Lewis Mumford on cities

Some notes by Gary Shapcott 2020 (13 pages only–an easy read, just notes and quotes)

Lewis Mumford 1961, *The city in history*, Harcourt Inc, New York; also available for free loan from the Internet Archive <https://openlibrary.org>. A book largely about the city in *European and North American* history.

What can we learn from reading this long (600+ page) book today? Heaps. It was chosen by the American Library Association as a Lasting Book. It lives up to that designation. Essential reading for anyone interested in the future of cities, the future of democracy and, indeed, the survival of civilisation.

What makes a good town or city? What makes a bad one? What can we do to turn a bad city into a good one? These are the kinds of holistic questions he addresses, avoiding the piecemeal approach of dividing city issues into housing, transport, environment and so on. Let's have a look at some of what he says in this book; I'm not claiming to be totally comprehensive. And then let's ask how cities in Australia measure up. For a study of Mumford's ideas in the context of the history of town planning, see Peter Hall 2002, *Cities of tomorrow: an intellectual history of urban planning and design in the twentieth century*, 3rd edition, Blackwell Publishing: especially chapter 4, 'The City in the Garden' and chapter 5, 'The City in the Region'.

Numbers refer to pages in the book; quotes from the book are highlighted.

What makes a good town or city?

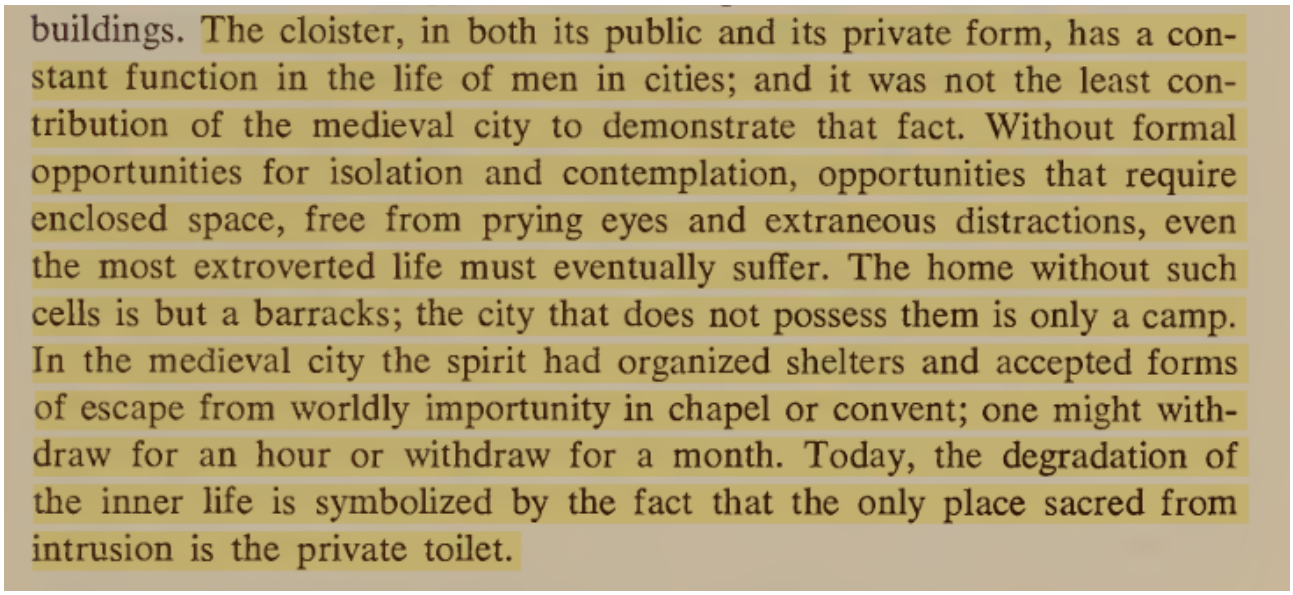
'Contrary to the convictions of census statisticians, it is art, culture, and political purpose, not numbers, that define a city' (125). The form of a city is the form of its social order and to remould one it is necessary to introduce appropriate changes in the other (172).

In the good city customary controls, collective commitments, municipal direction, public ends restrain the commercial spirit and stop the spread or sprawl of a city at the random will of the property owner. A sense of limits prevails: limits to population growth, limits to horizontal (new suburbs) and vertical (high rise towers) expansion of the city. City growth is managed by decentralisation and regional federations (156). Planning, not 'market forces', determines the way the city grows. 'Responsible public direction working for well-conceived public ends is essential for the foundation and development of all urban communities' (444). Sites are reserved for local churches, community centres, public squares, meeting halls, public libraries, bookshops, marketplaces, market gardens and orchards, schools, playgrounds for children and parks for everyone and all of these are kept in permanent municipal ownership. Heritage is respected.

Good urban design facilitates meetings, conversation, collective debate, cooperative action by as many people in the city as possible (117). Good cities provide 'numerous accessible permanent centers for face-to-face intercourse and frequent meetings at every human level. The recovery of the essential activities and values that first were incorporated in the ancient cities, above all those of Greece, is accordingly a primary condition for the further development of the city in our time. Our elaborate rituals of mechanization cannot take the place of the human dialogue, the drama, the living circle of mates and associates, the society of friends. These sustain the growth and reproduction of human culture, and without them the whole elaborate structure becomes meaningless–indeed actively hostile to the purposes of life' (569). The plaza, campo and piazza are examples of such centres, when cars can be kept out of them. See also 116-118. It is the lot of the

slave, the subject (as opposed to the citizen), the spectator (as opposed to the actor), to be unable to speak one's thoughts (196).

Private space is also provided (269):



buildings. The cloister, in both its public and its private form, has a constant function in the life of men in cities; and it was not the least contribution of the medieval city to demonstrate that fact. Without formal opportunities for isolation and contemplation, opportunities that require enclosed space, free from prying eyes and extraneous distractions, even the most extroverted life must eventually suffer. The home without such cells is but a barracks; the city that does not possess them is only a camp. In the medieval city the spirit had organized shelters and accepted forms of escape from worldly importunity in chapel or convent; one might withdraw for an hour or withdraw for a month. Today, the degradation of the inner life is symbolized by the fact that the only place sacred from intrusion is the private toilet.

The space, the surface area, given over to the motor car (roads, parking lots, driveways, garages) is reduced. Barring wheeled traffic from key areas of a city, creating pedestrian malls surrounded by markets and other venues that facilitate civic meeting and association, is something that ancient Rome knew how to do well, as in Pompeii (Illustration 12). Segregated and extensive rights of way for pedestrians, cyclists and mass transit have as much place in the good city as rights of way for the motor car. The latter is not allowed to become the dominant transport mode. Main roads touch the street network of neighbourhoods, quarters or precincts at a tangent on the outskirts or, at least, provision is made for a large hollow square free from traffic near the centre of the precinct, to one side of the main road. Main roads (or railways or tramways) are not allowed to cut through the centre of a precinct (211). Main roads serve as boundaries of neighbourhoods as well as connecting links between neighbourhoods, a key principle of the Radburn Plan (502 and Illustration 51). Wherever possible, greenbelts rather than roads are utilised to serve this function (503-509).

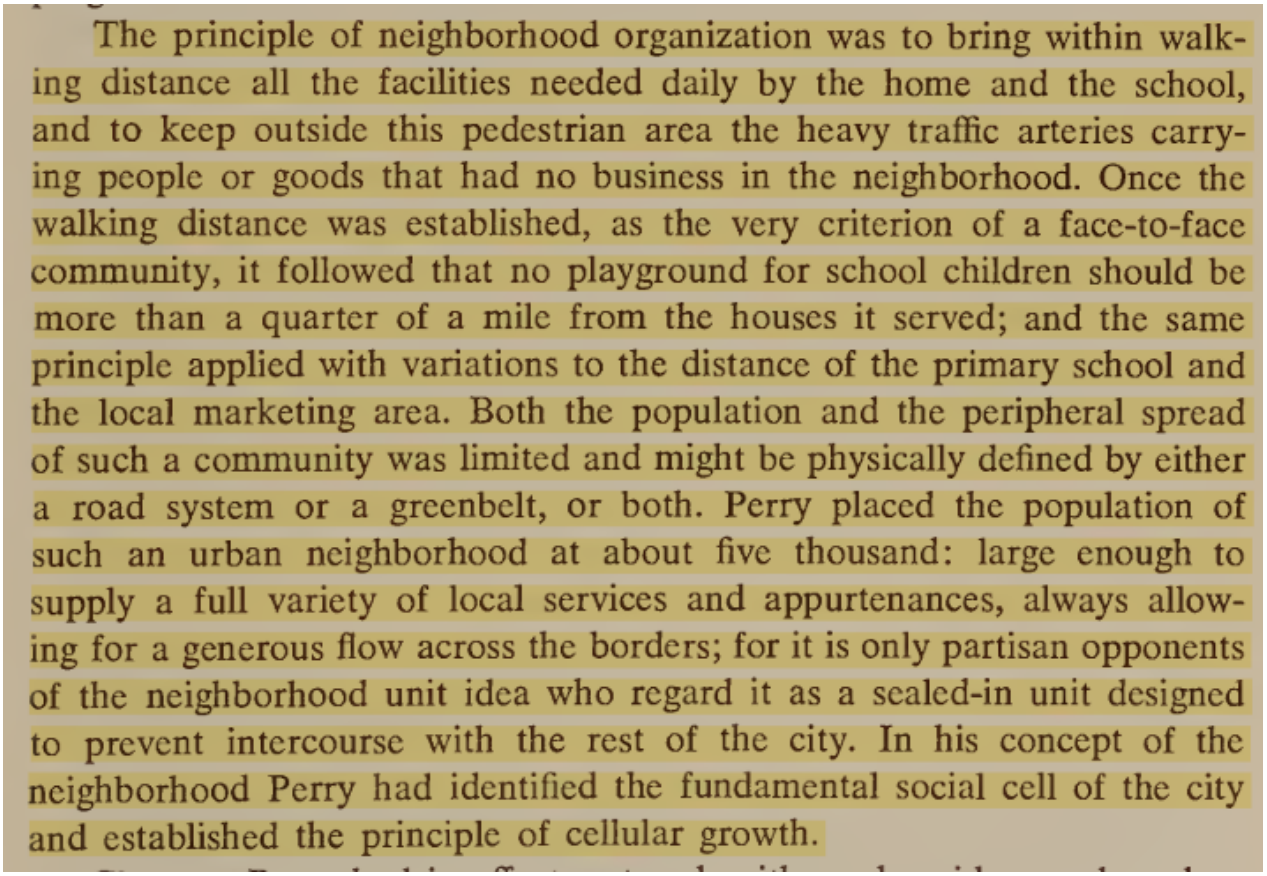
Commerce is concentrated in market squares and in short narrow streets and is not allowed to spread along long streets.

Planning pays attention to the conditions conducive to health and social life. Site coverage by buildings is limited (56 per cent is a good proportion–p.443) to allow space for gardens and other uses and to open buildings to fresh air and sunlight.

'Through its durable buildings and institutional structures and even more durable symbolic forms of literature and art, the city unites times past, times present, and times to come' (98). Cities are the home of the arts and sciences and of great buildings that house them. That's if they manage to escape destruction by war or conquest or the wrecking ball of the property developer.

Orderly design creates a 'unity' as, for example, that created by the spider-web system of canals in Amsterdam (442).

Population growth is controlled and the city is not allowed 'to grow beyond the possibility of socializing and assimilating its members' (331). To achieve this, growth is cellular as, for example, in the principles for neighbourhood organisation established by Clarence Perry (501):



The principle of neighborhood organization was to bring within walking distance all the facilities needed daily by the home and the school, and to keep outside this pedestrian area the heavy traffic arteries carrying people or goods that had no business in the neighborhood. Once the walking distance was established, as the very criterion of a face-to-face community, it followed that no playground for school children should be more than a quarter of a mile from the houses it served; and the same principle applied with variations to the distance of the primary school and the local marketing area. Both the population and the peripheral spread of such a community was limited and might be physically defined by either a road system or a greenbelt, or both. Perry placed the population of such an urban neighborhood at about five thousand: large enough to supply a full variety of local services and appurtenances, always allowing for a generous flow across the borders; for it is only partisan opponents of the neighborhood unit idea who regard it as a sealed-in unit designed to prevent intercourse with the rest of the city. In his concept of the neighborhood Perry had identified the fundamental social cell of the city and established the principle of cellular growth.

Medieval city development controlled growth and expansion in a 'cellular' manner, surplus population being 'cared for by building new communities, sometimes close by, but nevertheless independent and self-sufficient units' (313). 'The medieval pattern was that of many small cities and subordinate villages in active association with their neighboring towns, distributed widely over the landscape' (314). 'This decentralization of the essential social functions of the city not merely prevented institutional overcrowding and needless circulation: it kept the whole town in scale' (308). '... Venice pushed even further, right into our own age, the organization by neighborhoods and precincts whose recovery today, as an essential cellular unit of planning, is one of the fundamental steps toward re-establishing a new urban form' (321).

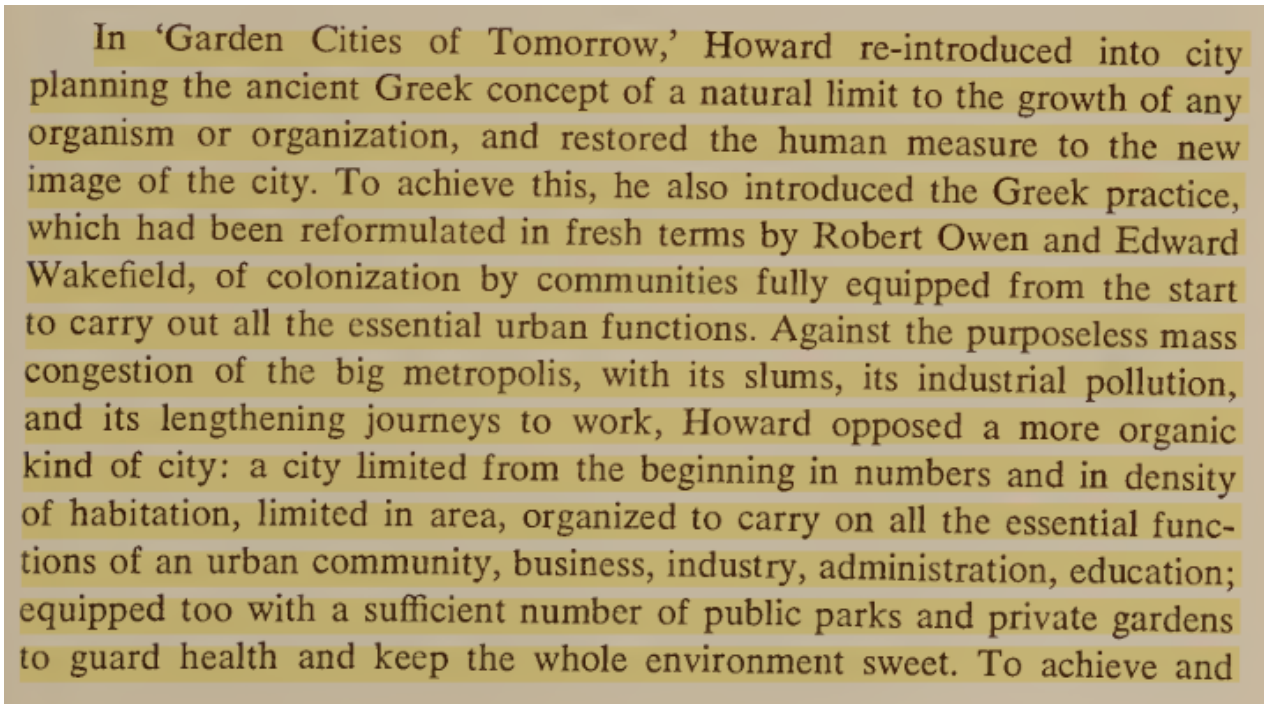
The neighbourhood unit and the functional precinct complemented each other in medieval city design (310-311):

Note one more feature: the neighborhood unit and the functional precinct. In a sense, the medieval city was a congeries of little cities, each with a certain degree of autonomy and self-sufficiency, each formed so naturally out of common needs and purposes that it only enriched and supplemented the whole. The division of the town into quarters, each with its church or churches, often with a local provision market, always with its own local water supply, a well or a fountain, was a characteristic feature; but as the town grew, the quarters might become sixths, or even smaller fractions of the whole, without dissolving into the mass. Often, as in Venice, the neighborhood unit would be identified with the parish and get its name from the parish church: a division that remains to this day.

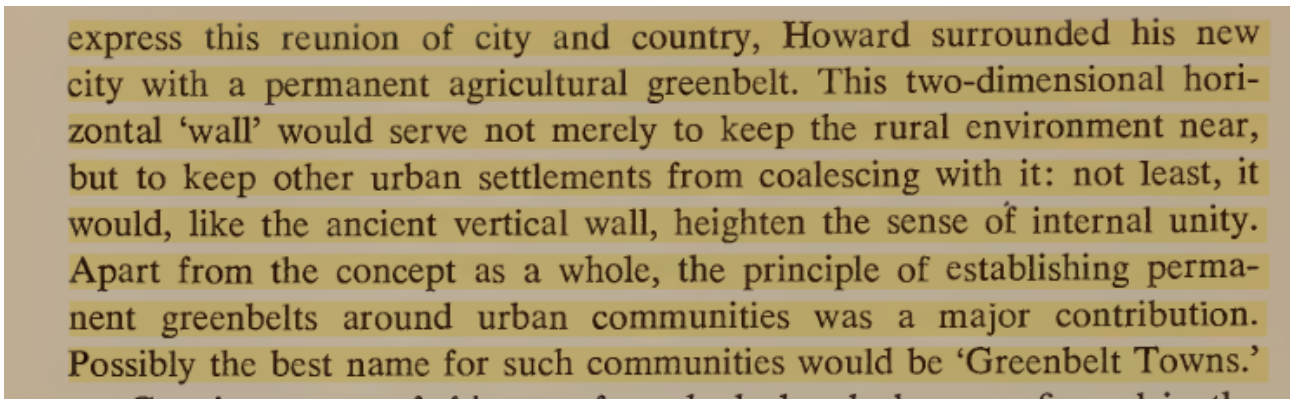
This integration into primary residential units, composed of families and neighbors, was complemented by another kind of division, into precincts, based on vocation and interest: thus both primary and secondary groups, both *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft,* took on the same urban pattern. In Regensburg, as early as the eleventh century, the town was divided into a clerical precinct, a royal precinct, and a merchant's precinct, corresponding thus to the chief vocations, while craftsmen and peasants must have occupied the rest of the town. To this constellation, university towns, like Toulouse or Oxford, would also add their college precincts, each relatively self-contained; while as convents and nunneries were drawn into the city, a movement that went on steadily from the thirteenth to the

eighteenth century, a scattering of conventual precincts, different from the cathedral precinct, would likewise follow, adding their gardens and open spaces, however private, to the sum total of open spaces in the city. In London, the Inns of Court, like The Temple, formed still another kind of enclosed precinct.

‘Cellular growth’ of a city entails planned dispersal of population in small, relatively self-contained urban centres, precincts or quarters. It entails in some cases ‘the building of satellite cities on a co-ordinated regional plan’ (Illustration 21). It’s about grouping highly individualised urban quarters in a way that unites them while retaining their uniqueness, just as the individual cells in an organism form the ‘unity’ that is an organism. In medieval Venice, for instance, ‘Each neighborhood or parish reproduces on a smaller scale the essential organs of the bigger all-embracing city, with the maximum possibilities for meeting and association on every human level, all within walking distance of the center’ (Illustration 21). Cellular growth is exemplified in the ‘greenbelt towns’ of Ebenezer Howard (515, 516):



In ‘Garden Cities of Tomorrow,’ Howard re-introduced into city planning the ancient Greek concept of a natural limit to the growth of any organism or organization, and restored the human measure to the new image of the city. To achieve this, he also introduced the Greek practice, which had been reformulated in fresh terms by Robert Owen and Edward Wakefield, of colonization by communities fully equipped from the start to carry out all the essential urban functions. Against the purposeless mass congestion of the big metropolis, with its slums, its industrial pollution, and its lengthening journeys to work, Howard opposed a more organic kind of city: a city limited from the beginning in numbers and in density of habitation, limited in area, organized to carry on all the essential functions of an urban community, business, industry, administration, education; equipped too with a sufficient number of public parks and private gardens to guard health and keep the whole environment sweet. To achieve and



express this reunion of city and country, Howard surrounded his new city with a permanent agricultural greenbelt. This two-dimensional horizontal ‘wall’ would serve not merely to keep the rural environment near, but to keep other urban settlements from coalescing with it: not least, it would, like the ancient vertical wall, heighten the sense of internal unity. Apart from the concept as a whole, the principle of establishing permanent greenbelts around urban communities was a major contribution. Possibly the best name for such communities would be ‘Greenbelt Towns.’

Robin Dunbar, an evolutionary psychologist at the University of Oxford, in an article in *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com> on 5 August 2020 called ‘Is humanity doomed because we can’t plan for the long term?’, provides support for these ideas of Mumford (without any mention of Mumford at all):

> ‘Our natural social world is very small scale, barely village size. Once community size gets large, our interests switch from the wider community to a focus on self-interest. Society staggers on, but it becomes an unstable, increasingly fractious body liable at [sic] continual risk of fragmenting, as all historical empires have found. ... Much of the problem, in the end, comes down to scale. Once a community exceeds a certain size, most of its

> members become strangers: we lose our sense of commitment both to others as individuals and to the communal project that society represents. COVID-19 may be the reminder many societies need to rethink their political and economic structures into a more localised form which is closer to their constituents. Of course, these will surely need bringing together in federal superstructures, but the key here is a level of autonomous community-level government where the citizen feels they have a personal stake in the way things work.'

That's a very Mumford-ian view of things! Compare Mumford: Quarters and neighbourhoods of cities that manage to foster qualities akin to those of a tight-knit village are indispensable creators of a 'We'. 'When these primary bonds [of the village] dissolve, when the intimate visible community ceases to be a watchful, identifiable, deeply concerned group, then the 'We' becomes a buzzing swarm of 'I-s', and secondary ties and allegiances become too feeble to halt the disintegration of the urban community' (15).

In the good city, town and country remain in a symbiotic relationship, as in medieval times (260, 261):

Even though the relation of urban merchant families to the peasants who rented their land outside might remain suspicious and one-sided, not to say mutually hostile—the 'Chronicles of a Florentine Family' offer testimony on this score—the relationship was close and constant. The terraced vineyards, the trim fields protected by windbreaks, the traffic of fruit and vegetables to the city, the carting out and composting of refuse and dung, including the woolen wastes of Florence—all this gave the city, even an overgrown city like Florence, a stake in the countryside. This was so close, in some Italian cities, that each neighborhood would 'adopt' a particular village that lay outside as its own rural province.

The typical medieval city, excluding the few overgrown metropolises of Italy, which were far from typical, was not merely in the country but of the country; and as in ancient Mesopotamia, some food was grown, if only to ward off starvation under siege, within the walls.

Indeed, agriculture and rural pursuits like fowling and fishing formed a part of the daily life of the city. As late as the fourteenth century in England, the urban burghers were required by law without distinction of class to assist at harvest time in the gathering of the crops. The summer exodus of the East Londoners to the hopyards of Kent is perhaps the last survival of that medieval custom. Many small centers in France and Switzerland, arrested in their growth long ago, still show these open spaces, never built upon, and still used as gardens, as in that charming little town on Lake Leman, Nyon. Even in crowded towns like Paris, where high rents resulted in the continued covering over of the original open spaces, the convents and monasteries and the hotels of the aristocracy preserved large areas of garden and orchard.

Examples of towns and cities that do or did exemplify some or all of the characteristics of good cities include Amsterdam (439-445), Venice (Illustration 21 and 321-328), Bath in England (Illustration 37), Pavia in Italy (Illustration 14), Cambridge and Oxford (Illustration 19), Chatham Village, Pittsburgh USA (Illustration 43), Bloomsbury in London (Illustration 44), Mohawk Valley in New York State USA (Illustration 57), the fifteen New Towns built in Britain in the decade after 1945 (Illustration 60), the 'garden cities' or 'greenbelt towns', Letchworth and Welwyn in England (517), the seventeenth century Dutch village and New England village (328-335).

What makes a bad town or city?

Congestion, sprawl, pollution and social disintegration are the norm. Commercial success abounds but civic life is destitute. The motor car and the property developer rule. The city is 'treated not as a public institution, but a private commercial venture to be carved up in any fashion that might increase the turnover and further the rise in land values' (426). Consumers abound, engrossed in the activities of getting and spending, but there are few active citizens. Cities on this model are 'man-heaps, machine-warrens, not agents of human association for the promotion of a better life' (450). The road network is the main focus of planning; living space is treated as a leftover (391-392). 'Market forces' in fact rule, not planning. The form of the metropolis is its formlessness (544):

> The form of the metropolis, then, is its formlessness, even as its aim is its own aimless expansion. Those who work within the ideological limits of this regime have only a quantitative conception of improvement: they seek to make its buildings higher, its streets broader, its parking lots more ample: they would multiply bridges, highways, tunnels, making it ever easier to get in and out of the city, but constricting the amount of space available within the city for any other purpose than transportation itself.

In the commercial city the combination of shopping and motor vehicle traffic turns every avenue into a shopping avenue and the activities of 'getting and spending' crowd out other cultural functions of the city (Illustration 35).

Cars are allowed to be space eaters (Illustration 48). When the car rules, the city dies (408):

> Already it is plain in Washington—and will become plainer as the city receives the inundation of new expressways, which recklessly spoil every view and defile every approach to its finest urban prospects—that when traffic takes precedence over all other urban functions, it can no longer perform its own role, that of facilitating meeting and intercourse. The assumed right of the private motor car to go to any place in the city and park anywhere is nothing less than a license to destroy the city. L'Enfant's plan, by its very invitation to traffic, has now proved its own worst enemy.

The notion of limits is absent. By the end of the 1500s, with the waning of the Middle Ages, the notion of limits disappeared (366):

Freed from his sense of dependence upon corporation and neighborhood, the 'emancipated individual' was dissociated and delocalized: an atom of power, ruthlessly seeking whatever power can command. With the quest for financial and political power, the notion of limits disappeared—limits on numbers, limits on wealth, limits on population growth, limits on urban expansion: on the contrary, quantitative expansion became predominant. The merchant cannot be too rich; the state cannot possess too much territory; the city cannot become too big. Success in life was identified with expansion. This superstition still retains its hold in the notion of an indefinitely expanding economy.

The idea of limits seems to have risen and fallen in cycles: strong in the earliest villages then retreating as cities and empires grew (52), strong again in the medieval period then retreating once again with the slow but steady rise of capitalism between the fifteenth and the eighteenth century.

The 'free market' is allowed to wreak havoc on the fabric of the city (415):

in the sixteenth century. What the capitalist meant by 'freedom' was escape from protection, regulation, corporate privilege, municipal boundaries, legal restrictions, charitable obligations. Each individual enterprise was now a separate entity, claiming the right to be a law unto itself, in competition with other self-sufficient particles, which put the pursuit of profit over every social obligation.

In the Middle Ages 'freedom' had meant freedom from *feudal* restrictions, freedom *for* the corporate activities of the municipality, the guild, the religious order. In the new trading cities, or Handelstädte, freedom meant freedom from *municipal* restrictions: freedom for *private* investment, for private profit and private accumulation, without any reference to the welfare of the community as a whole. The apologists for this order, from Bernard Mandeville to Adam Smith, assumed that the pursuit of individual activities deriving from greed, avarice, and lust would produce the maximum amount of goods for the community as a whole. In the period when this creed was the prevailing orthodoxy—roughly up to the third quarter of the nineteenth century, when industrial and municipal regulations began timidly to mitigate the resultant filth and illth—the rich grew richer and the poor grew poorer. This fact was expressed, with diagrammatic clarity, in the contrast between the West End and the East End of more than one great city.

The knock down and rebuild habits of the private developer, all for private profit, are a case in point. The bad city is a city of atomised individuals, seeking by their individual effort either salvation or profit, if possible a little of both, at the expense, if necessary, of their fellow citizens (343).

The isolating effects of the bad city militate against the active citizen (512, 513):

> The town housewife, who half a century ago knew her butcher, her grocer, her dairyman, her various other local tradesmen, as individual persons, with histories and biographies that impinged on her own, in a daily interchange, now has the benefit of a single weekly expedition to an impersonal supermarket, where only by accident is she likely to encounter a neighbor. If she is well-to-do, she is surrounded with electric or electronic devices that take the place of flesh and blood companions: her real companions, her friends, her mentors, her lovers, her fillers-up of unlived life, are shadows on the television screen, or even less embodied voices. She may answer them, but she cannot make herself heard: as it has worked out, this is a one-way system. The greater the area of expansion, the greater the dependence upon a distant supply center and remote control.

> The organizers of the ancient city had something to learn from the new rulers of our society. The former massed their subjects within a walled enclosure, under the surveillance of armed guardians within the smaller citadel, the better to keep them under control. That method is now obsolete. With the present means of long-distance mass communication, sprawling isolation has proved an even more effective method of keeping a population under control. With direct contact and face-to-face association inhibited as far as possible, all knowledge and direction can be monopolized by central agents and conveyed through guarded channels, too costly to be utilized by small groups or private individuals. To exercise free speech in such a scattered, dissociated community one must 'buy time' on the air or 'buy space' in the newspaper. Each member of Sub-

urbia becomes imprisoned by the very separation that he has prized: he is fed through a narrow opening: a telephone line, a radio band, a television circuit. This is not, it goes without saying, the result of a conscious conspiracy by a cunning minority: it is an organic by-product of an economy that sacrifices human development to mechanical processing.

In a well-organized community, all these technological improvements might admirably widen the scope of social life: in the disorganized communities of today, they narrow the effective range of the person. Under such conditions, nothing can happen spontaneously or autonomously—not without a great deal of mechanical assistance. Does this not explain in some degree the passiveness and docility that has crept into our existence? In the recent Caracas revolution that deposed a brutal dictator-

phenomenon. Suburbia offers poor facilities for meeting, conversation, collective debate, and common action—it favors silent conformity, not rebellion or counter-attack. So Suburbia has become the favored home of a new kind of absolutism: invisible but all-powerful.

I might be uneasy about the validity of this analysis had not the prescient de Tocqueville anticipated it long ago, in 'Democracy in America.' He sought to "trace the novel features under which despotism may appear in the world." "The first thing that strikes observation," he says, "is an uncountable number of men, all equal and alike, incessantly endeavoring to produce the petty and paltry pleasures with which they glut their lives. Each of them living apart, is a stranger to the fate of all the rest—his children and his private friends constitute to him the whole of mankind; as for the rest of his fellow-citizens, he is close to them, but he sees them not; he touches them, but he feels them not; he exists but in himself and for himself alone; and if his kindred still remain to him, he may be said at any rate to have lost his country."

(The quote from Tocqueville above is from *Democracy in America*, Volume Two, Part IV, Chapter 6, 'What kind of despotism democratic nations have to fear').

Ancient Rome is a case study and a warning for us today (242):

> From the standpoint of both politics and urbanism, Rome remains a significant lesson of what to avoid: its history presents a series of classic danger signals to warn one when life is moving in the wrong direction. Wherever crowds gather in suffocating numbers, wherever rents rise steeply and housing conditions deteriorate, wherever a one-sided exploitation of distant territories removes the pressure to achieve balance and harmony nearer at hand, there the precedents of Roman building almost automatically revive, as they have come back today: the arena, the tall tenement, the mass contests and exhibitions, the football matches, the international beauty contests, the strip-tease made ubiquitous by advertisement, the constant titillation of the senses by sex, liquor, and violence—all in true Roman style. So, too, the multiplication of bathrooms and the over-expenditure on broadly paved motor roads, and above all, the massive collective concentration on glib ephemeralities of all kinds, performed with supreme technical audacity. These are symptoms of the end: magnifications of demoralized power, minifications of life. When these signs multiply, Necropolis is near, though not a stone has yet crumbled. For the barbarian has already captured the city from within. Come, hangman! Come, vulture!

What can we do to turn a bad city into a good one?

A lot depends on the nature of the ‘we’ that does the work of transformation. In the past it has been the craft guilds (270), then the trade union movement, the co-operative movement, and ‘sensitive and intelligent souls’ who campaigned for collective sanitary facilities and regulations, and social welfare legislation (Illustration 40 and below, 494):

> Even in the heyday of Coketown, sensitive and intelligent souls could not remain long in such an environment without banding together to do something about it: they would exhort and agitate, hold meetings and form parades, draw up petitions and besiege legislators, extract money from the rich and dispense aid to the poor, founding soup kitchens and model tenements, passing housing legislation and acquiring land for parks, establishing hospitals and health centers, libraries and universities, in which the whole community played a part and benefitted.

These were active citizens, the citizens of ancient Greece being a model for us even today (165):

that we are dealing with a people unfettered by many other standard requirements of civilization, freed in an unusual degree from the busy routines of getting and spending: not given to guzzling and overdrinking, not making undue effort to secure comforts and luxuries, furnishings and upholstery: living an athletic, indeed abstemious life, conducting all their affairs under the open sky. Beauty was cheap and the best goods of this life, above all the city itself, were there for the asking.

3: THE POLIS INCARNATE

To understand the full achievement of the Hellenic polis, one must take one's eyes off the buildings, then, and look more closely at the citizen. For all the crudeness of the urban setting, as late as the fifth century, the Greek citizen had mastered Emerson's great secret: Save on the low levels and spend on the high ones. What we regard too glibly as an unfortunate handicap may in fact be partly responsible for the greatness of Athens.

The Greek citizen was poor in comforts and convenience; but he was rich in a wide variety of experiences, precisely because he had succeeded in by-passing so many of the life-defeating routines and materialistic compulsions of civilization. Partly he had done this by throwing a large share of the physical burden on slaves; but even more by cutting down on his own purely physical demands, and expanding the province of the mind. If he did not see the dirt around him, it was because beauty held his eye and charmed his ear. In Athens at least the muses had a home.

Occasionally well-advised governments step in and do some good work, such as in building the New Towns in Britain after the Second World War (Illustration 60). The Church in medieval times, for the first time in urban history, introduced hospitals, almshouses for the care of the poor and the destitute, and institutions for the care of the aged (267).

How do cities in Australia measure up?

Two-thirds of Australians live in just nine urban areas: Sydney, Newcastle - Maitland, Wollongong, Melbourne, Brisbane, Gold Coast - Tweed Heads, Sunshine Coast, Perth and Adelaide (Table 1). Nineteen per cent live in 92 urban areas ranging in population size from 10,000 (Kingaroy) to 432,000 (Canberra - Queanbeyan) — median 24,801. Only fourteen per cent live outside an urban area of 10,000 or more persons.

Table 1
Australia 2016: Population by Significant Urban Area

Urban Area	Population	Per cent
Sydney	4,446,805	19.00
Newcastle - Maitland	463,052	1.98
Wollongong	285,680	1.22
Melbourne	4,323,072	18.47
Brisbane	2,192,715	9.37
Gold Coast - Tweed Heads	624,263	2.67
Sunshine Coast	307,545	1.31
Perth	1,907,836	8.15
Adelaide	1,277,432	5.46
Other SUAs	4,330,758	18.51
Outside a SUA	3,242,738	13.86
Australia	23,401,896	100.00

Source: Gary Shapcott using Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Census, TableBuilder. From table: Persons (Place of Usual Residence) by Significant Urban Area. The Significant Urban Area (SUA) structure of the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) represents significant towns and cities of 10,000 people or more. A single SUA can represent either a single Urban Centre or a cluster of related Urban Centres.

Unfortunately, one would have to say that by and large Mumford's picture of a 'bad city' best describes Australia's cities. They aren't really cities, just man-heaps, built to support the car industry, property developers and the activities of getting and spending. More road network than city, more 'development opportunity' than home, more shopping centre than living space: that sums it up. As in ancient Rome, we have extortionate rents:

> Chris Martin at UNSW writing in *The Conversation* on 8 April 2020 stated that 'Private renters pay about A$43 billion a year in rent to another, smaller group of households: Australia's 1.3 million landlord households. A little more than half of that rental income, A$22 billion, flows right out again to banks, as interest payments on investment loans. For 60% of landlords the interest outflow, plus other property-related expenses, is greater than their rental income: they are negatively geared. For them, rental income is not about putting food on the table; it is part-funding their investment or speculation in property'.

As for building quality? Ugh! The Australian city: metropolis or necropolis? Too depressing to state the answer Mumford would give. This is a book as relevant to us today as it was sixty years ago when it was first published.

END OF NOTES