumford saw the war, instead as a confirmation of Walling's thesis that international, revolutionary socialism was dead, since, as Mumford saw it, the Second International had failed to stop the war through joint resistance. And Mumford agreed with these editors and Walling that the war provided nationalist

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[4] William English Walling, *Socialism As It Is* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), p. 229, cf. Paul Buhle, *A Dreamer's Paradise Lost: Louis Fraina/Lewis Corey (1892-1953) and the Decline of Radicalism in the United States* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1995), p. 21.

[5] Paul Buhle, *Dreamer's Paradise Lost*, p. 22. Buhle cites 3 works by William English Walling, *The Larger Aspects of Socialism* (New York: Macmillan, 1913), iii; *Socialism As It Is*, pp. 352-53; *Progressivism—and After* (New York: Macmillan, 1914), xxxii, 319.

[6] Buhle, p. 22. Ironically, however, Fraina, as Lewis Corey, later, in transit to his final stance as a social democrat, wrote that "in Britain partially, the State (under the . . . influence of labor) is used to facilitate experimental, scientific social change," a view strikingly similar to that of Walling and Mumford. Lewis Corey, "Labor and the New Order," *New Freeman* I (11 June 1939), p. 308. Cf. Buhle, p. 110.

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progressives with an opportunity to act through the State to accelerate the progressive economic transformations that Walling had predicted, through "intelligent action."

Mumford argues that the liberal, laissez-faire capitalist state, because of its inability to unite the citizens into a national community, must become a "socialist" state.

> Left to itself (a course which no nation has yet been insane enough to follow entirely) the capitalistic state becomes presently so complex, in the relationships that must be adjusted, that a third factor becomes necessary; with its introduction the state (now nationalistically self-conscious) becomes transformed into the socialistic state. This factor is organization.[7]

The welfare functions of the modern liberal national state, by themselves, abolish "exploitation," according to Mumford:

> With the socialist state exploitation, in the maleficent sense of the word, ceases to exist. Not class interest, but social welfare becomes the predominant object of legislation. The state, largely in the hands of the bureaucratic expert and the scientist, becomes the great intermediator, the arbiter, the dispenser of justice. This kind of society is not based on superiority in strength or wealth: it is based on equity [this last phrase about "equity" was later crossed out in the mss.—TS].[8]

More wonderous "corollaries" purportedly follow: from out of the process of bourgeois nationalism itself.

> Social welfare is now achieved by the utilization of land, capital, and social organization for the benefit of the

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[7] Mumford, "Essay on Socialism," pp. 13-14.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

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> citizen, who is also the once-exploited worker. Insofar as the socialistic state is regarded . . . as a phenomenon by itself, cosmopolitanism ceases in such a state to exert great influence. Nationalism, instead, comes to the front. A national literature, a national art, even a national technology arises. The various forces of the state become co-ordinated and the social body becomes more definitely integrated. For the first time the metaphor of the organism seems applicable.[9]

Please remember that this was a very early writing of Mumford's. He obviously got over this positive estimation of nationalist "organicism," and this rejection of cosmopolitanism, during the war. This is evidenced by his Bourne-esque essay for the *Dial*, "Wardom and the State." There, Mumford praises international associations of scientists, artists, and like minded individuals of all sorts, and damns nationalism as a dangerous abstraction, as he did later in *The Story of Utopias*, as we discussed in Chapter 6.[10] But he never got over the basic idea here--that a socialist state could arise from out of the exigencies of the national capitalist state to unite the population and provide for its welfare. In his mind, liberal nationalism becomes the political basis for a permanent and benevolent bureaucratic welfare state, which Mumford terms "socialism," but which is still capitalist in the Marxist view.

The "rationality" of the liberal nationalist welfare state, combined with the increasing efficiency of advanced capitalist economic and political processes, also becomes the basis for the regional, decentralized socialism Mumford would like

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[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.
[10] Mumford, "Wardom and the State," *New Republic*, October 4, 1919, pp. 303-05.

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to see become a reality. Mumford continues on this theme, in his unpublished "Essay on Socialism," by chastising critics of his evolutionary socialism. According to Mumford, such critics are simply guilty of imaginative laziness. which he attempts to remedy: "There is no reason of course for suspecting that such a state is in any sense final or ultimate; or that it represents the pinnacle of evolution. For the sake of freeing the imagination from such a lazy error I will adumbrate another possible line of development." Mumford continues by arguing that exigencies of nationalism itself. for government, will bring about the desired. socialist state of affairs.

> It will be observed that the socialistic state arises when the lack of a co-ordinating instrument makes life haphazard and subject to the unruly domination of external forces: in short when a growth of enterprise and an expanse of territory do away with the petty difficulties of an agrarian state, only to replace them with the larger difficulties that beset the nationalist state.

"To offset" these "larger difficulties," Mumford argues, in a way that is once again unclear, and, I would say, analytically superficial:

> a great bureaucratic centralization must take place, [in] which political centralization goes hand in hand with the newly developed economic activities of the state. This centralization leaves the citizen remote from the central government; it causes him to lose any sense of intimacy; and at the same time it has probably . . . a tendency to become extreme and rigid in form, and unadaptable to new conditions.[11]

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[11] Mumford. "Essay on Socialism," pp. 15-16.

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Yet somehow, once again in a way that Mumford never concretely elucidates here or elsewhere, the worst of times magically gives rise to everything Mumford wants in a new society:

> The next line of development is in the direction of decentralization: but this is not the laissez faire decentralization of the capitalist state. Instead, it is a decentralization into well co-ordinated, compact and closely integrated communities—municipalities for choice, which, closely in touch with the constituents of the community becomes the chief agent in all social enterprise, and responsive to their wills.

How does this miracle occur? Because bureaucratic centralization abolishes itself, by allegedly resolving all the logistical problems of modern society which called it into being, in the first place:

> By this time, centralization has so well adjusted problems of transportation and communication that there is little room for improvement: hence little need for attention. These affairs, tend, therefore, to be run on their original momentum.

As a result,

> The bureaucratic class begins to disappear, as the need for it vanishes. Technological improvements greatly reduce the amount of energy needed for necessary production, and since the aim of such a society is satisfaction (not, as in capitalist society more production), the hours of leisure increase and the methods of labor become less specialized.[12]

Thus, with what I would say is unmerited optimism and overblown (but hardly "lazy,"—none could accuse him of that!) imagination, Mumford argues that

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[12] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

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socialism will arise spontaneously, as the result of the increasing scientific and technical efficiency and capacity of modern society. This efficiency and capacity is wielded by a liberal nationalist state, whose personnel somehow become so increasingly compassionate toward their fellow citizens that they voluntarily give up their bureaucratic privileges, to the point where this state itself disappears. Thus Mumford disagrees fundamentally here with Marx. Marx argued that increasing scientific and technological capacity would instead give rise to economic and social contradictions, which in turn would give rise to mass *revolution*, "smashing" the bourgeois state, and creating socialism through a radically democratic state—like the Paris Commune of 1871.[13]

Mumford changed his mind radically after he wrote this document after World War I. At that time, he embraced Randolph Bourne's animus to the state in his two 1919 essays for *The Dial*, "The Status of the State" and "Wardom and the State,"[14] and rejected nationalism as a false utopia in his first book *The Story of Utopias* (1922). But as the threat of fascism and world war loomed again in the 1930s, Mumford was drawn back toward this old statist, evolutionary strain when he wrote *The Culture of Cities* (1938). Marxist critic Meyer Schapiro attacked him for this strain. The passage from *The Culture of Cities* which seems to have particularly perturbed Schapiro concerned what Mumford saw as the potential for

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[13] See Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France," *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 618-52.
[14] See Mumford, "The Status of the State," *Dial*, July 26, 1919, "Wardom and the State," *Dial*, October 4, 1919, pp. 303-05.

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the bourgeois "power state" to mutate, purely through popular pressure, without a revolution, into a "service state."

In effect, Mumford here splits his and his mentor Bourne's earlier, completely radical, negative concept of the state into two. The first is the old state of Bourne's conception, a state based upon war and power, which progressives should not have supported in World War I. This is the same modern, bourgeois "power state" which, according to earlier chapters of *The Culture of Cities*, is rooted in the Baroque era's pathology of power, profit, and megalomania. The second state is the contemporary "service state," a product of the New Deal era. Just as Mumford had argued in his "Essay on Socialism" that the bureaucratic centralized state would somehow give way to decentralized communities, so he now argued that this service state would grow out of the power state. The service state, according to Mumford, shared none of the power state's pathological attributes, and *was* worthy, it would seem, of support from progressives.

> Out of this power state a different type of organization has grown up: a service state: the outcome of the effort, through democratic pressure, to reapportion the existing balance of power within the "nation," to equalize the privileges of different regions and groups, and to distribute the benefits of human culture.

As in his "Essay on Socialism," Mumford is vague, almost cryptic about how the older, pathological state of affairs gives rise to the new, benevolent one. He seems to imply, once again, that this new and better "state" arises naturally. It arises out of some classless, universal social reaction to the problems caused by the old state of affairs, and/or the increasing rationality and benevolence of the

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personnel of the old bureaucratic, "power" state, who seek now to serve rather than aggrandize. He continues,

> This [service] type of activity derived originally from the necessity to regulate the hours of labor and the conditions of employment, first of all in England, in order to do away with the most hideous forms of exploitation: its activities extended to the regulation of housing and the provision of funds for the local improvement of housing: and even earlier, beginning in Prussia, it had taken over the function of education.

Mumford writes further that certain institutions of the Roosevelt Administration already comprise a "service state" an allegedly benevolent-state-within-a-malevolent-state. Examples of this are "the Department of the Interior, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Commerce, the Forest Service, the Parks Service, the Children Bureau."[15]

Elsewhere in *Culture of Cities*, however, Mumford himself casts doubt upon the progressiveness, or at least, the effectivity, of this "service state." For Mumford *attacks* the Roosevelt Administration for consistently failing to lend "consistent executive support" to such programs as the Suburban Resettlement Bureau." The SRB was a division of the New Deal's "Resettlement Administration." As we discussed in Chapter 5, though the RA was originally intended by FDR to carry out the regionalist designs of the RPAA throughout the country, it was scuttled first by the mega-urban conservatism of director Rexford Tugwell himself and then by the business class and their Congressional

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[15] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 364.

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representatives. As we shall shortly explore, in 1934, Mumford was disgusted with the New Deal's "bogus" housing program, offered after real estate interests opposed the original, quite ambitious program for its Housing Division which would have done some real good.[16]

Though Mumford proposed to differentiate between the two "states," to support one and not the other, they were already merging back into the same state in his mind. The difference was that whereas once Mumford, following Bourne, opposed the state in its entirety, he now supported it, in both its aspects—even as he cast doubt upon the sincerity and effectivity of its "service" motives! For as early as 1935, Mumford came to support American intervention in Europe against German fascism. Throughout the late 1930s, Mumford implied that even in its warmaking capacity, the American state could provide a service, by preserving "democracy."[17] As Schapiro sardonically remarked, Mumford's distinction between the "service" and the "power" state could easily become a (false, in Schapiro's opinion) distinction between different national states, in their entirety. In Mumford's mind, Schapiro suspected, while the American state, under FDR, had become completely defined by its "service" aspects, the German state, under Nazism, had become completely dedicated to "power." This distinction, Schapiro suspected, was becoming a rationalization for Mumford to support "the drums of

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[16] Mumford, "The Social Imperatives in Housing," *American Can't Have Housing* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1934), p. 15-19.
[17] See Donald Miller, *Lewis Mumford: A Life*, p. 391; Lewis Mumford, "When America Goes to War," *Modern Monthly*, June 1935, pp. 203-204.

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imperialist war" and to believe that these drums have come to "play humanitarian music.". For with this distinction, "it becomes right to support one's service state against the enemy's power state."[18]

Indeed, by 1940, with his *New Republic* article, "The Corruptions of Liberalism," Mumford demonized German society in much the same way as Bourne's contemporaries in World War I had demonized it. He explicitly dismissed explanations of fascism as rooted in economics and capitalism, and reduced fascism to a product of German national character, tracing a line of "raucous hatred" back from "Hitler" to "Luther." At the same time, Mumford surrendered his earlier scruples about the American nation-state. Recall his satirical fantasy of "the perfect citizens of Megalopolis" in *The Story of Utopias*, to which I referred briefly, but did not quote directly, in Chapter 2. If we were such beings, Mumford had argued, we would

> never let anything come between us and our loyalty to the State: when the State called for our taxes, we should never think regretfully of the amusements we must forego in order to pay them; when the State demanded that we go to war, nothing like the claims of a family or an occupation of a moral conviction would ever step between us and our national duty. [19]

Mumford would certainly revive such criticisms of statist totalitarianism in the 1950s and 60s, the era of the Cold War and the Atomic Age. In 1940, however, Mumford did his best to transform what was formerly a dystopian fantasy into a

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[18] Schapiro, p. 24.
[19] Mumford, *Story of Utopias*, p. 231.

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reality. He attacked what he called "pragmatic" liberals for their moral animus toward war, which Mumford reduced to an unwillingness to forego "private enjoyments." In order to fight domestic fascist sympathizers, Mumford called for a temporary suspension of civil liberties: including freedom of speech and the right to privacy in the federal mails. To fight fascism, America had to give up its "consumption economy" and become a "life-centered" "nation of villagers," whose family-centered "joys" and life lived close to the "soil" would make up for Spartan military sacrifice. In his maniacal fight against foreign fascists, as Matthew Josephson charged in his 1940 response in *The New Masses*, "Lewis Mumford's 'Mein Kampf'," Mumford's thinking had become almost identical to theirs.[20] In Mumford's frenzied appeal for collective sacrifice, what had genuinely been a life-centered philosophy was becoming its Spartan antithesis. Mumford was transmuting his hope for a socialistic "service" state into blind faith in and surrender to the irrationality of the imperialist American "power" state.

In 1938, Schapiro was already noticing the problems with Mumford's analysis of the state, problems which would, Schapiro predicted, lead him toward nationalism and support for war. This method, Schapiro charged, was idealist: "On the whole [Mumford] tends to psychologize causes and moralize effects." Mumford implied that meaningful social and political change could come from changes in ethics, science, and philosophy, from the change from the

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[20] See Lewis Mumford, "The Corruption of Liberalism," *The New Republic*, April 29, 1940, pp. 568-73; Matthew Josephson, "Lewis Mumford's 'Mein Kampf'," *the New Masses*, October 15,

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"paleotechnic" to the "biotechnic" era and "hygienic" morality, "from the special psychologies of the predatory and the 'organic' man," rather than from changes in the "social structure," from "historical events." Thus, Mumford could argue that, due to a rise of scientific rationality, of "neotechnic" values, the "power state" could metamorphose into a "service state." In arguing this, Schapiro charges, Mumford disregards the basic "bourgeois roots and aims" of "political liberalism:' the "close relations between power, interest, and service, and the ultimate dependence upon the economically dominant class." In other words, Mumford fails to comprehend that the "service" functions and departments of the modern liberal state are not created to serve the masses, or to truly unite them into an "organic" national community. Instead, these functions and departments "serve" the capitalist class, because they temporarily placate the masses in order to stave off a revolutionary upheaval. Mumford's idealist analysis, Schapiro argued, was unscientific, wishful thinking. Mumford did not grasp the essence of the state: instead, he was taken in by the illusion its "service" functions created: that the modern state could be or eventually become benign. "With all its service departments," Schapiro sardonically asked, how did the "'democratic' state" respond when faced with "strikes, crises and wars?" Though Schapiro does not spell out the answer, he obviously believed that the usual response, even for the "democratic" state, was repressive "power" and violence rather than "service." Contrary to popular myth, this pattern of repression was followed even during the

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1940, pp. 8-19.

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late 1930s and early 1940s by the Roosevelt Administration.[21] Mumford's believed that technical progress led to intellectual progress. This in turn would lead to political progress: the "power" functions of the state would shrink, the "service" functions of the modern state would expand. But Mumford's assumption that an expansion of the service state meant a decline in the power state failed to account for the fact, as Schapiro wrote, that "if 'irrationality and obsessive mythologies' are inherent in the power state as such, the Nazi state has also increased its service functions." Furthermore, Mumford failed to account for the fact that "just as [Mumford's] service state has grown out his power state, we have now the example of fascism growing out of that republican Germany which is for him the highest example of the service state in modern times."[22]

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[21] See Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream* (London: New Left Books, 1986), pp. 72-72, discussing the 1937 Illinois massacre of striking steelworkers in 1937 and the repressions during the rearmament years 1940-41. And as historians such as Howard Zinn and Robert Brenner have pointed out, the initial wave of strikes after Roosevelt's election was met, not with "service" on the part of the Roosevelt Administration but instead, neglect, which favored the capitalists. Roosevelt, according to Brenner, permitted "the companies and the local repressive forces" to crush "one strike after another." Thus the state, in the form of local government and police forces, used violence, nor reform, in the initial stages of this rebellion. It was only after this wave of strike activity won major victories, with general strikes in Toledo, Minneapolis, and San Francisco, and after the Socialists and Communists were gaining ground, that Roosevelt offered significant reforms—in Zinn's words, "to head off the alarming growth of spontaneous rebellion." See Robert Brenner, "The Paradox of Social Democracy," *Year Left I* (London: New Left Books, 1985), pp. 52-53; Howard Zinn, *People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), pp. 382-83, and Michael Zezima, *Saving Private Power: The Hidden History of the Good War* (New York: Vanguard Press, 2000).

[22] Meyer Schapiro, "Looking Forward to Looking Backward," *Partisan Review*, 5 (July 1938), pp. 20-21. It may be objected 1) that the New Deal programs were real achievements of mass struggle; that the masses were indeed served by such things as social security, unemployment insurance, the Work Project Administration, and the Public Works Administration 2) that the Nazis subsequently destroyed the Weimar republic in the most brutal way. But while both of these contentions are true, this does not contradict what Schapiro is saying. What Schapiro is arguing is that the New Deal/Popular Front programs, no matter how beneficial in the short term, no matter how different they are from fascism, no matter how much they need to be defended against conservative reaction, are nevertheless an instrument, like fascism, of the bourgeoisie to secure

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Rather than the "service" sector of the state gradually supplanting the "power" sector, as Mumford believed, both sectors, Schapiro charged, were

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their class rule. Confronting a wave of working class militancy, the bourgeoisie turn first to the Popular Front—to a very limited fulfillment of working class demands, to an inclusion of their reformist leaders—Stalinists as well as social democrats--in order to give the illusion that a compromise can be worked out. The Popular Front is also meant to co-opt the leadership of the working class movement. This is in fact what happened in the United States: in 1942, the AFL, the CIO, and the Communist Party supported a "no-strike" pledge; the Communist Party's shop stewards supported speed-up on the assembly line and, with the CIO, and the CP, along with the CIO, retreated on the issue of civil rights for blacks. See Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream* pp. 72-82; Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On: The American Communist Party during the Second World War* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), pp. 134-37.

If the workers' unrest is pacified--as it was in the United States, but through war production—the Popular Front will be eventually replaced by the usual bourgeois regime, and such reforms, as Marx said in the *Communist Manifesto*, will eventually be rolled back—as we see them rolled back today. If the wave of militancy continues and intensifies, the bourgeoisie will have bought sufficient time to organize and sponsor a fascist response—which will obliterate all the institutions and gains created by the Popular Front.

Even in the United States, it is questionable whether "democracy" was furthered when the CP and intellectuals like Mumford supported the America's entry into the war. America invaded Europe only after the Red Army routed the Nazi invasion—a victory for which America and the other Allies gave the Soviet Union little support. The Allies also did very little to help the Jews: although they could have bombed the railroad lines to the concentration camps, or taken in far more refugees. See Harry Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970). After the war, many Nazis were ferreted out of Europe by the American intelligence services, and found jobs within that apparatus. See Christopher Simpson, *Blowback* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988). The Popular Front was succeeded by the Cold War politics of the Truman Doctrine and then McCarthyism, which, while not formally fascist, terrorized intellectual dissent and Labor, and crippled the old Left and especially the Communist Party. As Mike Davis argues in *Prisoners of the American Dream* (pp. 72-101), the CP's support for the no-strike pledge and speed-up during the Popular Front era alienated them from the working class and thus left them critically weakened in their later struggle with McCarthyism. But even during World War II itself, the Allied bombing of civilians in France, at Dresden, and in Japan were heinous atrocities. Much like the fascists, the Allies thereby murdered and terrorized the civilian populations. This bombing demoralized popular, often pro-Communist or socialist, resistance movements against fascism. Civil liberties in the United States, for Japanese-Americans, for anti-war dissidents like the Trotskyists who went to jail, were disregarded—a repression which both Mumford and the CP indirectly or explicitly supported. After the war, the Allied occupation armies violently and murderously suppressed popular rebellions in Greece, Korea, and Italy, and set the stage for the Vietnam War: see Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War* (New York: Pantheon, 1968, 1990). All this makes very dubious Mumford's notion at the time that support for the U.S. against the Germans in World War II amounted simply to support for "democracy" against fascism, or that this was the best way to fight fascism.

See also Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, pp. 368-434, Alan Dawley, *Struggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State* (Cambridge, MA:

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integral parts of the modern bourgeois state. For both were useful, to varying degrees, in response to various events and crises, to maintaining the rule of the bourgeoisie. Mumford's view fails to comprehend the state as fundamentally an instrument of capitalist class rule. According to Schapiro, in discussing Germany, Mumford "disregards the class tensions, the precarious life of republican Germany, and the fortunes of German capital during the world crisis."[23] Neither the Weimar Republic nor the New Deal Administration, Schapiro argues, was a "service state" in embryo, waiting simply to hatch out of the old bourgeois power state. Such modern liberal regimes are instead a mask of benevolence, behind which the power state still operates.

I agree with Schapiro's critique. It is true that the Roosevelt Administration enacted some limited social welfare reforms during the Great Depression. Roosevelt and other leaders of the New Deal, such as Charles Merriam of the NRPB, were quite interested in welfare and planning for their own sake. As Governor of New York, Roosevelt supported the RPAA's program for building garden cities in the countryside. ***But these liberals also upheld the capitalist system.*** They erroneously believed that the two ideals—capitalism and social planning and progress—could be reconciled. But according to Schapiro, Sidney Hook, as well as the other independent Marxists as well as Trotskyists around the

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Harvard, 1991), pp. 377-79; Ernest Mandel, *The Meaning of the Second World War* (London: Verso, 1986), pp. 41-46, *et alia*.

[23] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 348, 364; Meyer Schapiro, "Looking Forward to Looking Backward," *Partisan Review*,5 (July 1938), pp. 20-21.

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Partisan Review, the political economy of the New Deal, and of capitalism in general, ensured that it was capitalism, not planning and progress, that would ultimately be favored.

In 1939, in his article, "Anatomy of the Popular Front," Hook argued that the Popular Front, the notion that workers and intellectuals should support "democratic" governments against fascists, had been a disaster in Europe. Far from fighting Europe, the Popular Front had facilitated it. In country after country in Europe—he mentions Spain, Germany, and France—the reliance of the workers movement upon its alliance with liberal capitalists and their political parties against fascism had been responsible for fascist victory. Hook wrote that

> in any Popular Front government it is the policy of the most conservative wing, which is pledged to support capitalism, that must prevail. Without capitalists parties there is no Popular Front. With them, the workingclass parties become hostages of the fear, timidity, and class interest of their allies.

So what, Hook asked, was the point, for socialists and the working class, of the Popular Front? As he writes further, "there is no reform or concession which can be won by a Popular Front government which cannot be won from a normal capitalist democracy by militant action of organized labor and its sympathizers among other classes who support a labor program. . . . ." Thus there is no net benefit. On the other hand, the cost is enormous: "the first real step towards socialism will probably bring what Marx described as a s pro-slavery rebellion to save capitalism. Could such a movement be effectively met with a key party in

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the government which is itself intent upon saving capitalism?" Of course not, Hook implies.

The Popular frontist seems to think that things can stay the way they were during times of economic prosperity. The attacks upon the working class, by the bourgeoisie, are a matter of poor judgment on their part. Thus if the working class remains civil to the bourgeoisie, and tries to work with them, the bourgeoisie will "come to their senses," also seek compromise, and remain civil. What the reformist fails to acknowledge, according to Hook, is the factor of "econcomic decline," which pits the two classes against each other, unites them in their fundamental opposition, their mutual struggle to the death. In the "face" of this decline, Hook writes, contrary to the comfortable but ultimately very dangerous illusions of the Popular Front supporter, "there is no going back or even marking time. ..." The only alternatives that exist are as follows

> either to present a socialist program, which [the Popular Front] cannot do because of its capitalist allies, or, what is more likely, to become the executioner of its own social reforms (as well as of those it has inherited), and thus incur the danger that the disillusioned masses will succumb to apathy or fall prey to fascist demagogy.[24]

The entry of the bourgeoisie into an "alliance" with the working class is a Trojan horse. As the most powerful partner within this alliance, the bourgeoisie prevented the Social Democrats, Communists, or Anarchists who entered such coalitions from enacting the popular reforms (i.e., land reform), they needed to

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[24] Sidney Hook, "Anatomy of the Popular Front," *Partisan Review* 6 (Spring, 1939), pp. 32-33.

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gain the support of the peasantry, who therefore swung their support instead toward the fascists. And if the workers movement threatened to become too powerful, in their struggle against both the fascists and the capitalists' austerity measures, the liberal bourgeoisie swung their support behind the fascists. Meanwhile, the social-democratic or Communist leaders, in order to keep up their end of the bargain with the capitalists, to maintain "order," refused to organize militant resistance against the fascists. The best way to fight fascism, Hook argued, was not an alliance with the treacherous bourgeoisie of one's one nation, but instead, a "united front" of the workers' parties and the peasants, against the bourgeoisie as well as the fascists.[25]fascism in

In America, as historians Thomas Ferguson, Alan Brinkley, and Steve Fraser have argued, the most powerful element of the New Deal/Popular Front was the capitalist class. They supported the New Deal only for the purpose, and to the extent, that this would boost consumption and get the economy moving again, and sow the illusion that capitalism was reformable, that the interests of the workers and capitalists were not fundamentally opposed. This was to ensure that the militant workers, poor, and farmers of the early 1930s would quiet down, and lend their support to the burgeoning American multinational empire. [26]

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[25] Hook, pp. 33-38.

[26] Thomas Ferguson, "Industrial Conflict and the Coming of the New Deal: The Triumph of Multinational Liberalism in American," Alan Brinkley, "The Idea of the State," and Steven Fraser, "The 'Labor Question'," in Steven Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order: 1930-1980* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 3-31, 85-121, 122-152.

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Beholden as they were to the support of these corporate capitalists, Hook argued, the New Deal liberals would never go beyond their timidity in pursuing their progressive planning goals. This ensured that the "power state" would *never be* "gradually" replaced with the "service state." Hook wrote (this was 1939) that the New Deal had failed to resolved the economic crisis of the Great Depression, that the conservatives in Congress had stopped its forward momentum, and that Roosevelt was responding to the ensuing political crisis and deepening economic crisis through rearmament, not further reforms.[27]

Schapiro makes an interesting point when he argues that Mumford's "unclarity about the state" is related to another, important weakness in his theory. Mumford, Schapiro argues, has a "general aversion from politics. . . ." and, more specifically, from discussion of "class groupings," for which Mumford tends to substitute a "mythical aggregate" of "undifferentiated we's and ours'. . . " We certainly have seen evidence of this substitution in both his "Essay on Socialism" and in *Culture of Cities*. It is "True," Schapiro remarks, that Mumford

> encourages 'political association' as a kind of healthy activity, in the way settlement workers promote boys' clubs (he names Sunnyside, L.I.—alas!--as a model of "robust political life").[28] But like so many honest reformers who fear the self-interest and blatancy of politics, he wishes finally to preserve his political virginity.

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[27] Hook, pp. 38-39.

[28] This comment in parentheses is somewhat unfair on Schapiro's part—as we will discuss later in this chapter. Mumford and Bauer hoped that Sunnyside would provide a model of community life for which workers might be encouraged to struggle. It was not Mumford's fault that Sunnyside's residents ended up being middle class. On the other hand, Schapiro has a point: why didn't Mumford talk about other, far more "robust" political activity that actually occurred among the working class at the time?

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As I noted earlier, there is little in *Culture of Cities* about the actual, militant workers' struggles of the 1930's. Probably in response to this dearth of discussion, Schapiro asserts that "Although [Mumford] acknowledges the existence of the labor and socialist movements, essentially he regards them from outside, as possible aids to the independent, public-spirited reformer."[29]

Schapiro does not go into detail about why he thinks these two problems with Mumford's thought are related. But I would argue that Mumford's ambivalence toward working class politics is the result of an aversion, endemic to "reformers" like himself, to the necessity of revolution.

Recall that, in 1919, in his *Dial* articles, when Mumford had come to share Bourne's aversion to the state in its entirety, he also embraced workers' struggles, specifically, the councils and soviets of the Russian Revolution. Mumford was terrified at the rise of Hitler in the 1930s. He was disgusted with the desire for appeasement among Western national leaders and his fellow liberals on the editorial board of *The New Republic* (John T. Flynn and Charles Beard). And he was disgusted with the Communist Party's support for the cowardly, criminal Hitler-Stalin pact in 1939, which was obviously the basis for their sudden shift toward non-intervention. As a result, Mumford backed away from his earlier, anti-statist radicalism, and moved back towards his early evolutionary nationalism. Thus, I would argue, came the theory of the "service state."

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[29] Schapiro, p. 19.

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If indeed the personnel of the "service" *sector* of the state could be relied upon to wrest control of or gain influence over the "power state," then the need, argued by Marx, for the working class to "smash" the state through revolution is obviated. Thus, while the Marxist revolutionary strategy embraces both the necessity of popular education and struggle, Mumford, armed with his "unclarity about the state," can argue that education alone, among workers and middle class professionals, exerting pressure upon and working for the "service state," will fundamentally transform society for the better.

Three Transitional Strategies

It would seem that, because of this confusion over the nature of capitalist state, and his ambivalence toward working class revolutionary politics, Mumford stumbles from one transitional strategy to another in the *Culture of Cities*. As he goes along, he realizes uneasily that by themselves they are limited, that they can only be successful if employed by a revolutionary organization. Yet he simultaneously seems to believe, a la Branford, that the persuasive power of such strategies alone, operating upon all the classes in society, might be a substitute for the revolution needed to implement them. This element of wishful thinking on Mumford' part limits his thought. But despite this limitation, his thought is nevertheless valuable, I would argue, to those who want to think about how to build working class struggles. Let's examine these strategies carefully.

I. *The School as a Base for the New Society within the Old*

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Like Dewey, Mumford, in *The Culture of Cities*, argues that the critical spirit of modern education, and of the "formal" rationality of the capitalist machine age, are completely at odds with one another. Thus radical education itself can be a base, within the old society, for the creation of the new:

> Under the impulse of psychological thought and revolutionary political hopes, directed toward the rational improvement of society, the school has, from the eighteenth century onward, tended to assume a more critical place in the whole political order: from Rousseau and Fichte to Dewey and Croce, pedagogy and politics have gone hand in hand, and the main interest of public education has been to effectuate, through collective means and processes, a better political society.

However, "With the growth of specialized machine industry, the educational opportunities of the extra school environment, in the confused, amorphous cities that this regime has produced, have become more limited. "

Mumford argues that the "systematic technics of the modern factory" have "de-rationalized," made "automatic and non-reflective," the spheres of industry, economics, and leisure.[30] This process has prevailed upon the school itself. Its liberatory potential is thwarted. Under the "paleotechnic and metropolitan regime," as the "essential instrument in effective orientation of society toward" the "ends its members and its ruling class conceived," the "duty" of the school has become to make "the population responsive to print, skilled in arithmetic, and docile to external stimuli."[31] The result of this growth in and prevalence of

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[30] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 364.
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 476. By "docile," perhaps Mumford means "submissive."

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machine rationality has "become familiar: a growth of irrational conduct in the very midst of a meticulous mechanized order and a decrease of what Mannheim distinguishes as *substantial rationality*."

This is basically, therefore, a situation not unlike that of "dual power" between workers councils and the bourgeois state. Such a condition can only be fragile, at best. It is an all-or-nothing proposition, socially speaking. Either the critical spirit of the school, its potential for face-to-face participatory discussion and education, pervades all of society, defeating the formal rationality of the cult of the machine. In this era, the task of the school is political: it becomes

> making the community as a whole capable of controlling its destinies: capable of disciplining and making over every aspect of its activities, the practical and the instrumental, the personal and the communal. A large order: it puts the school in the central position occupied by the Church in medieval Christendom.

But to accomplish this task, the school itself must be reformed

> . . . the humanizing and rationalizing elements in human conduct must be more fully incorporated in the organization of both school and city; while the automatic and compulsive processes, already as pronounced in the factory and the bureau as on the military drill ground, must be reduced and narrowed.[32]

II. *Decentralized Organizations*

As he wrote in "Preface to Action," Mumford argues in *The Culture of Cities* that resistance to the old order must involve "the introduction of small

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[32] *Ibid.*, p. 475.

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units, scaled to direct activity and participation, in every phase of organization."

For, Mumford argues,

> We need, in every part of the city, units in which intelligent and co-operative behavior can take the place of mass regulations, mass decisions, mass actions, imposed by ever remoter leaders and administrators. Small groups: small classes: small communities: institutions framed to the human scale, are essential to purposive behavior in modern society.

One might fear problems with what Mumford is proposing. Is he talking about anarchism? Does he really believe that all of society can be run by "affinity groups"? This is unlikely, however. A more likely interpretation: Mumford is not against any and all mass organization, only the predominant, unbalanced, almost exclusive emphasis in the modern era on mass organizations. Though mass organizations, such as trade unions, are important, they themselves must be democratized, and this must involve a decentralization of power within the organization. Otherwise, power is unbalanced. As a result of this imbalance, power concentrates into a few hands, "opportunities" are "limited," and

> We demand the impossible in the way of direction and specialized service from a few people, and we fail to demand the possible from those who are better equipped to handle adequately a smaller job. With our overgrown institutions, overgrown colleges, overgrown corporations, overgrown cities, is it any wonder that we easily become the victims of propaganda machines, routineers, and dictators?[33]

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[33] *Ibid.*, p. 475-76.

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This is certainly all true. But the question Mumford seems to beg, just as he begged it in 1915, is how the thinks the centralized and very powerful institutions of modern bourgeois society can be decentralized as he would like them to be. Is this centralization to be wished away? Does Mumford expect that bourgeois society will simply pattern *itself* upon the decentralized organizations he envisions? How is this to happen? Does he expect his decentrists to make their case and effect the changes they would like to see through gentle persuasion? Or are the decentrists, by getting down to work in their own communities, to serve as a model upon which the rest of society will marvel and then mimic? Isn't there a revolutionary contest of power necessary here?

III. *A Transitional Program for Housing: Need to Present Humane Standards as an Organizing Tool*

Mumford has a strategy for the Decentrists, and it involves, not just gentle persuasion, but instead, popular political struggle. In "Preface to Action," Mumford proposes that the Decentrists attempt to focus the consciousness of working people away from the empty abstractions of bourgeois and religious ideology, and toward a practical consciousness. This practical consciousness would make manifest to them their need to fight for regional socialism. To focus in this manner meant to focus upon practical issues that actually affected the masses' existence. The issue on which Mumford focused through the 1930s was housing, a concern connected with his intensely amorous as well as intellectual relationship with radical housing advocate Catherine Bauer, who was also one of

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Mumford's RPAA colleagues. At a time when public housing was in fact born in the United States, it was indeed, for Mumford and Bauer, the key issue to focus upon.

In the *Culture of Cities*, Mumford argues that the basic weakness of capitalism is its failure to fulfill human needs:

> Under [the] pecuniary economy, the civic and domestic needs of the greater part of the population have never been satisfied through the ordinary processes of the market. [Though the costs of consumer items were reduced,] the low wage levels which entered into the production of these cheapened goods made it impossible for any large mass of workers to make an adequate demand for dwellings and for the community equipment that goes with urban living.[34]

What kind of mass housing is produced by capitalism? According to Mumford, it is "totally inadequate, because of the profit motive itself:

> As the standards of housing have risen, the opportunities for profit through their sale or rent have dropped. In a capitalist economy, this means that production has gone into other channels. Result: a quantitative shortage in dwelling space has been chronic in highly industrialized countries. . . .
>
> In order to make it possible for capital to enter this field at all, the qualitative standards have kept consistently below the level of decency available under the existing technology. The dwelling house, far more than the farm, has been the backward point of modern technics.[35]

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[34] *Ibid.*, pp. 458-59. By "mass of workers," Mumford still is talking about this mass operating as individuals within the capitalist market. Later, as we shall see, he will discuss the potential of this mass, acting within their trade unions, to mobilize *collectively* for better housing, a potential of which he is very supportive.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 460.

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As for the modern promotion of private "home ownership," Mumford is dubious. Supporting Engels' argument in his *Zur Hausfrage*, Mumford writes,

> The failure of decent housing to obtain capital through competition in the market has led to widespread attempts to foster home-ownership among the workers: under the guise of offering security, those who have fostered this movement, including government agencies, have sought to burden the worker with the risks, risks whose returns are not sufficient to attract the necessary capital from the more wary.

Mumford agrees with Engels that the costs outweigh the benefit and are far more lasting:

> This diversion of the worker's meager budget to housing not merely undermines his standard of life: it lessens his freedom of movement and, during a financial crisis or a local shutdown often results in the complete loss of his entire investment—and the roof over his head as well.[36]

Under the biotechnic economy, however, these conditions are reversed. Instead of wages and income directing market demand, vital demand determines the level of income and directs production into socially useful channels.[37] The "biotechnic" regime that Mumford desires would make the basic, life-needs of the entire human community the goal of society. This would end "the wasteful duplication of mechanical equipment, the aimless productivity, the random expansiveness of production under pecuniary canons of success." Instead, a biotechnic economy erects rational goals: the best possible environment for

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[36] *Ibid.*, p. 460.
[37] *Ibid.*, p. 461.

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human nurture and culture: the primary of consumptive and creative activities over the instrumental processes. . . ."[38]

Standards of housing, in this regard, are primary. For housing is at the center of the society of the future. This society will orient industry toward life and community: not the other way around. In the "biotechnic" economy, housing will occupy the "peculiarly central" place that the office and factory do today, for industry will no longer be abstracted and arrogated over the processes of life and community. Mumford points out that "about ninety per cent of the structures in any urban community are houses. Thus, "an adequate insight into the task of housing today is essential to the development of cities. The socialized provision of housing, in integrated neighborhood units, is the economic foundation for the biotechnic city."[39]

But housing is key not merely to the society of the future, however. It is also central, for Mumford, to the process of transition. As we discussed in Chapter 3, Mumford supported the radical program of housing envisioned by Henry Wright. This program would redevelop large, middle-class, blighted areas, rather than just isolated slums, to create rationally designed, healthy communities. It would provide vastly better housing than the private market. And as Mumford wrote in his 1934 article for the *New Republic,* such a program would also provide many, many more jobs than the Work Projects Administration provided.

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[38] *Ibid.*, p. 463.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 465.

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In the midst of the Great Depression, with massive unemployment and poverty, Mumford wrote that such a housing program must have "a central place in any continuous public-works program that seeks to build up a steady base for employment. . . ." As Mumford argues further,

> Every technician knows that housing makes heavier demands for labor than the more rationalized industries. . . . About 40 percent of the total costs go to labor on the job; and another 20 or so go to materials in which labor has already played a part. As the land costs and the financial costs of private building are diminished in a non-profit, governmental-aided project, the amount that goes to labor increases.[40]

As we have seen from examining Henry Wright's work, a rational housing program ultimately requires a process of regional decentralization of the mega-urban population into garden cities. Here, too, Mumford writes in the *Culture of Cities*, the inequality of the capitalist economy serves as an obstacle to this process:

> Without doubt the prime obstacle to urban decentralization is that a unit that consists of workers, without the middle class and rich groups that exist in a big city, is unable to support even the elementary civic equipment, of roads, sewers, fire department, police service, and schools. At present it is only by remaining in metropolitan areas, where the taxes derived from the well-to-do districts can be partly applied to the working class quarters, that the worker can obtain even a modicum of the facilities for a good life.[41]

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[40] Lewis Mumford, "The Shortage of Dwellings and Direction," Part III of "New Homes for a New Deal," a series of articles on the housing crisis by the leaders of the Housing Study Guild, successor organization to the RPAA: Albert Mayer, Henry Wright, and Lewis Mumford. Mumford's contribution appeared in *The New Republic*, February 28, 1934, p. 69.
[41] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 459.

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This was the great problem which bedeviled middle class housing decentralists such as Ebenezer Howard—and Mumford's own RPAA. Unless the community as a whole is wealthy and controls the resources necessary, such plans become just another means for the personal self advancement of what must eventually become a middle or upper class community instead. Though Engels was in fact its originator, Mumford claims that "this fact was discovered by the planners of Radburn, N. J., in attempting a rational organization of its municipal life and it was further demonstrated by Mr. Clarence Stein in a study made for the Resettlement Administration. . . . ."[42]

The first step is to set our sights on a higher standard of living, for everybody:

> In terms of housing, the minimum standards are set by objective criteria of air, water, sunlight, heat, privacy, an so forth, and further modified by those social provisions which tradition and current investigation prove to be necessary for the nurture of children and the education of responsible citizens.

Wages must be adjusted upward to meet these standards: not the other way around, as is currently the case. As for those "industries that cannot meet such a level," they "must be looked upon as economically inefficient and socially defective: to be abolished or taken over by the community."[43]

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[42] *Ibid.*, p. 459.

[43] *Ibid.*, pp. 461-62. The language Mumford uses here might appear to be either the result, or the stimulus to, one or two FDR's speeches. But, in the first place, Mumford was writing like this from the late 1920s on. As for such language influencing Roosevelt, this may indeed be the case. As stated before, as governor of New York, Roosevelt was very interested in the RPAA's program. On the other hand, the Communist Party was also talking and writing this way, and they were heavily involved in arousing the masses, in the early thirties, against the system in which Roosevelt ultimately believed. So the influence over Roosevelt was probably from that quarter, in

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In formulating this vital standard, the destructive fetishes of the capitalist economy—the fetishism of money, machines, and commodities—would be discarded. These would no longer serve as the measure of progress, no longer serve as a substitute for universal health and fulfillment.

> Vital standards must be expressed in terms of leisure and health and biological activity and esthetic pleasure and social opportunity: that is, in terms of goods and environmentally improvements in which machine production and all the devious and indirect processes that subserve such production have but a subordinate part.

These standards must be embodied in new centers, new institutions: "In putting a vital standard first, we thereby make the dwelling house, the school, and the city the concrete, all-engrossing end of industrial and agricultural production." By making these ordered, planned institutions, rather than the market and the machine, the dominant ones, we do not the realm of freedom, as Jacobs might argue: we in fact expand and intensify it and make it far more worthwhile.

> The aim is not more goods for more people to buy, but more opportunities for them to live: hence only such increases in goods as are instrumental to "the best life possible." Under such an economic order, communal choices become more important than individual choices, and more and more of the activities of the citizen's life are released from pecuniary constraint.[44]

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the main. According to biographer Donald Miller (my telephone conversation with him), Mumford had very little connection to New Deal figures, outside of some correspondence between himself and Eleanor Roosevelt. He was critical, as we saw before, of what he considered to be Roosevelt's half-heartedness and inconsistency in really fulfilling the popular needs and aspirations he claimed to champion.

[44] *Ibid.*, pp. 463-64.

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"The house, the school, and the city": these are the new foci for the biotechnic regime. All three have a crucial importance and are integrally linked. Mumford proceeds to explore this potential ecology of human habitat. He begins with the biotechnic house[45]:

> The new home is primarily a biological institution: and the house is a specialized structure devoted to the functions of reproduction, nutrition, and nurture. . . . Add to these primarily physiological requirements the provision of space for social intercourse and play and study, and the definition of the modern dwelling is complete.[46]

The facilities for these activities have developed remarkably in the contemporary era.

> With the return of entertainment to the house, through the phonograph, the radio and the motion picture—with the near-prospect of television—*the modern house has gained in recreational facilities what it lost through the disappearance of many of the earlier household industries.*[47]

The house has also become the focus of utility networks as well as gadget sales:

> a succession of mechanical utilities pushed into the house: the heating stove, running water, the bathroom, the kitchen range and the gas lamp, the water closet, the central heating plant and the icebox, electric light, gas. . . . These new utilities and machines changed the nature of the

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[45] Mumford's term, the "biotechnic house," probably derived from his friend Frank Lloyd Wright, is vitalist and somewhat unfortunate. It implies that biology and technology are both in harmony and jointly in command of reality—part of a foible Mumford has, as we discussed before, in hoping that political and social conflict is unnecessary: all we need is new technology. But Mumford did acknowledge the need for such struggle, as we saw in Chapters 7 and 8; and the "house" he has in mind is properly a *social* institution.

[46] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 466.

[47] *Ibid*, p. 467.

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> dwelling house in two important ways. They broke down its self-sufficient isolation and linked it up, with specially built roads, water mains, sewer pipes, gas pipes, electric wires, telephone lines with other parts of the urban environment: the house functioned as an element in a collective unit, and the efficiency of the individual cell was now conditioned on the efficiency and economy of the whole. Well-equipped houses, without appropriately modified community plans, could achieve only a small part of their mechanical promise.[48]

This development is positive, potentially speaking. It potentially acts to break down the individual's isolation, to build community. But in the meantime, under capitalism, "without appropriately modified community plans," the costs far outrun the advantages:

> All these improvements, furthermore, added to the total cost of the house: for whereas the bare structure originally about ninety percent of the cost, to day this structure constitutes but twenty percent. . . . if one assumes that the proportional relationship between housing, clothes, food, and other necessaries of life remains fixed, then the total income of the family would have to expand greatly in order to cover the rise in the expenditure. The alternative is deficient accommodations: lack of space, lack of equipment. Up to the present, for the greater part of the population, modern communities have contented themselves with deficient accommodations.[49]

Mumford is not against these modern conveniences, any more than he is against modern communication when he attacks the culture of "Broadway" and the manipulations of mass culture, in general. It is just that these conveniences, like modern communication itself, are made problematic by capitalism.

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[48] *Ibid.*, pp. 467-68.
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 468.

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Capitalism manipulates the individual with mass media; it burdens the individual with the costs of these conveniences. An individualist as opposed to a collectively shared and planned system of equipment and utilities—Henry Wright's schemes for group housing, for example—is enormously inefficient and increases their cost. Take for example, the fact that in a typical modern suburban tract, to mow the lawn, each person has to own a lawn mower; to cut wood, each one has to buy a power saw, etc.; whereas if a few houses had a common tool shed, costs would drop significantly. Similarly, community would be enhanced rather than weakened if each neighborhood, even each block, had a community center with a small playhouse: the need felt today, especially in suburbia, for a television set in each room of the house would perhaps as a result no longer be so strong. The advantages of these conveniences cannot be realized cheaply for the community as a whole, without their socialization:

> the act of rationalization does not solve the problem of cost that results from the multiplication of utilities and services: nor will it be solved by the further pre-fabrication of floors, roofs, and walls, although each and all of these steps may be decisive improvements. . . . the deepest need of modern life is to re-integrate the organs of association by forming new civic wholes.[50]

But how to get there from here? Mumford argues that some mode of social organization, to focus mass consciousness, mobilize the mass, and organize the logistics, is required:

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[50] *Ibid.*, pp. 469-70.

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> Hence the importance for community housing of an active trade-union and co-operative movement: the first to push wages upward, claim a larger share of the total product, and create an effective political demand for government-aided housing: the second to organize and administer the units built, focusing and interpreting the consumer's demand, acting as mediator between the official agencies and professional services and the eventual occupants: in some cases, as in pre-Nazi Frankfurt, administering the housing itself.

As with his theory of principled planning, discussed in Chapter 7, Mumford emphasizes here that "the *educational* services of these organizations are no less important than their political functions."[51]

Catherine Bauer's work with Labor Housing Conference was probably the inspiration for Mumford's ideas here. So it is to Catherine Bauer, Mumford's lover in the early 1930s, to whom we shall now turn.

Catherine Bauer's ***Modern Housing***

First some background on Bauer and her relationship with Mumford, which spanned several decades. According to biographer Donald Miller, Mumford met Bauer in the offices of his publisher, Harcourt Brace, in 1929. Bauer, in charge of advertising, "was a promising student of planning and architecture and had studied art at Vassar," so Mumford and she "had a lot in common." At first, his relationship with Bauer was Platonic—intensely so. As "they began to have lunch together regularly late that fall," Mumford claims he was

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[51] *Ibid.*, p. 471.

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"more charmed by her quick mind and spirited personality" than by the "curve of her breasts"—which he also remarked upon. "We plunged and leaped in a sea of ideas like two dolphins . . . before our bodies were ready for any other kind of play." But after this initial period, "he and Catherine soon fell into an intense sexual and emotional relationship that burned hot and strong for the next five years." Miller writes that Bauer became Mumford's "most trusted intellectual associate, the only one to whom he would ever show the first draft of anything he had written." Their frequent reference to each other's work, the fact that their articles would frequently appear beside each other, revealed this fact to the world—and perhaps some knowing snickers, as well.

Their sexual relationship fizzled after Bauer took on another lover, architect Oscar Stonorov, and Mumford's wife Sophia became pregnant, in 1934, and their intellectual companionship began to weaken as well. In the meantime, however, their relationship, while it almost wrecked Mumford's marriage, tremendously stimulated Mumford's intellectual and emotional development. Mumford claimed that the "sexual exhilaration he found with Catherine helped him to break through his emotional blockage and released energies for future work," according to Miller. "Around her, for the first time ever he felt close to achieving that balance of intellect

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and passion he had set as the supreme aim of his life"[52]—the aim which, as we noted in our introduction and in chapter 1, was the hallmark of Mumford's Romantic tradition.

Their relationship also stimulated Bauer's development. When the woman who became perhaps the greatest American advocate of public housing in the twentieth century first started seeing Mumford, she "was not even interested in social issues," and "didn't much like 'reformers'"! As Miller continues, "But once Catherine was drawn into Lewis's life, her own life had taken a different direction. She began to read more widely on politics, labor, and city planning." Bauer became executive secretary of RPAA in 1932, as well as Clarence Stein's research assistant. "By 1932, after her European trip with Lewis, she felt she knew enough about new housing departures to write a book of her own." That book became *Modern Housing*. It was at this time, as well, that Bauer

> was drawn into the New Deal's public housing effort. . . . With Lewis's encouragement, she took a position in Philadelphia as principal advisor and executive secretary of the Housing Labor Conference, which was then working with the American Federation of Full-Fashioned Hosiery workers on the Carl Mackley Houses, one of the first housing projects of the New Deal.

"Casy," as her friends now called her, became part of a "formidable brain trust and lobbying team, at one point leading a labor march on city hall." This brain trust included her new lover, Stonorov, as well as John Edelman, the head

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[52] Miller, *Lewis Mumford: A Life*, pp. 288-89.

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of the Hosiery workers union.[53] As expressed in Bauer's *Modern Housing*, the philosophy of the LHC was "that workers had to organize politically if government-sponsored housing was to become a reality in America." The group designed the Carl Mackley Houses with the necessity of this collective mobilization in mind, as housing historian Gwendolyn Wright writes,

> The common recreational and service facilities—which included rooftop playgrounds, tennis courts, swimming pools, library, laundry buildings, and numerous meeting rooms—received more attention than the 284 tiny living units. Residents were encouraged to organize forums in socialized medicine and political issues. To them, as Bauer had hoped, subsidies for housing represented one of many basic rights the government should guarantee for all citizens.[54]

By the summer of 1934, the Labor Housing Conference gained important influence within the labor movement. As Gail Radford, another historian of public housing, states, "Central labor councils in New York City, and in Boston and Lawrence, Massachusetts, established housing committees that became affiliates." Though the AFL refused to endorse the radical housing demand of the LHC at its October 1934 annual convention, local branches of the Conference sprung up around the country.[55]

The LHC came to be subsidized by the Housing Division of the New Deal's Public Works Administration, headed by Harold Ickes. As Gwendolyn Wright

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[53] Miller, pp. 332-33.
[54] Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), pp. 224-25.
[55] Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 182-83.

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writes, the example as well as the public pressure generated by the LHC's organizing efforts stimulated the PWA to get into the act themselves. "Within a year, the PWA itself began to buy land, raze slums, and build housing. Over the next four years, it was responsible for destroying more than ten thousand substandard housing units and erecting almost twenty-two thousand new units in fifty-nine different projects."[56] This was slum clearance and isolated housing project development only, however. According to Richard Plunz, the design guidelines for the PWA's programs were high in terms of individual apartment standards of "room size, light, and ventilation." But in terms of site planning, these guidelines were abstract and bureaucratic. Their guiding conception was either the "tower in the park" conception of Le Corbusier, or the individualist one-family housing of the new suburban tracts sponsored by the Federal Housing Administration. They did not share the vision of the 1920s radical architects in America, who, as we discussed earlier, had in the outer boroughs of New York City, designed for private developers and workers' cooperatives dense housing with meeting halls and rooms and surrounding commonly enjoyed, spacious parks, gardens, and courtyards.

The PWA architect standardized his designs for interlocking apartment clusters by using interchangeable wooden block-shapes, which he played around with "until a pattern evolved which recognized site characteristics and satisfied PWA criteria." "Community participation" in planning was highly "discouraged

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[56] Gwendolyn Wright, p. 225.

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since the living habits of future residents were considered to have a negative influence on design." The political model was of scientific expertise, not democracy: "social workers would translate 'usable information'," to the planners instead. This was certainly not the ambitious program, building upon the radical communal architectural movement of the 1920s, of democratic planning and community building envisioned by Henry Wright, Mumford, or Bauer. Despite the gains represented by the PWA's program, these radicals were still quite frustrated by these problems with the PWA's projects,[57] as shall be discussed shortly.

According to Nathaniel S. Keith, the Labor Housing Conference was also one of the main organizers--besides organized labor itself, the National Public Housing Conference, and the Housing Legislation Information Service--of a "ground-swell of support" for a bill sponsored by Senator Robert Wagner, the United States Housing Act of 1937, otherwise known as the Wagner-Steagall Housing Act. This was "the high water mark of New Deal liberalism in housing," according to Keith. The LHC, and the AFL, used its influence to try to push the original draft of the bill further to the Left, toward even greater direct federal support for public housing construction and for Wright's ambitious community building program. But as it passed through Congress, the bill got more and more watered down to pacify conservative interests. Thus it represented a compromise. The US Housing Agency thus created was no longer directly involved with

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[57] Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City*, pp. 226-33.

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construction. Bowing to judicial resistance, it ceded such authority to local and state agencies, which it funded.[58] And it never fulfilled Henry Wright's vision. But for the next couple of decades, it ratified as acceptable what the PWA had already been doing temporarily: "annual Federal subsidies to local housing authorities to provide housing for the poor at rents geared to their ability to pay."[59]

It was during this heady time that Bauer wrote *Modern Housing*, which we will now discuss.

Bauer begins by considering the housing crisis, which reached full bloom in the nineteenth century. During the Industrial Revolution, "The cities grew progressively uglier and more wasteful and less workable. The average dwelling of the average citizen was narrower, darker, dirtier, and more crowded in the prosperous middle decades than it ever had been before." She quotes Engels's *Condition of the Working Class in England* of 1844, with its description of Manchester as one of "piles of debris, . . . refuse, filth, and offal," of pollution and congestion, of workers' housing and filthy tanneries confounded together, an existence circumscribed by "gasworks, the railroad station, the cemetery, the poorhouse."[60]. She cites Engels again, writing fifty years later, that while the bourgeoisie "have made further progress in the art of hiding the distress of the

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[58] Gwendolyn Wright, p. 237; Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, pp. 184-91.
[59] Nathaniel S. Keith, *Politics and the Housing Crisis Since 1930* (New York: Universe Books, 1973), p. 36.
[60] Catherine Bauer, *Modern Housing* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside, 1934), pp. 8-9.

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working classes. . . no substantial improvement has taken place." This is "amply proved." Engels writes in a preface to the 1892 edition of *The Condition of the Working Class in England,* "by the 'Report of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Poor, 1885"[61]

Evidently, Bauer agrees with Engels that no "substantial" resolution of the housing crisis can take place under capitalism. But she does not agree with Engels's conclusion that all attempts at housing reform in this society are pointless. She argues for a more dialectical approach. Let's now discuss her analysis of the history of housing reform.

The "philanthropic," bourgeois reformers of the nineteenth century—Bauer mentions a "Wilberforce" of the "Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor"--attempt to absolve the economic system, and "uplift" the "soul" of the individual.[62] These were ultimately succeeded, during the latter half of the nineteenth century, by more practical efforts to at least provide the poor with housing, through the creation of "model" tenements, by such organizations as the Peabody Foundation in 1864 in London. Similar experiments were attempted in Paris, and on the outskirts of Berlin by reformer Victor Huber.

Bauer reviews these bourgeois reform efforts, and argues that they "became speedily just as insanitary" as the old housing. " Also, they often tended to be even more overcrowded." Because there was no protection against speculation,

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[61] *Ibid.*, p. 10. Friederich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (London, 1892).
[62] Bauer, p. 67.

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even the cottages usually "were resold at a handsome profit and ended up as mere upper middle-class suburbs." Bauer reveals the fatal flaw of such schemes. Their purpose was to redeem rather than challenge the fatally flawed capitalist system: "Why did they fail? Just simply because it was an absolutely impossible job on their premises. They wanted to provide good dwellings, on an 'economic' basis, at a price which everyone could pay, and without disturbing or even questioning any part of the current social-economic system."[63]

Yet even with these bourgeois reformists of the nineteenth century, Bauer cannot dismiss their achievements. While the "net result of all this activity" was "not far above zero," still, "almost inadvertently, the reformers managed to give an initial impetus to every one of the major elements in the technique of modern housing as it has been practiced in Europe since the war. . . . For one thing, they brought many of the facts to light for the first time—facts about overcrowding, slum diseases, and exploitation. For another, they introduced the idea of the housing society—that is, on broadest terms, an organization equipped for large-scale building enterprise and not dominated by a desire for the maximum of financial profit."[64]

While the "original" bourgeois reform societies were, indeed, "paternal," this soon changed:

> as soon as the first fruits of the consumers' co-operative movement began to make themselves felt, housing societies

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[63] *Ibid.*, p. 83.
[64] *Ibid.*, p. 87.

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> were formed from the bottom up and not from the top down. Moreover, the cities themselves took over the form and set up semi-official societies for non-profit house construction. And legislation appeared which favored the various kinds of 'public utility,' 'limited-dividend,' or 'co-operative' society.

In addition, the ground-up reformers developed

> the notion of large-scale construction *per se*. Introduced at first purely as a matter of economic policy in competition with wasteful small builders, it soon became apparent that the orderly planning and building of large tracts at one time was not merely the cheapest method, but also the only way by which permanent amenity and adequate neighborhood equipment could be provided.[65]

Such insights, taken over by a "grounds-up" cooperative movement, do indeed become a force for measurable improvement, if not a successful resolution, of the housing situation of workers under capitalism, argues Bauer. For example, in Britain: "although the members of consumers' co-operatives represented very nearly half the population in Great Britain in 1925, they had not themselves undertaken many large-scale housing experiments." But this mass of co-operators provided a social base for "separate co-operative societies, organized specifically for housing purposes, who had by 1907 put up about twenty-five thousand houses in England alone." Although,

> Before 1900. . . these houses were usually sold off to members once they were constructed . . . the Garden City Movement—itself an outgrowth of the idea of co-operative association—served to emphasize the virtues of permanent single [i.e., collective] ownership, particularly of the land,

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[65] *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

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> as an essential safeguard against speculation and deterioration by change of use.[66]

In Germany, after 1889,

> there was an immense growth in co-operative workers' housing on the workers' initiative. The garden city idea spread from England around 1900, and the most advanced architects and planners of the day worked with the trade unions and labor organizations to produce some of the best housing built on the Continent before the war.[67]

Similar improvements in housing, engineered by co-operative efforts, were made in Belgium and Denmark and in Russia, although co-operative efforts here had only a small influence upon housing,

> the fact that eight million peasant families had become habituated to collective, non-competitive enterprise may well . . . have played no small part in the eventual success of the revolution.[68]

These historical facts would seem to prove Engels's pamphlet, *On the Housing Question (Zur Wohnungsfrage)* of 1872, partially wrong, according to Bauer. She summarizes this work as follows.

> there are a large number of elements in the new technique of housing for which one an find no adequate explanation in Engels. The enormous increase in State and municipal responsibility, for instance, and the method of providing large-scale rental housing on a non-profit basis, under working-class leadership and with little if any equity. Such developments, springing directly from the failure of speculative enterprise rather than from politics bourgeois or

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[66] *Ibid.*, p. 93.
[67] *Ibid.*, p. 93.
[68] *Ibid.*, p. 94.

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> otherwise, have considerably increased the complexity of the housing problem for the modern radical.[69]

Bauer argues here that the positive developments she sees in cooperative housing do not emerge, as Engels predicted it must, from the politics of the class struggle and the formation of powerful European workers' and peasants' movements. Yet she contradicts this elsewhere. She writes that the factors making for a virtual changeover from private to public housing development in these countries were three-fold:

> 1. a very general dissatisfaction with the old kind of residential environment, as produced by the old private-profit, individual agencies. . . . It touched rich and poor, and cut across political factions. . . .
> 2. the tradition [here in these countries, especially Germany] of public responsibility in matters of city development. Inherited from the Middle Ages, it had never quite died out even during the most rampant period of *Manchestertum*. . . .

These first two factors or rather dubious. They are reminiscent of Mumford's idealist historical analysis, in which he tended to idealize the Middle Ages. Bauer probably derived these theories from Mumford. But with her third factor, "*organized political demand on the part of the people who needed good housing,*".Bauer is on far firmer ground. She recognizes that this is the crucial factor: without it, "*there would have been no such achievement.*" Against those who throw up their hands and cry about the purported lack of a paternalistic tradition in America, she writes, "Housing was not bestowed from the top down

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[69] *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

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in Europe any more than it ever will be in America. It had to be acquired by people who knew what they wanted, and how to get it." This, by the way, sounds very much like Machiavelli's description of the ideal Prince: more evidence that Mumford and Bauer were greatly enamored of Machiavelli's notion that, to get things done, to engage in *innovazione*, leaders must educate and appeal to, inspre, and excite the masses into action. Machiavelli also said that the Prince must never rely upon Fortune alone, but instead, upon his own "prudence" and upon his "audacity" to make things happen rather than let things happen to him.[70] Similarly, Bauer writes,

> good, planned, community housing available to the average citizen is not a 'normal' product of capitalist society. It can be achieved, even partially, only when there is an active demand on the part of workers and consumers which is strong enough to over-balance the weight of real estate and allied interests on the other side.[71]

Bauer does not believe that trade union or social democratic party bureaucrats will generate such an active demand. Her critique of the timidity of the Fabians and other Social Democrats, who "made all possible compromises before they presented their plan,"[72] resembles very strongly Mumford's attitude toward the RPA, or the parliamentary socialists he criticizes in his essay, "Plan for Action." If it were left up to these social democratic leaders, Bauer implies, there never would have been any cooperative housing. "The various post-war

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[70] Niccolo Machiavelli, "The Prince," *The Prince and the Discourses*,(New York: Modern Library, 1950), chapter 25, pp. 91-94.
[71] Bauer, pp. 121-22.

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governments of a 'Labor' or 'Social Democrat' flavor had, as subsequent events have proved, little greater desire or power to 'socialize' anything as a theoretical objective than had the Liberals or the Conservatives. " But: "they did represent a large and powerful body of voters who needed housing, who demanded good housing, and who realized that private enterprise would never do the job."[73]

The most important factor here was that "the public as a whole was able to distinguish a good house from a bad one, and a pleasant environment from an unpleasant one."[74] This was both a result of these workers' movements, Bauer argues—and a basis for further organizing. But that is all it was. It had no effect on the structure of capitalism itself. And though much housing was built in the post-war period,

> There is no getting around the fact that 'modern housing' and much of the framework of contemporary western society are mutually antipathetic. The premises underlying the most successful and forward-pointing housing developments are not the premises of capitalism, of inviolate private property, of entrenched nationalism, of class distinction, of governments bent on preserving old interests rather than creating new values.

The achievements of the housing movement, thus, are built on sand. Thus the housing movement is fragile, constituting "a world within a world, hampered by all the contradictions and insecurity attendant on such an anomalous position." As Marx said in the "Manifesto of the Communist Party, within capitalist society,

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[72] *Ibid.*, p. 102.
[73] *Ibid.*, p. 122.
[74] *Ibid.*, p. 123.

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"now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time."[75] Reforms won through struggle are, in the long run, only temporary concessions. They are conceded as a sop, to quiet the workers down, promote the illusion that revolution is unnecessary, so that "order" may be restored and the concession may eventually be taken back. The task of revolutionary housing advocates, or socialists in general, is therefore to educate people as to the real significance as to what is going on here. The problem is, according to Bauer, that the housing advocates themselves are often taken in by these illusions as well. Unfortunately, the "full implications" of what is going on with these reforms and what they really mean have, "as a rule," i.e., historically, "been better understood by the jealous guardians of the old order of things than by the advocates and direct beneficiaries of housing."[76]

As if to bear out Marx's assertion in the *Communist Manifesto*, Bauer further remarks that "for the moment at least [1934], the trend of housing in most European countries is downward. Laws which were designed to be permanent measures have suddenly been repealed." This restoration has been effected in England by the triumph of the Conservatives, "which at the end of 1932 brought the astonishingly productive housing program to a stop 'in order to concentrate on slum clearance',[77] and in Germany by the success of the Nazis. The success of

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[75] Marx and Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," *Karl Marx on Revolution*, p. 88.
[76] *Bauer.*, p. 136.
[77] Bauer, p. 136, 243. Don't forget that this was the early 30s. Because of their need to mobilize the masses to fight for the British Empire and to rebuild the country, the Conservatives under

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these parties, according to Bauer, virtually wiped out the gains of these co-operative movements in these societies. [78]

Bauer correctly argues, I believe, against Engels's contention that all housing reform under capitalism can be reduced to that of individual home ownership, and that therefore, Marxists should have no truck with it. As Bauer's own LHC experience showed, popular movements can create cooperatively owned collective housing projects. These are more viable than individual home ownership schemes. They do not limit the workers' freedom. They create a collective public space for working people within capitalist society. They represent an achievement for the working class movement: an achievement that points to the possibility of further achievements, and ultimately to socialism, if the class struggle deepens. They encourage people to think seriously about the possibility of a better life, about what life ought to be beyond mere individual, brute survival. They encourage people to come to understand an idea Bauer credits to Patrick Geddes, that "people who live in a house require not merely private shelter but food and work and recreation and social life, and that this makes the house an inseparable part of the neighborhood, the city, the surrounding open country and the region."[79]

Churchill offered significant reforms in housing and other fields later on. IN the early 1930s, such housing programs were anathema to their "conservative" ideology.

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 136.

[79] *Ibid.*, p. 115.

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Let's discuss now this process of how the housing movement can point the masses of working people toward reconstruction and out of their present misery. What are the "minimum, vital standards" of housing and community living we need to point to, as revealed by the achievements of the past? These achievements in standards, Bauer argues, are everywhere in Europe "remarkably the same."[80] The general categories for these are as follows:

> •Decency: privacy for both families vis other families, who each deserve "one structurally separate dwelling," and the individual members of the family, vis each other.
> •Health: Running water for "cleanliness and sanitation"; "adequate air and cross-ventilation," "purity of air," "maximum light and adequate sun in all rooms and public corridors" "facilities for outdoor recreation,"
> •Amenity: "Attractive outlook"; "Moderately prepossessing [functional] architecture"; "quiet,"
> •Comfort and convenience: internal "domestic[ity]" and neighborhood "communality": schools, shops, cafes', social centers, work
> •Safety: Firmness of construction. Play-space for small children without crossing a through street. Passably fireproof. Permanent immunity from partial or total neighborhood 'blight'.[81]

To this minimum list, Bauer adds a list of "*extra-standards.*" These, conceivably, are those standards that human beings might come to expect as their birthright, once they get used to conditions which are not as miserable as today's. They include:

> •Scientific orientation for sunlight
> •Extra standards of light and sun by means of wider glass areas.

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[80] *Ibid.*, p. 141.
[81] *Ibid.*, pp. 142-44.

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> •Extra space standards: on the interior. . . in the community as a whole
> •Interior equipment: . . . central heating and hot water
> •Private balconies or public roof-terraces.
> •Dwellings not fronting on a through road of any kind.
> •Built-in communal facilities as an integral social and architectural part of the development (modern schools, nurseries, kindergartens; social rooms, cafes, mechanically equipped laundries, clinics, gymnasia, etc.
> •Really positive and creative effort toward modern architecture.
> •Place of work planned in the residential community.[82]

Once practiced in a noticeable manner, Bauer asserts, such standards have a way of impressing themselves upon the consciousness of ordinary people, and raising their hopes for more. As a result of the class struggles in Europe at the turn of the century, and the responses of bourgeois and social democratic governments in the housing field, these standards, even the "extra" ones, have become "the average working principles of ordinary everyday legislators, inspectors, bureaucratic officials, and contractors."[83] After a time, an application of such standards according to some "sliding scale . . . in deference to class or income distinctions," seems increasingly unjust in the eyes of the masses. The right of all to prosperity and amenity is accepted as fact; rationality takes command:

> Compact planning and rational construction lessen the burden of house-keeping and house-maintaining. Adequate neighborhood layout and public control prevent blight—and boom—from descending on one section at the expense of the other sections. And new building forms grow, on the

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[82] *Ibid.*, pp. 145-46.
[83] *Ibid.*, p. 146.

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> one hand, out of the new standards and materials and methods and functions, and are related just as clearly on the other to that quickening and renewal of aesthetic sensibility which we call 'modern' in the best twentieth-century painting and sculpture and photography.[84]

Thus the resistance of the Conservatives and the Nazis to the new housing experiments: they make tangible what a socialist future might produce. They threaten to break down the class distinctions in modern society, all in the name of a more rational way of life.

Finally, Bauer asserts that these modern developments in housing, to reach their final fruition, must embrace a mode of "planning, of finance, of construction, of administration," which embraces "the complete neighborhood, and not the individual house or apartment-building."[85] Only the economies of scale possible with large-scale units—along with government control of land—can make these developments possible and affordable. Furthermore, Bauer also argues that the "only way to carry the premises underlying modern housing and planning through to a really satisfactory conclusion" is to construct

> the self-contained regional town, complete with assorted industries, and agricultural belt, and full facilities for social life. . . . The building of completely new cities, of a size and extent limited in advance and located scientifically with respect to natural resources, manufacture, and distribution, is the only way to which the use-standards embodied on a small scale in the best modern housing can be enlarged to include all of modern human environment. It is the only way by which the waste and

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[84] *Ibid.*, pp. 147-48.
[85] *Ibid.*, p. 154.

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> confusion of the nineteenth century can be really canceled out.

But "to do this, however," Bauer emphasizes, is " quite impossible within the present class-property-profit economic system."[86]

As Henry Wright had pointed out in *Rehousing America*, new garden cities would lessen the population pressure on existing urban centers, permitting comprehensive redevelopment of the old slum and blighted areas. In the countryside, it would space for far more new housing. Thus, in both the old and the new urban centers, such a program would really create the opportunity to design the kind of communities envisioned by Bauer, with the standards she proposes enjoyed by everyone.

As vice-president, during and after the war, of the National Public Housing Conference, Bauer used her influence to create such "regional cities." She was joined by Dorothy Rosenman, president of the National Committee on the Housing Emergency, and R.J. Thomas, president of the UAW and chairman of the UAW-CIO Postwar Planning Commission. In the post-war period, these radical regionalists were opposed by liberal organizations such as the Philadelphia Housing Association and the National Housing Association of Housing Officials, as well as the president of Bauer's own National Public Housing Conference and the head of the PHA, Bryn Hovde. These liberals mainly supported tax incentives for private developers and low-interest mortgages from

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[86] *Ibid.*, p. 157-58.

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the Federal Housing Administration, for prospective homeowners within the existing mega-cities and the growing suburban developments. They saw public housing as, at best, a mere adjunct to their own housing program, to help the poor get back on their feet and start paying rents to private rentiers again; at worst, as unwanted competition for the private market. Bauer's proposal to site plenty of new public housing in new regional cities was therefore anathema to them. Their policy of "redevelopment" finally prevailed over the regionalist program. As Bauer foresaw in her 1943 article, "Cities in Flux," this "urban redevelopment" policy, "coined by desperate central property owners," would do nothing to challenge the suburban trend and its potentially disastrous effects upon urban life. As I wrote in Chapter 2, Clarence Stein had shown, in his 1925 essay, "Dinosaur Cities," that the problems of Megalopolis for both industry (inefficient transportation, lack of space for assembly lines), and for those individuals and families who could afford home ownership (noise, congestion, etc.), drove them out of the mega-city. If this suburbanizing trend was not brought under rational control, channeled into the kind of regionally comprehensive, garden city development desired by the RPAA, wrote Bauer,

> Not only will central areas begin to look as if they had been intentionally bombed out, but the surrounding countryside will be ruined, too. . . . Instead of productive market gardens, natural recreation spots, and pleasant villages, there will be a huge gray amorphous blob of suburbs, without community integration, without adequate breathing space between built-up areas, without sensible relation between homes and work places. And for miles

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> beyond. good farm land will continue to be cut up into prospective building lots whether they are needed or not.[87]

The accuracy of Bauer's forecast here, I think we must admit. was remarkable.

The Need for Militant Popular Movement

Bauer argued that the ruling class understood the potentially dangerous significance of the housing movement, and that most labor and social-democratic bureaucrats are too timid to fight for the kind of programs she envisioned. The natural conclusion to draw from this was the need for the Scipian vanguard that Mumford conceived in "A Preface to Action," to focus the demand for public housing among the working class, and keep the movement moving against the forces that would throttle it. In her conclusion, titled "Where is the Demand?", Bauer summarizes the history of modern housing as the product of two. closely interrelated "lines."

> One is the line of rational investigation, of scientific and technical research, of individual imagination and experiment. . . .The other line is the whole broad history of mass emotion and popular desire. . . . The possibility of mass action inspired all that was most valid in the experiments and Utopias. Conversely, the images and suggestions of a different world inspired discontent with the old one. And, if it had not been for the earlier experiments [in cooperative housing], the workers and consumers would probably not have known what they wanted in that period after the war when their voices became temporarily and partially effective. Certainly,

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[87] Clarence Stein. "Dinosaur Cities," in Carl Sussman, *Planning the Fourth Migration*, p. 72, *et passim;* Bauer, "Cities in Flux," *American Scholar* 13, Winter 1943-44, pp. 75, 78. See also J.F. Bauman. "Visions of a Post-War City," in Donald A. Krueckenberg, ed., *Introduction to Planning History in the United States* (New Brunswick, NJ: The Center for Urban Policy Research, Rutgers University, 1983), p. 175-78.

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> without the handful of architects and planners who had given thought to the matter before their opportunity arose, the quality of post-war housing would never have been as high as it was.

These two "lines," scientific reason and mass desire, intertwine in the post World War I to create an "organized and well-informed demand: the German trade-unions who were prepared to carry out a large-scale housing program with governmental aid on their own initiative; the townspeople of England who elected Councilors on a housing platform; and everywhere, the workers who wanted not merely housing but revolution and a whole new social framework."[88] This was the "touchstone" for the great achievements of the European housing movement.

Bauer then argues that it is "the lack of such a demand" which is "the principle reason for all the obstacles which have piled up in the path of housing in America. If the demand were there, most of the obstacles, now seemingly insurmountable, would melt away." This is badly articulated. Clearly, there was and is such "demand." Clearly, as Richard Plunz has documented, there was a strong, socialist housing movement going on throughout the 1920s and 1930s[89]: and Bauer was leading some of it in Philadelphia as she was writing this book. As was typical with Mumford, Bauer seems to be deliberately and excessively negative about the problems she sees. As I wrote before, while Mumford was very good in *The Culture of Cities* in elucidating the problems of megalopolis, there is little discussion here of the popular struggles and movements, going on

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[88] Bauer, *Modern Housing*, pp. 253-54.

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all around him at the time, to fight these problems. While there is much discussion of medieval urban guild association, where in *The Culture of Cities* is there any discussion, for example, of Communist Party organizing in New York City to reinstate evicted tenants? So, too, Bauer here over-emphasizes the problems and failures of present American society vis. Europe. She does briefly discuss, "as a precedent for large-scale co-operative action on the part of a trade-union group. . . . the two developments of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers," which are "worthy of special mention." She also discusses various "experiments in community planning" conducted by "limited-dividend" societies, such as Sunnyside, Queens and Radburn, New Jersey.[90] But in general, Bauer fails to highlight the movements that do exist, perhaps in order to give her analysis and proposals special urgency. Such a polemical strategy is bound to be more trouble than it is worth, however. It does not win Bauer much credibility to imply that there is little or no housing movement in America when she herself is leading one!

The real question Bauer is asking is a more valid one, however: not whether such demand or movement existed, but rather, why the demand was not as commonly accepted nor as successful as it had been in Europe, and why it has not created the standards for housing and community life commonly observed in Europe. This, according to Bauer, is because it was not actively fostered by strong

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[89] See Richard Plunz, *History of Housing in New York City*, pp. 122-206.
[90] Bauer, pp. 238-39.

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leadership, and this was because, in America, "many of the most earnest housing promoters seem conscientiously to evade the fact that the issue is essentially a political one in the broadest scope of the term." Instead, "their faces are turned, fruitlessly, in the opposite direction. They either pull the ears of the 'real estate interest,' or else endeavor to wheedle those same interests into the belief that housing would somehow work out to their pecuniary advantage after all."[91]

This analysis of the lack of housing movement in the United States might seem dated, these days. There are few housing activists who still hold any belief that salvation will come through some kind of compromise with real estate interests. Today, these are viewed pretty much universally these days in the housing movement as scum. But the other factor she mentions is very relevant today; and applies equally well to her colleague Mumford's views on the "service state" potential of the Roosevelt Administration in *The Culture of Cities*, written just two years later:

> The lack of an effective articulate demand is also largely responsible for a certain air of unreality which hangs over the matter [and which, apparently, explains this lack, in turn—TS]. That distant, miracle-working image, 'Washington,' is the center of all eyes and hopes, all praise and criticism. Washington alone, apparently, can let loose the benevolent flood which will put everybody to work, clear up all the slums and dot the country with model developments duly stamped with the accolade of Federal approval.[92]

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[91] *Ibid.*, p. 254.
[92] *Ibid.*

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I would speculate that Bauer is writing this as an attack upon the reluctance of the AFL to endorse her Labor Housing Conference program at the time, and their probable motives for this reluctance.

Note: Bauer is not saying here that she wants no more Federal spending to support housing. That would obviously counter everything she ever worked for, as U.S. public housing advocate #1. What she is arguing is that such spending has certain political strings attached—the temptation to see the liberal New Deal Administration as providing the sole legitimate leadership and setting the sole boundaries for social change. Certainly, any political movement in the real world has "strings attached": but this particular temptation, Bauer is arguing, could easily stifle the fledgling grass-roots housing movement that was beginning to grow in the early 1930s. For that is the motive of any bourgeois government, no matter how liberal—to pacify movements of the poor rather than create fundamental and beneficial change.

Bauer argues that it is particularly ironic that such illusions about the supposed beneficence of the federal government should flourish in America. For "benevolent paternalism, *Kathedersocialismus,* has absolutely no roots here at all. We got things for ourselves, because we knew what we wanted, or did without." Even in Europe, which had the supposed benefit of this tradition, "there has never been any such centralization or *specialization* of housing responsibility as that contemplated today in America" by these American statists. It is this delusion, Bauer implies, which represents a great obstacle to any real achievement: "It is

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the firm opinion of this author that there will never be any realistic housing movement in this country until the workers and the consumers—and the unemployed—themselves take a hand in the solution." Promoting faith in the centralized bourgeois state to deliver the goods will only postpone this is necessary course of mass action.

Bauer recognizes another obstacle to such mass action: the culture of (separate) individualism in America:

> We have a much vaunted tradition of individual initiative and 'self-sufficiency,' above all in housing matters. Can this force be transformed into effective *group* initiative, the only form of action which can supplant the environment of the nineteenth century with really modern houses and workable cities?[93]

In her "Housing: Paper Plans, or a Workers Movement," (1934), Bauer asserted that Roosevelt's rhetoric of "working toward the ultimate objective of making it possible for American families to live as Americans should" amounted to a broken "promise."

> The country has been blanketed with surveys. A series of laws all purporting to be housing measures has been enacted. A few Housing Authorities have been set up. . . . But where are the houses? Why are 80% of the building workers still totally unemployed? Not only do the old slums remain, more crowded than ever, but there seems to be nothing but the present stagnation of the real estate

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[93] *Ibid.*, 254-55. In his essay, "Notes on the Welfare State," about thirty years later, Bob Ross made a similar complaint: "Calling the militants irresponsible, yet unable politically to devise a program that ungluts the glut they have created, the urban liberals look to Washington for help. This usually means bull-dozers or delinquency-control projects. It's rare to find a 'community leader' who recognizes that blight could be fought by minimum wages or adequate welfare or democratic control of cities." In *Where It's At*, p. 453.

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> business to prevent the erection of expensive new slums and incipient "blighted districts" just like the old ones.

"True," Bauer admits, "the Housing Division has somewhat grudgingly assisted in the construction of a handful of community developments by limited dividend companies. There are certain allotments for 'slum-clearance'," as well. But this, Bauer cries, "is a mere drop in the bucket of demonstrated need: what has happened to the housing movement?"

This article appeared in an anthology entitled *America Can't Have Housing,* published by the Museum of Modern Art in 1934. It was the product of the Housing Study Guild, a circle of architects, created, according to Donald Miller, after "the RPAA went bankrupt early in the depression." The Housing Study Guild was formed by Mumford, Henry Wright, Henry Churchill, Albert Mayer, and Carol Aronovici, "to train architects to take part in the new public housing efforts begun by" the New Deal government. This was apparently to gain some influence over the New Deal programs, as well, but the Guild, along with Bauer, quickly found their attempt thwarted by the real estate lobbyists, who had far more clout.[94] Thus, contrary to Mumford's later optimism about the chances of transforming the "power state" into the "service state," he and the HSG quickly had become embittered by the New Deal's timidity in solving the housing crisis. In an article in the same 1934 anthology, entitled "The Social Imperatives in Housing," Mumford complained of the "disgraceful inertia of the present

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[94] See Miller, pp. 362-63.

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Government in Washington." In their respective articles for this anthology, Mumford and Bauer agreed that the reason for this "inertia" was the fact that the Roosevelt Administration was a bourgeois government, beholden to "the classes whose interest in housing is subordinate to their interest in maintaining the present structure of capitalism" (Mumford). This was proven, as Mumford wrote further, by the fact that "as soon as the banks, insurance companies, and real estate speculators proclaimed that their structure of values would be threatened by government aided housing developments, the Government unscrupulously sabotaged its own very modest program, and hastily concocted a fake program designed to maintain and increase existing values by prolonging the present shortage." In his article for another Housing Study Guild series, "New Homes for a New Deal," which appeared in *The New Republic* in the spring of 1934, Mumford wrote that New Deal's Housing Division, under director Robert D. Kohn, presented a program whose "broad outlines were admirable." Kohn at least committed the agency to building low-cost housing for the poor, not simply slum clearance. When it came under the authority of Harold Ickes' Emergency Administration, however, the HD came to accept, under pressure from the real estate industry, the same constraints upon housing development as had the Hoover Administration previously. So as not to compete either ideologically or economically with private realtors, the New Deal maintained its predecessor's commitment to private home ownership. It resolved "to build no more houses than are destroyed." And it stuck to a program of melioristic slum clearance and

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the isolated building of projects for the poor. It refused to adopt the ambitious program for comprehensive community building and rebuilding in blighted middle and working class neighborhoods that Henry Wright had argued for in his article in the preceding issue, as well as in his book, *Rehousing America* (See chapter 4).[95]

As Bauer concurred with Mumford, the fulfillment of housing needs would always entail a "threat" to the ruling classes, for "in the course of a real housing movement the whole flimsy structure of speculative real estate 'values' will necessarily be punctured."

In their final, jointly written article written for the Housing Study Guild series in *The New Republic* in 1934, entitled "New Homes for a New Deal, Mumford, Albert Mayer, and Henry Wright wrote, sounding like Marx, that their program for housing was "radical only in the sense that it aims to go to the roots of the trouble. . . . " Thus it avoids diversionary abstractions. " It does not attempt to salvage 'values' that do not exist, or to redeem promises that should never have been made, or to bolster up individual 'ownership' which should never have been encouraged." Instead, it will roll up its proverbial sleaves and fulfill the needs of the citizenry: "It will promote building and provide work for every kind of industry on a scale that will be sufficient to give production in every field a long and steady lift." Sounding like Henry David Thoreau, they continue, "The

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[95] Mumford, "The Shortage of Dwellings and Direction," Part III of the Housing Study Guild series, "New Homes for a New Deal," *New Republic*, February 28, 1934, pp. 69-72.

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program we offer attempts to salvage *people* and to make that salvage permanent by creating a sound community environment for *living.*[96]

Thus. Mumford argued, for the masses' housing needs to be fulfilled, "nothing less than a revolutionary shift in the distribution of income and wealth and a readjustment of the entire productive mechanism" was required, along with "the collective ownership and control of land. . . ." But such "community housing. . . can only come through a creative desire on the part of the workers to transform not merely their status and their industrial functions by their entire environment and their standards of consumption." "Such a desire," Mumford argued as he did later in *Culture of Cities*, "will be expressed through direct pressure from organized economic groups: workers' trade union groups and consumers' cooperatives—provided," Mumford added, "that these groups recognize the radical social implications of housing and are not content to wait for the final collapse of capitalism before formulating their demands and acquiring the necessary experience in building and administration." In other words, the movement for better housing was not a mere adjunct to workers' revolution to overthrow capitalism, but an integral part of it. Such a housing movement could secure valuable gains in workers' standards of living here and now, as had already occurred in Europe. This goal could not be achieved, Bauer wrote, either by permitting the bourgeois federal government to set the agenda, or by abstaining

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[96] Albert Mayer, Henry Wright, Lewis Mumford, "A Concrete Program," Part IV of "New Homes for a New Deal," *The New Republic* March 7, 1934, p. 94.

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from the struggle for housing until after the millennium. Instead, it could only be achieved by demanding that "the Federal Government . . . attack the housing problem boldly from the front, as a long-time measure which must eventually rebuild most of America. . . ." Such a movement, as Mumford wrote, could concentrate "demand for housing on the part of the classes that are now badly housed and economically insecure," But, as Bauer wrote, such a popular movement must have, as its goal, not just the demand for better housing, but democratic self-determination. As Mumford argued later in *The Culture of Cities* for planning in general, Bauer argued in her 1934 article here that "bona fide workers' and consumers' representatives must be delegated real power and responsibility in every department of the housing operation, from surveys and policies straight through to administration."[97] This is the sort of movement Bauer tried to create with the Labor Housing Conference in the 1930s.

The New Deal Administration could certainly not be looked to for leadership for the comprehensive, radical programs desired by Mumford, Bauer and Wright; for this, what was required was a grassroots movement from below. This is borne out by the subsequent history of the New Deal's public housing program. The New Deal Administration always sought to compromise between the needs of the poor and the prerogatives of the real estate industry, a compromise that, if they could get away with it, would never challenge those

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[97] Bauer, "Housing: Paper Plans, or a Workers' Movement," in Carol Aronovici, ed., *American Can't Have Housing* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1934), pp. 20-23; Lewis Mumford,

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prerogatives. The principal architect of New Deal housing policy, Senator Robert Wagner, said in a speech before the National Public Housing Conference in December 1935:

> The object of public housing, in a nutshell, is not to invade the field of home building for the middle class or the well-to-do which has been the only profitable area for private enterprise in the past. Nor is it even to exclude private enterprise from major participation in a low-cost housing program. It is merely to supplement what private industry will do, by subsidies which will make up the difference between what the poor can afford to pay and what is necessary to assure decent living quarters.[98]

To be sure, the New Deal and future administrations went far beyond a program of mere subsidies. But the programs created did not go beyond Wagner's original deference to the private housing industry. For what was eventually built was bureaucratically managed high-rise buildings that effectively segregated the poor and did not provide them community. It did not challenge private industry's control of the housing market.

As I wrote before, Bauer helped bring the United States Housing Agency into being by co-writing and supporting the Wagner Steagall Bill of 1937. Twenty years later, in 1957, five years before her tragic death while hiking, Bauer reviewed the intervening history, in her article, "The Dreary Deadlock of Public Housing." This article, which sounds similar to Mumford's critique of Robert Moses' Stuyvessant Town project in 1948 (which I discussed in my introduction),

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"The Social Imperatives in Housing," *American Can't Have Housing*. p. 15-19.
[98] Robert Wagner, as quoted in Nathaniel Keith, *Politics and the Housing Crisis*, pp. 32-33.

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[99] makes it obvious that Bauer's fears, in 1934, about the dangers posed by faith in the New Deal had been borne out. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, from the mid-1930s onward, in response to the LHC's democratic grass-roots housing movement, the Public Works Administration did indeed build a lot of housing and went far beyond the failures and limitations decried by Mumford and Bauer in 1934. But the PWA's housing was constructed in a very abstract, bureaucratic manner. The PWA did not take into account the needs or desires of the people who had to live there nor the communities in which their high-rise projects were placed.[100] .

In her 1957 article "The Dreary Deadlock of Public Housing," Bauer attacks many things about the official housing projects built since the 1930s: the poor living conditions, the monotonous architecture, their high density of population, their failure to create racial integration, their "rigid and heavy handed" management. And this is the result of the fact, according to Bauer, that "the program has never called forth the kind of pervasive and persuasive popular support that oils the wheels of change in democratic countries." This is because the program has been based politically, for the intervening decades, only upon liberal lobbying organizations like the National Housing Conference. These liberals have been timid about making any big changes that would earn conservative opposition as well as popular support. Thus the conservative

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[99] Lewis Mumford, "Stuyvessant Town Revisited," *The New Yorker* 24, November 27, 1948, pp. 65-72; "Prefabricated Blight," *New Yorker* 24, November 13, 1948, pp. 49-55.

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opposition had managed to hamstring and thwart the radical implications of the program as Bauer, Wright, Mumford, Mayer, and others in the Labor Housing Committee and the Housing Study Guild had originally conceived it. What was needed, Bauer argued, was the far more comprehensive program that Wright had originally envisioned. Such a program must go beyond mere slum clearance and isolated housing projects, to determine "overall housing needs," for both the central metropolitan areas and the surrounding region, where "lower-income and minority families" were "more likely to find their employment in outlying plants and offices."[101]

As Bauer discussed in *Modern Housing*, such a comprehensive program (as opposed to the far more limited and bureaucratic programs adopted by liberal Democratic Party regimes) could only come with the development of a militant, working class socialist movement—which has not yet re-arisen in America since the 1930s. The desperate housing needs of the poor, the need for a regional development to satisfy these needs, can never by themselves bring about such a movement. But once such a movement begins again, brought on perhaps by

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[100] Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City*, pp. 226-33.
[101] Bauer, "The Dreary Deadlock of Public Housing," *Architectural Forum*, May 1957, pp. 140-42, 219, 222. See also Bob Ross, "Notes on the Welfare State," *Where It's At*, p. 452; Sam Bass

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renewed economic crisis. Mumford's and Bauer's radical regional housing program might serve indeed as an important, inspiring part of such a movement's program.

Warner, Jr., *The Urban Wilderness: A History of the American City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 237-76.

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CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION: MUMFORD'S RELEVANCE TODAY

In this dissertation, I have tried to argue that the thought of Lewis Mumford is very important and worthy of attention from radical thinkers and activists. I think I have shown this to be the case. Though he certainly could be guilty of straying and of poor judgment, Mumford represents a link to the still vital radical tradition in American intellectual history. Thus his thought can be a refreshing antidote to the sort of "go-with-the-flow" fatalism of many intellectuals today. As we have seen, Robert Fishman is a good example of these intellectuals. He seems to have turned his back on his former utopian dreams and embraced the "great city" and a very much domesticated, market-centered version of planning.

Mumford's thought developed upon the radicalism of his mentor, Randolph Bourne, the most important thinker among the Greenwich Village radical milieu around such journals as *The New Republic, The Masses,* and *The Seven Arts.* In Mumford we see the common sense radicalism of the 1930s Popular Front developed into a coherent, comprehensive program for democratic social planning, in order to solve many of the problems that beset us, now as well as then. Throughout his career, but especially in the 1930s, Mumford grounded his ideas in the practical possibilities he saw around him. If he was a utopian, it was a practical utopianism for which he strove: a way of presenting how things ought to be in ways and means that ordinary people could understand. Most essentially,

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this concerned the new developments in housing, town planning, and architecture, whose significance to social change Mumford, with the help of his associates Wright and Bauer, grew to successfully understand.

In this conclusion, I'd like to consider what relevance Mumford's ideas have for us today. I think they have tremendous relevance to concerns today about housing, environmentalism, and even race relations in our society. Mumford's, Wright's, and Bauer's relevance to the movement for housing is not very well remembered these days. But their basic notions--that such a movement is vital to socialist concerns, that it needs the support of a militant labor movement, that the vision of garden cities, restored urban environments, and communal standards of health, amenity and sociability, no less than affordability, ought to be the organizing tools—are sound, and ought to be revived.

Mumford's work has been a fertile ground for the new field of social ecology. This school of thought, developed by such thinkers as Murray Bookchin, attempts to comprehend how our current destructive relation with nature shapes our current hierarchical society, and vice versa, a view that explores how must restructure our society if we are to live in harmony with nature and survive. As we have seen, Mumford explored in depth the ecological as well as social problems with our modern society, particularly its Megalopolitan urban form, its fascination with science and the Machine. We have dealt primarily in this paper, in the main, with the problems of the congested, hyper-urban center of the Megalopolitan complex. But perhaps an equally problematic aspect of this

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complex is suburban sprawl. This is causing the destruction of the natural environment in the countryside, loss of farmland, soil erosion, and the anomie, teenage drug abuse and other social problems, resulting from a television and shopping mall vs. community-centered social environment.

Let's examine how Mumford's own strategy for transforming suburbia attempted to deal with this problem. To resolve the problems of suburbia, Mumford sought to *reconcentrate* the suburban population, as well as to *decentralize* the central mega-urban population, into regional garden cities and neighborhoods with urbane cultural facilities. As he wrote in the 1960s:

> Two complementary movements are now necessary and possible: one that is of tightening the loose and scattered pattern of the suburb, turning it from a purely residential dormitory into a balanced community, approaching a true garden city in its variety and partial self-sufficiency, with a more varied population and with sufficient local industry and business to support it; and the other is that of loosening the congestion of the metropolis, emptying out part of its population, introducing parks, playgrounds, green promenades, private gardens, into quarters that we have permitted to become indecently contested, void of beauty, and often positively inimical to life. . . .[1]

This is a great vision for resolving the twin crises of mega-urban center and suburbia. But there is one very important obstacle to realizing it. How do we get beyond the *racism* embodied in suburban exclusion and of Mega-urban slum congestion?

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[1] Lewis Mumford, "Landscape and Townscape," *Urban Prospect*, pp. 88-91.

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The issue of racism is and perhaps has always been the most explosive issue in American culture since its inception as a (slave-owning) nation. Today, the fate of the cities is integrally connected to the fate of black working class and poor urban population. As C.L.R. James wrote in the 1960s, the crises of Megalopolis as well as capitalism creates an extraordinary potential for revolutionary consciousness among these strata:

> The people who dominate the inner cities numerically cannot possibly work out a plan or have any programme by which they can improve their own situation which does not taken into consideration the city as a whole. A new situation has arisen for the urban black, for thinking in terms of the whole city means that you are automatically thinking in terms of the state and from the state you find yourself facing the whole nation.[2]

I believe that progress in racial relations in the United States can only be achieved through integration and equality, not separatism. Only by *integrating* their struggles against their special oppression into the struggle of the working class for emancipation can blacks hope to liberate themselves from discrimination and racism. I do not believe that inner cities constitute, now or potentially, a "nation-within-the-nation." Such a fictional "nation" neither should, nor could, be separated from the larger American society.[3] However, the special oppression of blacks within the inner city does make their oppression particularly keen. If anti-

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[2] C.L.R. James, "Black People in the Urban Areas of the United States," *The C.L.R. James Reader*, ed. Anna Grimshaw (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), p. 375.
[3] See Richard Fraser, "For the Materialist Conception of the Negro Question," *SWP Discussion Bulletin*, A-30, August 1955, reprinted in *What Strategy for Black Liberation?: Marxist Bulletin*, 5, Published by the Spartacus League.; and Theodore Draper, *The Rediscovery of Black Nationalism* (New York: Viking, 1970). Both authors consider black nationalism to be something

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racist socialist revolutionaries, whether they are black or white, could someday gain a prevailing influence upon a newly militant labor movement, what should they propose as a path for liberation from the miseries of the ghetto, in order to rally the black masses to the cause? Does Mumford have an answer for this?

Well, yes and no. By the 1960's, Mumford was decidedly no longer a revolutionary (whether or not he ever really was, in a consistent fashion, is not the issue here). But he was vitally concerned with the fate of the black and Hispanic immigrants into the inner city in the twentieth century, to form what he called a "hapless proletarian majority." In a passage of the "postscript" to *The Urban Prospect* (1968), Mumford formulated what amounts to a program for urban planning to resolve the problems of this inner city "majority."

Naturally, of course, Mumford has no use for the usual liberal Megalopolitan solutions, which amount merely to bigger spending. Rather, the solution lies (surprise!) with Mumford's garden city/planned migration scheme:

> No open housing or school busing can overcome the isolation and resultant self-segregation that sheer numbers have produced. Before any urban renewal program can be instituted for the benefit of given racial or cultural groups, the first question is whether they are willing to move out of their present neighborhoods, even if this means scattering widely in a mixed community, and losing some of their present identity and cohesion.

Minorities in our society have a choice as to the urban vision for which they should strive; a choice which is obvious:

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of a compensatory and impossible fantasy, borne of the futility blacks feel, during periods of demoralization in American history, in attempting to unite with whites against racism.

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> If they choose to remain in numbers where they are, they commit themselves to continued segregation: not merely to segregation but also to congestion, and, along with congestion, to insufficient recreation areas and overcrowded health and hospital services, too. But if they choose to move far enough away to invite the provision for good housing, new industrial or agricultural opportunities, and stable neighborhood facilities, they will become a part of New Towns, suburbs, or growing rural communities. . . .

Mumford would prefer garden cities, as he discusses in the beginning essay of the book, "Planning the Fourth Migration." He continues that blacks, once involved in such a decentralization program "will, like any other newcomers, perhaps need a generation before they are fully integrated, no matter how faithfully their legal status is secured. . . ."

Mumford examines the far greater problems involved, however, with the two, liberal solutions. The first he considers is the mere atomized, suburban-style policy of dispersion "now quietly favored by educated middle-class Negroes in professions and businesses. . . ." This policy, Mumford argues,

> would leave the metropolitan ghettos without leadership; and so, worse off socially than before. Dispersal would also have the effect of undermining the sub-culture that has developed in Harlem and other major metropolitan centers: yet this sub-culture, through its expression in music, the dance, and the theater, is one of the chief sources of the Negro's and the Puerto Rican's individuality and self-respect. (Certainly, something was lost to the once-thriving Yiddish sub-culture by its voluntary removal to improved living quarters away from the Lower East Side.) By now there is an activist Negro minority—how large is anyone's guess [Mumford is most certainly referring to the growing nationalist movement here—TS] —that would resist such assimilation.

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The other liberal solution considered by Mumford is the proposal to rehabilitate "the slums and the blighted areas . . . for the existing overcrowded population. . ." This, Mumford argues, offers no solution whatsoever, for it

> would mean continuing to build superslums, whether on the opening high-rise pattern favored by the municipal authorities, or the dense housing on crowded lots, without provisions for sunlight, open air, or visual amenity, favored by Jane Jacobs, in which streets would remain the chief play areas, though filled, as now with dangerous traffic. Neither the frying pan nor the fire is attractive; for housing designed at three hundred to four hundred people to the acre—to say nothing of the greater number some favor—is not conducive to health, neighborly cooperation, or adequate child care.[4]

I think Mumford has done an admirable job of outlining the problems here, and the only possible solution. He shows that any "solution" that sticks within the present contours of Megalopolis would be problematic.

Where Mumford stumbles, typically, is his vagueness about the issue of reform vs. revolution. This is why he fails to present a radical alternative to the liberal solutions discussed above. Instead, he seems to cofuse the suburban dispersal solution promoted by the black middle class, with the garden city solution that he has promoted all his life.

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[4] Mumford, "Postscript: The Choices Ahead," *The Urban Prospect*, pp. 248-50. Interestingly, Eugene McCarthy seems to have embraced just such a program to "break up the ghettos" and move blacks into inegrated communities in the countryside in his 1968 bid for the Democratic Party presidential nomination—a plank for which he was race-baited by Bobby Kennedy. See Gary Wills, "Waiting for Bobby," *New York Review of Books*, February 10, 2000. Wills is reviewing Ronald Steele, *In Love with Night: The American Romance with Robert Kennedy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999).

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If, indeed, the "fourth migration" is conceived in gradualist terms, within the present system, then yes, perhaps a garden city style of decentralization will have very similar problems as would a suburban, atomized decentralization, in terms of a loss of minority culture. But it is difficult to understand, in the first place, how garden city decentralization could take place, at all, unless the it came as the fruit of a successful revolutionary socialist movement, with a racially integrated working class leadership. Once such a movement takes power, it can plan and build such garden cities fairly rapidly, and make it quite easy for the poor and the working class—not just the middle class, as with the old suburban black migration, by any means —to move into them. There should be some concern about minimizing racial isolation and mono-racial enclaves, to avoid the reemergence of racial hostilities in the future. But the racial and ethnic composition of each garden city could be consciously and enormously varied, in order to accommodate just the kind of concerns about cultural integrity presented by Mumford in this passage. In other words: the "Transnational America" that Mumford's mentor, Randolph Bourne, proposed, where both ethnic and cosmopolitan culture might fecundly flow in and out of one another among the prosperous citizens of a socialist America, could finally become a reality. Mumford's garden city was the solution to the problems raised by Bourne's seminal essay.

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The New Urbanism and Mumford

Architects and intellectuals like Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Philip Langdon, and Peter Calthorpe have recently developed a movement called "the new urbanism." They hope to reintroduce people to the sort of neighborhood-centered proposals advocated by Mumford, Bauer, Clarence Perry, et alia, in order to concentrate and focus an urbane community in the vast suburban wasteland. There is much in this movement that can be traced directly to Mumford's work. Basic to the thought of the "new urbanists" is Mumford's and the Goodman brothers' notions that walkable, children-centered neighborhoods must comprise the central building blocks of new towns; that these towns should be full of public spaces—village greens and commons, squares, plazas; that automobile use should be discouraged and pedestrian access encouraged; that city and town expansion must be limited in order to stop sprawl and its destruction of nature, that a "master plan" for the broad contours must be employed to give these towns coherence before they are built; that the new urbanism might also be applied to the old mega-urban city centers as well as help drain their congested populations; that major concern be given to the need of the poor and of workers to find affordable housing.[5]

But while there is much to commend this movement, there are unfortunate tendencies that run counter to Mumford's more radical thought. Many of the new

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[5] See Philip Langdon. *A Better Place to Live: Reshaping the American Suburb* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994); Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Alex Krieger (Editor),William

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urbanists put out far more hope than did Mumford that the existing capitalist industrial system can be reconciled to their plans to fundamentally transform the urban and natural landscape. They tend to fudge on the exigency of regional economic and social planning. As Mumford insisted, for garden city decentralism to work, industry would have to be strategically relocated to give a job and an affordable apartment to anyone who wants to move to these new urban spaces. Resources, production, and urban community could be allocated and developed more efficiently and with minimal negative impact upon the natural environment. By itself, the new urbanism cannot implement such planning, unless the present capitalist social context is replaced by socialism. Few "new urbanists" call for such replacement, as Mumford did, let alone insist that the imperatives of the market must be countered rather than accepted. One notable exception is Philip Langdon, who does share Mumford's animus toward the market and his insistence upon the need for planning instead.[6]

More ominously, the new urbanism has been used as a figleaf for capitalist expansion and destruction of nature, when such "new urban" spaces are created by powerful corporations like Disney. For Disney has used its new urban "Celebration" town in Florida, created quite recently, as a legislative trading chip.

Lennertz (Editor), *Towns and Townmaking Principles* (Rizzoli, 1991).
[6] See Langdon, *ibid.*

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Because it created "Celebration," Disney won the right, from the state of Florida, to develop sprawling suburban tracts, shopping malls, etc. elsewhere in the state.[7]

Mumford, if he were alive today, would probably have praised the vision of the new urbanists, but insisted upon a radical social transformation as the precondition for it. He would have severely criticized Disney for their hypocrisy. And, with the exception of Langdon, he would have criticized the new urbanists for their failure to embrace the radical socialist strategy by which their plans could be made to benefit the poor as well as their wealthy clients.

As I think the reader will by now agree, the ideas of Lewis Mumford still hold enormous significance for today's problems and politics. His books bear reading, and re-rereading, by activists everywhere dedicated to progressive social, environmental, and political change.

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[7] Andrew Ross, *The Celebration Chronicles: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Property Values in Disney's New Town* (New York: Ballantine, 1999).

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