Recycling Cities for People
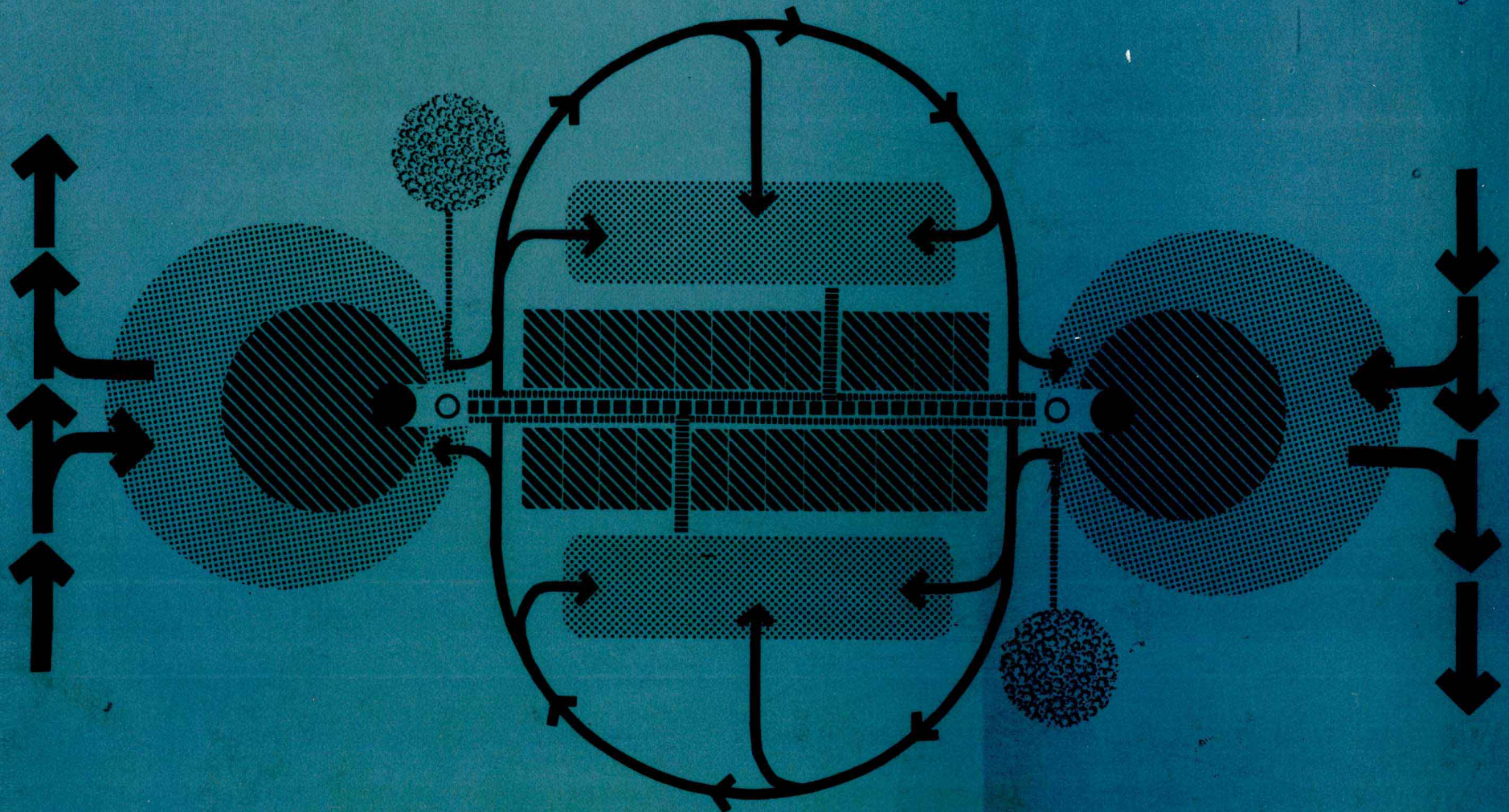
The Urban Design Process

SECOND EDITION

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Foreword by William Marlin

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To the memory of E. David Lukashok

Foreword

If our cities are hard on people, and they clearly are, then a pivotal question comes up as to why people are so very, very hard on themselves.

Laurence and Sherrie Cutler's book, or textbook to be more precise, is a timely attempt to put people in touch with some answers to that question. A strategy for recycling the physical increments of which our surroundings are composed is, for them, nothing less than a strategy for reinstating human values as the underpinnings of urban structure and experience.

In a time when society frequently behaves, and builds, as if no values are possible, this transcendentalist couple—a kind of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller—have evoked an enduring conscience, characteristic of New England, even if their practice of architecture and urban design, centered in Cambridge, is taking them to places as disparate as Nigeria and Pawtucket, Rhode Island, as Micronesia and Gardiner, Maine. Yet there is nothing of the presumptuous piety of missionaries here, just an easy-going importing of perception, a saunter through the lessons that their own professional experiences have suggested, and an affable grab at the elbow of increased environmental concern. Perhaps it is because their work has drawn upon practically every discipline under the sun that they have realized that there is, truly, nothing new under it. Thus the evidence of the past, as they view it in the context of present day trends, is not so much worn out heirloom luggage to be carted along, generation after generation, but a vital resource to which a self-comprehending culture should be naturally accountable.

So while the Cutlers illustrate how to recycle cities, the practical reasons for public perception of and involvement in the process provides the connecting tissue—an ethic holding their diverse examples together. This book, then, is simply, refreshingly, a kind of offering, not a cast-in place altar, encrusted with so-called truths. Without ostentation, the Cutlers familiarize us with the books and the structures that have moved them and we are taken through the process by which they have come to terms with their own projects. Never are we asked to believe anything outright except, perhaps, to believe in beliefs. In this sense, their book is an armature of questions over which to weave our own identification with the day-to-day environment.

Basic to this approach is their sneaking assumption about, rather than the typically sneaking suspicion of, the worst of such public identification with planning decision. Not only are everyday people inadequately informed about the actions and events that shape their surroundings, they are also unconvinced that being informed will do any good. There are encouraging exceptions to this, of course, but generally speaking, a communal throwing up of hands has become one of our democracy's few predictable rituals.

Like most of humanity's technological and institutional extensions, conceived to stretch the spectrum of its ability, the city, in which such extensions are concentrated, has coiled back upon and hung a noose around the things it was meant to strengthen. "There is no way out, around, or through," as Sartre described the prepackaged ennui of contemporary existence.

If unseemly demeanor or abrasive manners can be ascribed to the way buildings relate to each other along our streets, this is in part expressive of the kind of torturous internal aggressions building up inside of people themselves as, steadily, the forces that actually determine the rhythm of our lives move farther from their control.

Dr. Edward T. Hall, the anthropologist, writes in his book *Beyond Culture*, "One of the most devastating and damaging things that can happen to anyone is to fail to fulfill his potential. A kind of gnawing emptiness, longing, frustration, and displaced anger is turned inward on the self or outward toward others. Yet, how man evolved with such an incredible reservoir of talent and such fantastic diversity is not completely understood. Man is not anywhere nearly enough in awe of himself, possibly because he knows so little and has nothing to measure himself against."

Self-image, self-respect or, as Dr. Hall writes, self-awe, none of these can really be blamed for the jagged-edged, emotion-scraping configuration of most urban environments, in which buildings are little more than cut-rate icons intended to symbolize established institutions. It is precisely the absence of introspective qualities that has allowed wholesale desolation in the name of urban planning. If we are to develop an introspective environment, facilitating cultural expression as well as functional needs, we have to create, more than buildings, loci for encounters between people and activities, between people and varied times of the day, between people and different periods of their communities' history. Comprehension of the "incredible reservoir of talent," of the "fantastic diversity" of which Dr. Hall writes, is finally the most practical and utilitarian

function that a well-rounded community environment can serve. Regenerating a sense of control over events will only come about when, out of everyday experience, people can sense something of themselves and their history along the streets and within the structures which line and define their lives. It is for such regeneration that this book is both an appeal and a well-documented primer.

William Marlin

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Preface

We are going to find each other—we who are searching for the right way of living the truth and the peaceful way of harmony with each other and with nature . . . We are all part of it, we cannot break away from it.

—T. Banyacya, a Hopi

New and meaningful juxtaposing of seemingly diverse and unrelated elements has historically been the key capability of the imaginative mind. In this era of specialization and categorization, there is an acute need for this ability and for the person who possesses it—let us call that person a generalist/specialist.

The generalist was at one time a singular total individual, the so-called Renaissance man. Now, although great creative capability must still be a singular effort, there exists the need for a team approach to problem solving. "The generalist" who would organize new functions of the human environment today must, in fact, be a part of such a team—perhaps made up of specialists, but with the ability to merge into the *creative communal mind* of the committee, the Professional firm, the department, the corporation. All of these must all be capable of this "communal genius" if they are to be successful in the creative task, which has always been to "put it all together."

Acknowledgments

Symbolic juxtaposition. As seen through the pupil of an eye, by Claude-Nicholas Ledoux (late eighteenth century).

Contents

The State
of the Art

1

Designing for Cities

Don't walk in front of me,
                I may not follow;
Don't walk behind me I may not lead;
Walk beside me and be my friend.

—Camus

The layperson and city design

The involvement of the layperson in the design of a city is not a new role. When the earliest settlements began to evolve from a cluster of dwellings into a village, into a town, and then into a city, the inhabitants' involvement in the process was what, in actual fact, forced the adaptations. Settlements have always had to conform to the new and changing needs of the dwellers. In the more primitive forms of urbanization, this involvement was as simple and rational as the town meeting form of government. But now more complex urban forms have complicated the layperson's requirement for the design of his cities and the more structured forms of government necessary to operate the city have obscured the individual's role in its design.

A camel is a horse designed by a committee

On occasions when citizen involvement has been built into the political system, it has been in such capacities as planning commissions or building committees where an individual's effectiveness is fragmented by the special interests and "related professions" of the other members.

The planning commission form of civic design has often failed because neither the commission members (nor their constituents) have been adequately prepared to deal with the prime duty of their position—*to view the city as an integrated whole.* The members—usually a real estate broker, a general contractor, an engineer, a developer, and an environmentalist/activist—see their duties as simply protecting and advising conservatively. Additionally, they feel responsible for actions taken that reflect on their own fragmented and isolated area of

special interest or expertise. Such worries about personal accountability and concerns for what is personally unfamiliar, tend to have a stultifying effect that restricts the communal imagination and derring-do of committees and commissions. Lack of familiarity also impedes commissions in working with their constituents in obtaining the understanding necessary for approvals of innovative approaches.

Our citizens, whether "policy makers" or constituents, have simply never been educated to see their own roles, professions, businesses, and so on as innate parts of the city as a whole. Nor have they the tools to weight the importance of an urban element with respect to other factors, to propose areas of compromise, to understand the major interfaces of activities within the city, or to devise and implement innovative urban concepts.

Body: Home of the individual human
City: Home of the communal human

A high-school education includes biology, botany, chemistry, physics—all directed toward an understanding of the natural systems. The human body is studied: its evolution from earlier forms, its structural/skeletal framework, the materials transfer and removal functions of its circulation systems, the communicative functions of the nervous system, and the regenerative function of its reproductive systems. The sixth-grade biology student studying the human organism realizes that to study these functions independent of each other would be impossible and meaningless. But the city, which is as much the home of the communal human as the body is of the individual human is studied only as fragmented activities—if it is studied at all by the end of high school.

In college one never studies the city unless the student himself so chooses, and that choice usually is because of prerequisites for city planning or architectural courses leading to professional degrees. And in those courses, the notion of the city having regenerative functions is as little broached as sex education was in the 1950s.

The question now arises as to whether there is a textbook available to reeducate the layperson who would be directly involved in the design of cities. Where can the student of the city be provided with the background in order to see his city in its proper perspective?

The state of the art of designing for cities as it exists in current literature is comprehensive but suffers as well from fragmentation. The existing works related to the design and understanding of cities fall into three major categories: historical, analytical, and elemental, while a fourth—synthesis— remains virtually unpublished except in the literature of proposals, reports, and implementation plans prepared for particular cities. We have selected some classic examples in each category to give the reader insights into the existing literature and the state of the art of designing for cities.

The historical works are the tomes of the methodical "greats" capable of imparting the historical *overview* of cities necessary in order to sense major new directions, modes of change, and to cite important precedents:

1

Historical Context of Cities—Lewis Mumford, *The City in History*

2

Historical Analysis of Cities—Edmund N. Bacon, *The Design of Cities*

3

Historical Overview of Cities—Christopher Tunnard, *The City of Man*

The analytical works are philosophical theses by the *imaginative* few who see the city in their own unique way—as a work of art or a hieroglyphic tablet capable of being "read" in different ways by different people:

1

How to Read a City—Grady Clay, *Close-Up: How to Read the American City*

2

The City and Its Image—Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*

3

The City as a Work of Art—Le Corbusier, *Creation is a Patient Search*

The elemental works have proliferated as the city is catalogued by various urban *specialties*. They are essential because they are the building blocks and the tools with which the urbanists must work. But so often the synthesis, putting the elements together, is not there. The books that fall into the "elemental" category are numerous and individually they cover just about every possible dimension and element of the city. They can provide a comprehensive and solid textbook base, but how the elements are used together, how and whether new formulas are tried, depends on the creativity of the chemist. For the sake of brevity, only the first three books herein are discussed; this list is ever expanding and is more completely covered in the bibliography.

1

Elements of the City—Lawrence Halprin, *Cities*

2

The Spaces of Cities—Gordon Cullen, *Townscape*

3

The Law & the Preservation of the City—John J. Costonis, *Space Adrift*

4

The City as Public Policy—Jonathon Barnett, *Urban Designs as Public Policy*

5

The City as a New Town—London County Council, *The Planning of a New Town*

6

The Architecture of the City—Paul Spreiregen, *The Architecture of the City*

7

The Words of the City—Charles Abrams, *The Language of Cities*

8

The Landscape of Cities—Edited by Cliff Tandy, *Handbook of Urban Landscape*

9

Models & Systems for Use in the City—Edited by Jean Perraton and Richard Baxter, *Models, Evaluations, & Information Systems for Planners*

10

The Ecological Economics of the City—Walter Isard, *Ecological-Economic Analysis for Regional Development*

11

The Psychology in Cities—Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*

12

The Sociology in Cities—Jane Jacobs, *The Death & Life of Great American Cities*

The synthesis is, as yet, unpublished as a textbook type for studying city design. It exists more in the literature of proposals, reports, renewal plans, action plans, and brochures. It also exists in the experience of the participants of these plans—client, contractor, designer, and users. Outstanding is the team that possesses collectively not only the abilities to determine the problems, but also to propose solutions that pull disparate pieces together, to explain the proposal so that it is understood, to resolve conflicts, use opposition positively, and finally, to implement a creative concept in the city.

Urban designs or "city works" evolved in this way have always represented the ability of the human species to work together creatively in the same way that the artist or the writer works independently. The creative process of the participants in these collective city works is perhaps not any more explicable than those of the singular creative artist, but it is a freedom of thinking, an optimism and openness of mind—a solution orientation.

What is the question?

How can we save our dying cities? As a dying Gertrude Stein replied when Alice B. Toklas asked, "Gertrude, Gertrude—What is the answer?" (referring, of course, to the meaning of life), "My dear Alice, what is the question?" Design synthesis in the city is the phrasing and answering of some of the questions:

☐
What is worth saving?
☐
Can we create a more human urban environment?
☐
What can we do about the city and why?

☐
Ideally what could happen?
☐
What's happening here now?
☐
What are the city's assets?
☐
What are the city's liabilities?
☐
What immediate action should we take?
☐
How do we go about doing it?
☐
Who does what?
☐
How can the community participate?
☐
Are our goals mutual goals?
☐
What elements or factors are involved?
☐
What are the recurring problems?
☐
How can we think about old problems in new ways?
☐
How can we clarify and systematize the urban functions?
☐
How can we reinforce a city's urban frame and reorganize its components?
☐
How can urban elements be juxtaposed to form new concepts?
☐
Can we make new concepts public and make them understandable?
☐
How can we implement tasks and work together?

No book can phrase all the questions and give the answers. This can only happen through the participation in the process; this book can only introduce a newcomer to that process and show the reader what may be important now and in the future.

The Historical

Historical Context of Cities—Lewis Mumford's
The City in History

Lewis Mumford traces the history of urban culture from its ancestral forms and patterns to suburbia and the megalopolis—from the emergence of urban settlements as simple sanctuary to village and stronghold to the period in history that marked the passage from village to city. According to Mumford, this happened in the late neolithic culture, when "the more developed villages at some natural meeting point between regions may have gained in population and arable land . . . not the numbers of people in a limited area alone, but the number that can be brought under unified control to form a highly differentiated community, serving purposes that transcend nurture and survival that have decisive urban significance."

An understanding of the rich relics in art and technics, the signs of institutional life, and the significance of assemblages of building materials are the resources with which we track our urban history. The past gives us the notion that our age of automation and urban expansion has displaced the humanistic goals urbanization was supposed to serve. Mumford states that the needs today are similar to those of the past, yet the scale is the whole planet rather than a river valley, and that man's prime need is to "contrive channels for excessive energies." If this is not done, then the entire ecological system on which man's own life depends will disappear in a posthistoric era.

Mumford contends that these insights into the future come from an analysis of the rules of the Bronze Age, and that: "The final mission of the city is to further man's conscious participation in the cosmic
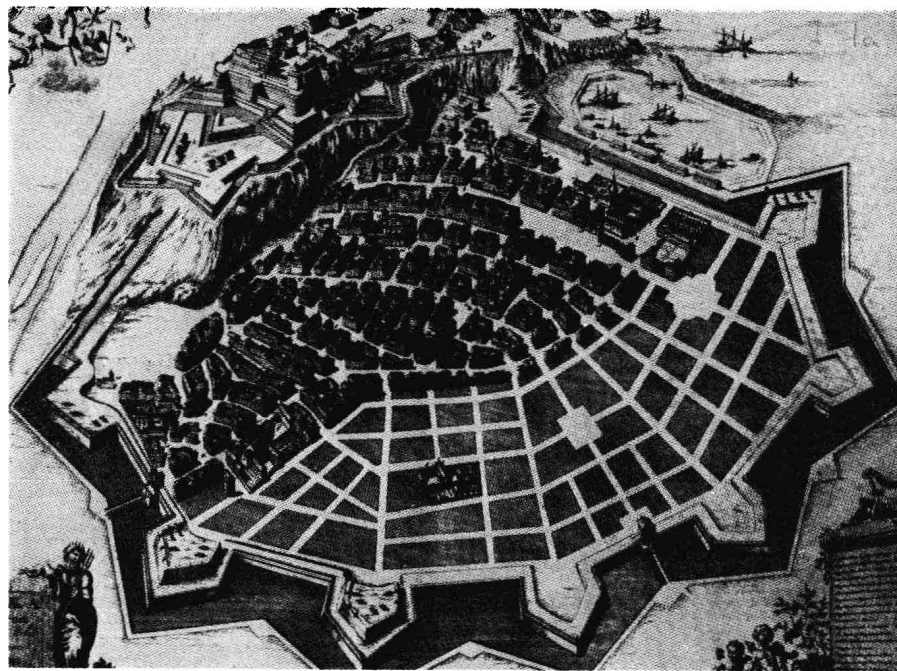
Classic stages of town building. The plan of Nice shows the three classic stages: 1) the castle on the hill, 2) block extension of a port community, 3) more orderly radial street layout.

A civic opportunity. Naarden in the Netherlands was originally a military extravaganza converted into a civilian community.

and the historic process.'' The magnification of all the dimensions of life is the supreme reason for the place of the city in history.

Historical Analysis of Cities—Edmund N. Bacon's *Design of Cities*

Edmund Bacon presents a number of accounts of the historical or, rather, morphological development of the city ranging from ancient Athens to the new Brazilian city of Brasilia. He also examines the work of such great urbanists as Vitruvius, Sixtus V, John Nash, and Sir Christopher Wren, illustrating how their great works have influenced subsequent development around them.

Although Bacon is not an historian by training he states that his own particular role as ''a participator in the recent history of the rebirth of Philadelphia'' gives him the experience to synthesize the rich ideas of many planners that are applicable to all cities.

Bacon's basic belief is that there are universal parallels in the currents of history and that city planners and urbanists should draw upon them. His thesis is that one should explore the nature of decisions as they have occurred throughout history, as well as the context within which these decisions were made. To understand the development of the city through time is what Bacon states as the most fundamental need: to understand the deeper forces at play that actually form the spaces and structure of a great city is to comprehend the basic principles in city design.

600–479 B.C.

478–339 B.C.

338–86 B.C.

86 B.C.–287 A.D.
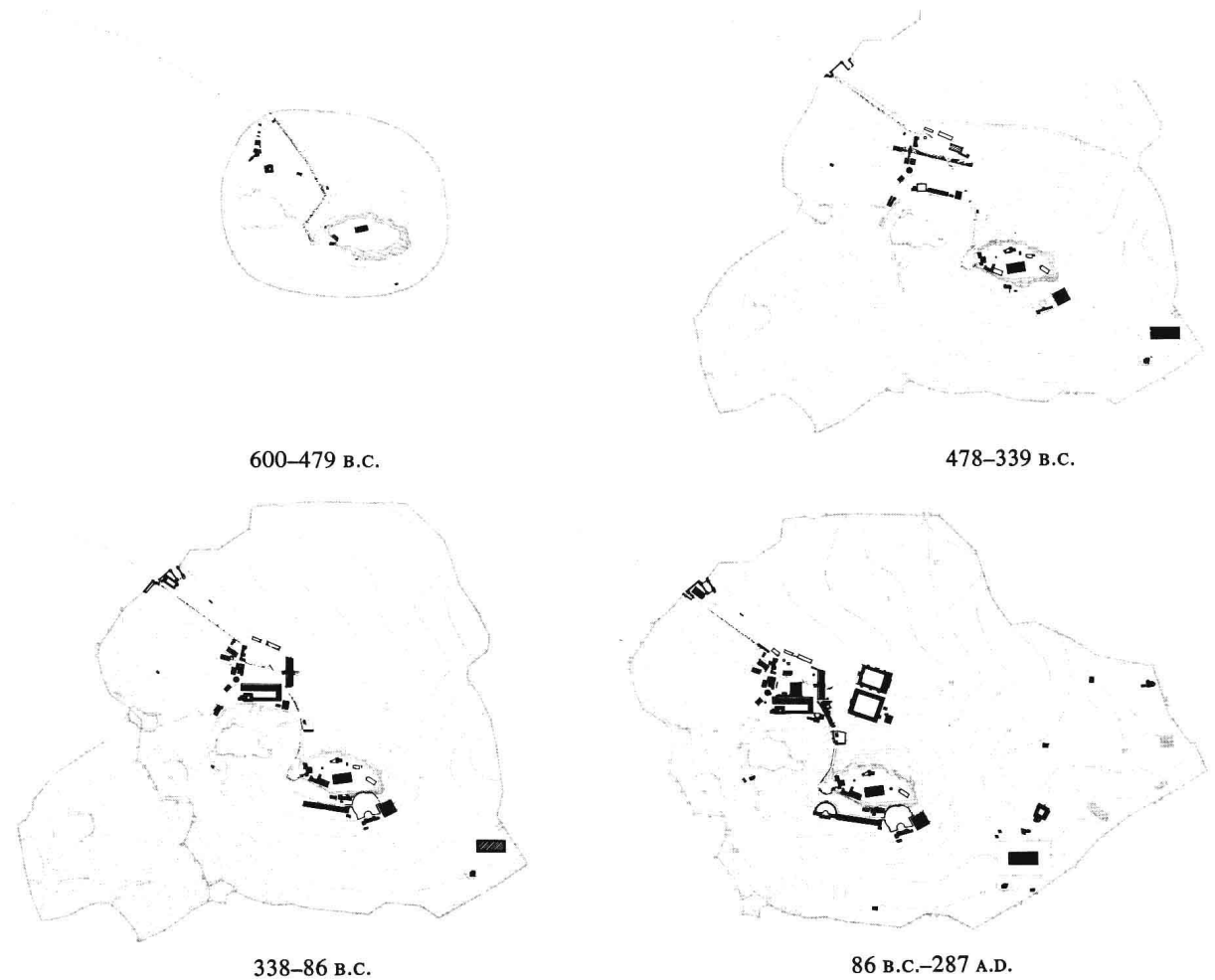
The evolution of the form.
Athens from 600 BC to 287 AD.

Historical Overview of Cities—Christopher Tunnard's—*The City of Man*

Christopher Tunnard defines the city as a place that can only be experienced as a constantly changing fact of life influenced by particular schools of thought. He predicts rapidly increasing urbanization in the future and traces his visions of the New Urbanism back to their origins and the historic trends and schools in architecture and planning. Among these trends in particular were the industrial company towns that were developed along river edges because the mills were usually powered by water. The next period of history was captured by the romantic mood, which fully embraced the notion that God has made the country and man the town. This was the early nineteenth-century era of Herman Melville, the Hudson River school, gothic libraries, and Garden City on Long Island.

Tunnard quotes the famous aphorism, "Architecture is the decoration of construction" and goes on to make a strong case for the need of art in civic design. He feels that the goal of beauty is the unifying principle for city planning. The planning profession would be healthier if artists participated in the creation of urban form. In the United States there is a tendency to admire the picturesque wherever it can be found. Since there is very little beauty to admire in the mass, the emphasis is either on the "quaint" or the "spectacular"—"old" Williamsburg or the "skyline of New York."

Tunnard presents the historical reasons for the loss of a sense of value for esthetics in our constructions and in our urban lifestyles. The traditions that enabled the design and construction of fine buildings and cities with style have been maligned by the advent of community participation in the design process, by economics and by pure functional requirements.

He challenges professionals to work toward the day when architecture and city planning are united in a total approach to the city that can be titled "The Grand Design." The new creative designer will be a "visual expert, an artist in the form of cities, aware of the contribution which others must make if we are to live in communities which achieve an integration of art and life."

Tradition is the key to begin—historical roots in an ever-evolving series of schools of thought is the direction, according to Tunnard.