

PEOPLE AND NATURE
ORION

SPECIAL SECTION

Greening America's Cities

**What Are Cities
and Why Do We Want Them?**

by Francesca Lyman

The Organic City

by Daniel Kemmis

The New Urban Planners

by Adelheid Fischer

Restoring Boston's Landscape

by Lynda Morgenroth

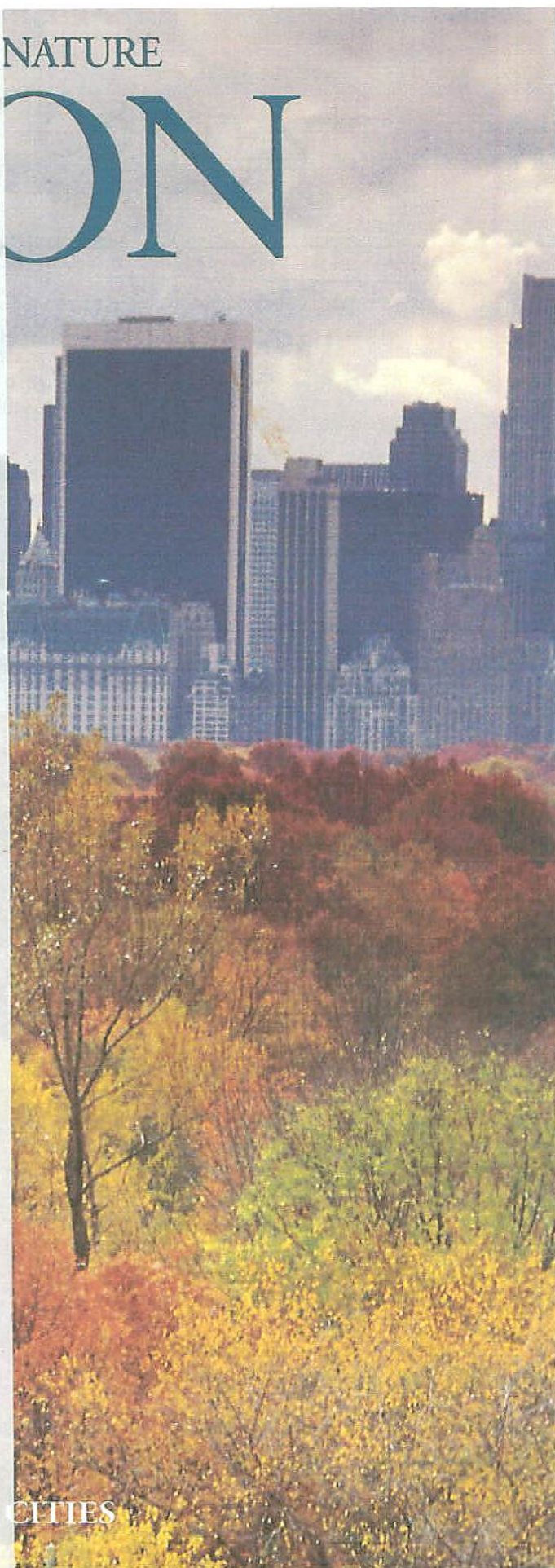
ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

"Lessons from the Wolverine":

**New Fiction from
BARRY LOPEZ**

**Ecological Verse by
VIKRAM SETH**

**Searching for the Divine:
The Poetry of
PATTIANN ROGERS**



A DREAM OF CITIES

In this special section, *Orion* explores the nature of, and the nature in, the vibrant, troubled, powerful place called "The City." Here you will find writers considering what the city is in relation to nature as a whole, and how cities are becoming better aligned with nature. To speak of the city is of course to face travails, but we also invited writers to tell us why they cherish city places. Five remarkable essays were the result—

- Francesca Lyman traces America's historical longing for "Arcady," distinguishes between the true city and "urban sprawl," and reveals some effects on the city of racism, and transportation plans driven by private interests. Chicago, New York, and Paris have been the author's cities, and she embraces them as "ecosystems—with their own life and generative power."

- Hong Kong and Flint Creek, Western cattle rings and Beijing all figure as evidence in Mayor Daniel Kemmis's view that—"the simple fact is that a city...bears to its surrounding region a natural, organic relationship." The author is a farm boy become a regional and national presence, and his perspectives open up new ways to see the land.

- Among the most influential figures on the urban landscape are architects and city planners: Adelheid Fischer introduces us to a new generation of designers who are finding more humane, more equitable, and more ecologically sustainable ways of shaping the cityscape.

- A girl who grew up making friends with city trees and feeling that "nature was not something you went to, but something you were with," Boston writer Lynda Morgenroth gives an insider's look at ways people in her famously livable city protect and cultivate green places crucial to the city's soul.

- About "A Moth Flies in Brooklyn," written by and about "a true child of the city"—we only fearlessly predict that Thomas Campanella's story will restore even the most wilted urbanite.

As always, *Orion's* writers have been invited to speak their minds in a personal way. Here, you will find passionate and idiosyncratic voices sharing memories and hopes as well as considerable learning. By their works, these writers offer glimpses of a city of nature being imagined, cajoled, and labored into reality. We wish you a good roam through its streets.



GINKGOES, LAGOONS, AND LANTERNS ONCE AND FUTURE CITIES

by Francesca Lyman

James Brown knelt down on one knee to accept the blue sequin cape of the King of Soul; then with trademark coolness, he dismissed it with a flick of his hand, before throngs of laughing, cheering fans. "It's a man's world, but it would be nothing, *nothing*, without the woman I got," he sang.

In a setting perfect for this sultry theatricality, a dazzling stage at the base of a wide bowl of green lawn lit the night sky of Atlanta. Smells of deep-fried corn fritters, chicken wings, and warm beer permeated the outdoor concert area. Staged for the first time in ten years in pavilions and tents in the heart of downtown, on the site of an abandoned office park, the three-day Midtown Music Festival drew record numbers of concertgoers from the metropolitan region. Many reclined on blankets in the grass or, like our little group, were moved to dance. A grand event of the kind that can only happen in America's big cities, the festival united old and young, rich and poor, black and white, urban and suburban, Southern and Yankee. As such it was a triumph over all the big-city blues: drugs, crime, violence, and fear. Amid the rapture of the moment, James Brown turned from his peripatetic patter and ribaldry, to sound a sober note about America's inner cities. "When grandma can't get her check cashed without worryin' about being mugged, and little sis' can't go to school without worrying about a case of rape, and you can't sit on the stoop without worrying about being the victim of a drive-by shooting, we've got a problem."

James Brown is right. We have all got a problem. Our cities are the great engines of contemporary commerce, art, and culture—places of the greatest energy, excitement, and creative exchange—but their pathology affects and implicates us all. Look at inner cities today and you find joblessness, homelessness, abandoned housing, burned-out buildings, domestic violence, drugs, crime, and the despair that comes of being locked in a *de facto* prison.

Even some urban theorists throw up their hands, describing cities' dilemmas as essentially intractable. Many larger cities are "deeply riven by ethnic divisions and chasms between rich and poor that have destroyed their ability to

unite around a conception of the common good," as Carl Abbott writes. "The irreducibility of urban problems and the failure of pluralistic competition and ethnic groups has raised the fear of a permanent urban underclass and a permanent state of impoverishment for central cities."

But are these problems "irreducible"? Or have we been approaching them the wrong way?

What Are Cities and Do We Want Them?

As a city child, I knew no wants. Growing up in Hyde Park, an inner-city neighborhood on Chicago's South Side, in the 1960s, I felt my family had the best of all things in life. Equipped with no more than a bicycle, a map, a library card, and memberships in places like The Museum of Science and Industry and The Art Institute, I found that the city was my oyster. My sisters, friends, and I knew every street and alley, hiking path and park, vacant lot and ballfield within a mile or so radius of our house. We made playhouses of ginkgo trees, and we colonized certain corners of the University of Chicago Campus, particularly a place called Botany Pond, outside the biology department. Every spot of natural vegetation was our treasure, and our outings to visit grandma in "the country," whose cornfields steadily fell to suburbia's bulldozer, or even the "forest preserves," were no match. Best of all, "The Point," a promontory reaching out into Lake Michigan, two blocks from our apartment, was our playground in every season. We learned to swim with the "polar bear club" off the Point and learned Yiddish from the neighborhood's postwar émigrés who filled the park's benches. At school (which was ninety-two percent African-American) I learned to jump double-Dutch, dance every dance necessary, and "do the Dozens."

My love for my old neighborhood and city of origin has made me wonder often about all the complicated questions: How did cities reach their present depths of social, economic, and ecological travail? Why has the fate of cities escaped being seen as one of the key issues for those who

care about quality of life, people, and nature? But perhaps one ought to pose the most basic question first: Do Americans like cities?

To observers outside our culture, Americans seem to have a love-hate relationship with their cities. Australian neighborhood organizer David Engwicht writes that many Americans and Australians share a loathing for cities and a belief in what he calls the "bush myth." "Unlike Europeans, most Anglo-Saxons do not view the city as a hothouse in which great civilizations flourish, in which individuals are nourished and grow into their fullest potential. Many people in these countries do not even like their cities." In a New York City poll in 1990, a majority of residents told pollsters they would rather be somewhere else. As Jane Jacobs wrote in her legendary critique of urban planning, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, the most influential planners of the century were descendants of the philosophy that cities are ugly, defiled places as essentially evil as Dickensian London, in need of "sorting" and "decontamination." City streets were considered disordered and environmentally harmful and lower densities more desirable. The result, she writes, was to kill the spontaneous and unique life of city neighborhoods, streets, and sidewalks: "Unstudied, unrespected, cities have served as sacrificial victims."

Of course, America has its city people, people for whom the joys of tightly knit neighborhoods, of friends and family ties, of being able to walk to work perhaps, and the energy and intellectual stimulation, presumably outweigh

town, enshrined in the American imagination. According to sociologist David Brown, this preference for small places over "urban areas" is traceable to an agrarian fundamentalism, the Jeffersonian ideal.

Despite Americans' yearnings for Arcady, however, the fact is that four out of five of us live in metropolitan areas. The real demographic trends of the last three decades reveal cities sprawling far beyond their boundaries, and the creation of new urban belts, or "edge cities," between older metropolitan areas. The effects of this have yet to be fully measured. A number of social critics fear the worst, while others hope that good is coming of these demographic shifts—like the fact that new immigrant groups will restore and culturally enliven cities.

Whatever happens, it behooves us to closely examine these migratory developments and the new life forms of built environment we have created. We need to distinguish between what cities are and what they could be ideally. Ecological philosopher Murray Bookchin believes we have confused cities with urbanization—the latter a process of uncontrolled building and sprawl which he considers a menace "to city and countryside alike."

Take Los Angeles. Seventy percent of the total land area of Los Angeles, with its highways, freeway interchanges, parking lots, and drive-in everything, is devoted to the car. Most of America is feverishly paving itself over in the same style. Urbanization has created more social fragmentation and alienation, worsened the quality of life in cities, destroyed the uniqueness of old urban traditions, and at the same time increased the "sameness" of places outside cities—making suburbs into places people like less and less. It has also vastly affected the land, decreased the efficiency of natural resources, increased road building and habitat destruction. It has turned many farms into housing tracts and shopping centers, greatly increased congestion, air pollution, water pollution, and loss of endangered species.

Yet true cities, at their best, are *more* ecological than their current alternative—the suburbs. They are more humanly scaled, more efficient in their use of land and energy, and better designed for fostering intimate human exchange. City dwellers living in apartments or townhouses squander far less energy and materials in their daily lives, are more likely to walk, and rely less on cars. City dwellers have far more opportunities to "bump into" neighbors and

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the negatives. Many Americans who move seem to gravitate to the nation's smaller cities, places like Seattle and others surveyed as getting high marks for livability. The very existence of such "livability" surveys for cities is a good sign. Historically, however, the Great American Dream has been wrapped up with suburbia, an ersatz version of the small

friends than suburbanites in their cars. Even big cities have thriving neighborhoods that are more like small places. It is no surprise that spending time in the sidewalk cafes of Paris "felt like a small town" to a biographer of the Lost Generation in postwar France. And Richard Lingeman, author of *Small Town America*, wrote that, contrary to the view that the city is the antithesis of community, "Small towns can suffer social malaise and anomie as much as the city, while in the city there are neighborhoods that retain the elusive characteristics of 'community.'"

The hope is this: to reverse the unchecked growth of sprawl, to revive the original idea of cities as a way of bringing people into better harmony with nature, and to preserve wilderness and the last open spaces.

Urbanization and its Discontents

Walking to school as a kid on Chicago's South Side meant walking through about a mile's worth of what looked like Dresden after a bombing raid—blocks of razed buildings and rubble. In the site preparation for the Urban Renewal of the 1960s (often called Negro Removal), blocks of what used to be storefronts housing little cobblers' or dressmakers' shops were facelifted out of

existence. At my young age, I was unconscious of the true meaning of the changes going on around me, being content to sift through the rubble to salvage bits of architectural ornaments. But what disappointment greeted our childlike eyes when the construction site metamorphosed: "University Apartments" didn't just take up space on the street. A concrete fortress, with cars disgorging from beneath it, it was plunked on an island in the middle of the old street, forcing the streets to flow around it like parallel moats—and pedestrians to avoid it.

Simultaneous with these earth-shaking changes in our neighborhood's environment, both sets of our grandparents were moving away from their respective city neighborhoods. Grandma Mollie couldn't wait to get her hands into the soil around her new ranch home in Elk Grove Village, advertised in the brochure she clutched in her hand as some new heaven on earth. But despite her rosy idealism, nothing could hide the disappointment on her face when the cornfield a few houses down was mowed down for more identical ranch houses.

In 1925, the French architect Le Corbusier bragged that cities were an assault upon nature. A generation later, America's most influential urban historian, Lewis Mumford, decried Le Corbusier's influential International Style with its trademark towering skyscraper at right angles with a plane of green lawn, as the most destructive influence on cities in history. What the architect envisioned as "The City in a Park" Mumford called "The City in a Parking Lot."

One of the first social critics to bemoan the condition of urbanized America, Mumford warned of what he called the *anti-city*. "The fact is that twentieth-century planning still lacks a fresh multi-dimensional image of the city," he

wrote. "What has passed for a fresh image of the city turn out to be two forms of anti-city. One of these is a multiplication of standard, de-individualized high-rise structures almost identical in form, whether they enclose offices, factories, administrative headquarters, or family apartments set in the midst of a spaghetti tangle of traffic arteries expressways, parking lots, and garages. The other is the complementary but opposite image of urban scatter and romantic seclusion often called suburban, though it has in fact broken away from such order as the nineteenth-century suburb had actually achieved.... As an agent of human interaction and cooperation, a stage for the social drama the city is rapidly sinking out of sight." Mumford's diagnosis has proven true in every respect, from urban flight to a new kind of suburban blight. And tragically, no new vision of city has yet emerged.

The American Dream of suburbia was thought to be the antidote to living in huge, over-crowded, and polluted cities. But that dispersed, low-density development pattern has turned out to be an ecological disaster, far more wasteful of land and energy than traditional high-density, compact urbanism. Eclipsed by so many other pressing environmental problems during the 1970s and 1980s, the issue of sprawl is being noticed again, with groups like World Wildlife Fund/Conservation Foundation concluding that "the automobile-dependent sprawl mandated by many suburban and rural communities is destroying America's cities and countryside, to the detriment of environmental, cultural, social and economic values."

A host of theories has been put forward to explain the steady decay of urban areas over the last half-century with mass migration of the middle and upper classes to the suburbs being named most. But as Nicholas Lemann concludes, the solution most often proposed for the crisis, so-called "economic revitalization," is the least likely to succeed. Instead of trumpeting the economic possibilities of so-called "Empowerment Zones" in the inner city, he writes, it would be better policy to simply give aid to needed social services (schools, housing, and police protection).

The demographics of urban-rural-suburban migrations give us a good picture of the rise and fall of our cities. For a century and

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a half, America has been an urbanizing culture. Between 1915 and 1930, urbanization transformed the entire United States "from a collection of rural societies into a metropolitan nation," writes Carl Abbott. Then, especially in the period after World War II, America suburbanized, initiating what has been called *the biggest migration in the history of the world*. Of the four-fifths of all Americans who live in metropolitan areas, only a small percentage live in downtown urban cores—a population that grows poorer and less educated as time goes on.

Historically, American cities grew up as centers of commercial and industrial enterprise. The power and influence of central cities has been hurt during the last few decades, with the long-term decline of manufacturing and industry, as many firms relocated in the suburbs; as minority and immigrant populations concentrate in major cities; and by weakened financial muscle with loss of federal and state funding. As Henry G. Cisneros, Secretary of HUD has written, "The outlook and prospects for the nation's cities are perhaps at their lowest point since the alarm about the national urban crisis in the 1960s."

Several key public policies have encouraged these demographic, political, and economic shifts to the suburbs. First, the Federal Housing Administration's insured home mortgages, and the Veterans Administration's government-guaranteed loans for home buyers, gave Americans strong incentives to move from cities—white home buyers, that is. African-Americans who had migrated to cities from southern farming areas found themselves unable to secure those same loans and excluded by protective covenants and exclusionary zoning. Federal transportation policies gave big subsidies to highways, while subsidies for public transit did not occur until the late '60s and '70s.

The urban crisis has been examined demographically, economically, politically, anthropologically, sociologically. But cities need to also be viewed ecologically, holistically,

and spiritually. The obsession with finding economic answers to the problem is proving futile. Far more promising might be the possibility of solving urban poverty using wholly different approaches—such as seemingly quixotic but not-impossible efforts to make cities livable again through open space, greening, and community gardens that draw neighborhoods into saving themselves. Over and over, we have seen that investing in recreation and physical beautification eases crime, vandalism, and drug use.

Although the environmental movement in many ways originated in the public health movement that started in cities at the turn of the century, cities have gotten short shrift in mainstream environmentalism. Attempts at land-use legislation in the 1970s, aimed at putting curbs on sprawl, failed—seen as antithetical to free enterprise. What environmental group could take on the Great American Dream? And, too often cities have been conceived as separate from the natural landscape. As Gary Moll of the American Forestry Association writes, "Cities could be considered the 'black holes' of the natural landscape because in them the fibers that connect nature's web have been broken."

Can there be an end to this perpetual, perceptual division? I believe, along with the Trust for Public Land, that "It's time to stop thinking of our cities as one place and nature as someplace else. Our urban centers and edges host the vibrant society of our culture. We should not have to think of them as places to escape. Bring on the green spaces, we say: the pocket gardens, the community parks, the river corridors, and the tree-lined boulevards. For those serious about saving the environment, the cities are a logical place to start."

According to Fred Kent of the Project for Public Spaces, this is a good start, but environmentalists need to do more to articulate a vision of urban development, and of suburban development in conjunction with land preservation. Historically, he says, conservationists supported a vision of low-density development over higher-density urban development, to the detriment of land and nature. "All they wanted to do was put trees all over cities," making them seem insensitive to non-vegetative concerns, intensifying their image as "elitist," Kent charges.

The most publicized threats to nature seem to be the

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most distant (global warming, rainforest destruction, ozone depletion) with little attention to the one right under our noses—the environmental impacts of metropolitan life. Leaving aside for a moment the aesthetic blight of suburbia, consider that rapid suburbanization has transformed places like the Chesapeake Bay from one of the most important fisheries in the country to one of the least. Paving over larger areas of land generates greater groundwater runoff and concentrates its toxicity; it also “forces even greater car use for most aspects of daily living, causing more air pollution and acid rain.”

Such sprawl has also been the biggest enemy of countryside. Much of the loss of farmland from the 1970s on was due to suburban development, according to Bob Wagner of the Massachusetts American Farmland Trust. Farmers realized, says Wagner, that “You could make more money growing houses than cows.” Every year in the United States, more than one million acres of productive farmland is consumed by urban sprawl.

A Green City Ethos

One of my favorite haunts as a child in Chicago was Jackson Park, a large swath of land between Lake Shore Drive that runs along the lakefront and Stony Island Avenue, the street I'd take to get to Hyde Park High School. Both the park and my high school had changed in character since the days their favorite son, comedian Steve Allen, had gone there. Despite reports of muggings, we'd brave the park on bikes, often with friends, and we would picnic along the lagoon. Saturdays, we took sailing lessons at the boat club on the lagoon and watched people fishing in the lake behind the museum. To go swimming was just a five-minute walk to the Fifty-seventh Street Beach.

The image of the park I treasured most, however, was the one described to me by my mother, recalling her childhood memories. Thirty years before, when my mother was a girl, the park had a Japanese tea-garden; Japanese paper lanterns were hung along the lagoon and passengers went out on sampans to simulate the taste of the Orient—all the rage at the time. Back then, Chicago families went promenading in their Sunday best along the little foot paths and foot bridges.

The way we have gone about building our cities and towns has traditionally embodied our highest technological achievements and social ideals. Not the least of these have been the great city parks built in the heart of old cities, many laid out like private estates. As Lewis Mumford noted, “Today our appreciation of the biological function of open spaces should be ever deeper...now that the air itself around every urban center is filled with scores of cancer-producing substances.” Open spaces, he noted, also have a profound social function.

Like other critics of urban society, Mumford feared urbanization was becoming a prime enemy of the natural world. He railed against urbanites who deserted to cities for the suburbs, and against planners who failed to take this

desertion “as an instruction to rehabilitate the central city.” In the early 1960s he advocated a whole series of steps to restore in-city parks and natural topography, as well as greenbelts outside cities. “In the cities of the future, ribbons of green must run through every quarter, forming a continuous web of garden and mall, widening at the edge of the city into protective greenbelts, so that landscape and garden will become an integral part of urban no less than rural life, for both weekday and holiday uses.”

Today, a vision of a green city is emerging. Inherent in this vision is a holistic critique of traditional urban planning and an approach that looks at cities in a unified, whole-systems way. There's also a renewed look at existing parks, trees, and other natural features that can be strengthened or restored (In Berkeley, California, for example, activists dug up from beneath concrete an old streambed, Strawberry Creek, and turned it into a thriving park.)

The beginnings of a holistic approach were taken, in different ways, by Jane Jacobs and Lewis Mumford: Jacob took pains to study the art of social behavior in cities—the subtle relationships and exchanges taking place between storekeepers, people walking and children playing. Mumford likened the city, with its many facets and interrelationships, to a symphony.

People dedicated to the idea of an “ecocity” are bringing cities into closer relation with nature. Ecocity proponents say that we should look at cities as *ecosystems*—with their own life and generative power. Fred Kent, of Project For Public Spaces in New York, describes walking down city street as being like walking down a path in the rainforest, so rich and varied is the human ecology.

A mix of architects, planners, landscape designers, community organizers, and sympathetic neighborhood leaders, the ecocity movement represents a desire for cities to become healthier and more livable, as well as to fulfill their age-old functions as centers of culture, art, and politics. The themes were laid out at The First International Ecocity Conference, held in Berkeley in February 1990. More than seven hundred attendees from around the world convened to discuss the special problems of cities and to “submit solutions with the goal of shaping cities upon ecological principles.”

Integral to this movement is the idea that planners and engineers had become too centered on the car. David

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Engwicht writes that engineers were obsessed with the **modes of transportation, not why people need to travel.** "The myth? Freedom lies in motion. But the ability to move does not necessarily equate with freedom." Meanwhile, a new kind of tyranny has arisen in suburbia, in which people are unable to get anywhere except by driving.

Why has ecology had so insignificant a place in mod-

ern cities? Gary Moll writes, "Most of the people who design and build cities have successfully isolated themselves from the natural sciences and make no attempt to cultivate an even superficial relationship." Yet it is just that holistic, interdisciplinary perspective that is needed today, says Ted Krueger, a professor of architecture at Columbia University, who faults the architectural and planning community for never seeking perspectives outside its own professionals. "If you organized a task force to look at New York City...the typical response would be to invite politicians, economists, planners, social scientists. Why not bring in a guy from computer graphics who could do a high-speed graphic of migration and demographics over time? Or why not bring in an ecologist. Even better, a pathologist." A pathologist, he says, might notice that the computer graphic drawn bears a similarity to the behavior of a cancer cell or some other pathological process.

continued to be served by farm areas that edged their borders. By reconnecting cities to farms through greenmarkets, one can simultaneously use big-city restaurants to subsidize the preservation of outlying farms and bring a new sense of city neighborhood around the markets.

A second need is to drastically reshape transportation and curb the car and the traffic congestion and pollution it causes. Richard Register says we ought to be building for "access by proximity, not transportation." Architects and urban planners, such as the "New Urbanists," are returning to old-fashioned ideas of mixed-use town planning in which homes, shops, offices, and public buildings are all intentionally built closely together to avoid the need for transport.

Thirdly, certain elementary ecological principles need to be applied to city planning and management. One principle is that land only has a limited "carrying capacity." Richard Register again: "Given the climate and soils of an environment, the resident plants and animals can extract only so much water, minerals and energy in creating their bodies, the collective biomass." Another limit is the rate at which the total population can reprocess that biological material into usable biological resources through decomposition and soil building.

Visions of a green city vary from place and person, but there are common threads. Most blueprints for an ecological city are based on the traditional urban model—diverse, compact, and cohesive. They are human-scaled like old-fashioned American small towns or European cities with their pedestrian-scaled piazzas and squares. New visions protect natural ecological values, and there is an interest in reviving homegrown agriculture, in restoring wetlands, shorelines, and urban parks, as well as efforts to save urban wildlife by establishing "greenways" (strips of contiguous natural land that sustain wildlife) and "blueways" (biologically vital waterways).

Integral to these visions is a set of social behaviors as well: conservationist habits that encourage recycling and avoid waste. There is also a renewed sense of the uniqueness of particular places, a new appreciation of regional local plants and foods. Cities are also being viewed as political entities capable of moving in their own self-interest.

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City
Zen

What are the elements of a new kind of urban development that respects people, nature, and citizenship?

One of the first needs is to rediscover the city's place in its natural, regional surroundings. Peter Berg of Planet Drum speaks in terms of cities' connections to bioregions. Up until a few decades ago, most American cities

article in this issue) housing is grouped around public space that provides a locus for civic concern and local commercial uses, a return to the model of a small-town community or a city neighborhood. Ecocity activists, however, go much further in their proposals. David Engwicht, for example, proceeds from the assumption that we need to rebuild existing cities and neighborhoods on an ecocity ethos. "In planning cities so they promote a rich diversity of exchange, it is not new techniques for fine-tuning the machine that are necessary, but a whole new ethos—a new way of looking at cities and people that inhabit them. Viewing the city as a machine for economic production will always lead to dehumanizing of the inhabitants." He also proposes such guidelines as defining neighborhood boundaries, defining a neighborhood hub, enriching neighborhoods to become as self-sufficient as possible, and building strong street life.

Restoring Sense of Place

As a seven-year-old spending a year in a French lycée, I learned that "*Paris est la plus belle ville du monde*"—*chauvinisme* at its most extreme, drilled into French children as much as the Pledge of Allegiance is made sacred to American children. By the end of the year, after listening to lilting French and eating French food, it was hard to go back to flat Illinois accents and Wonderbread

sandwiches. The French could be annoying in their punctiliousness, but I came away with a tremendous admiration for the French love and fealty for home and country. Years later, I strolled about the Place des Vosges, watching Parisians conversing, avoiding stepping on the grass (which by custom, only children could roll and play upon), I thought: Central Park is wonderful, but could such gentleness and respect be learned there too? And one night, at the night of *La Fête de Musique*, when minstrels and singers of all stripes joined in a street-singing and dancing tradition that went back centuries, I could think of no experience in any American city (certainly not any Memorial Day parade) quite like it. Everyone sang along, and even my two-year-old son was swept up by a wandering troubadour and made part of the ritual.

What we can learn from these old-city sources is a whole host of new ways of seeing cities: as organic entities with their own, unique life that comes of time and traditions. We need to claim for America the long historical tradition that reveres and honors cities for their sense of inherent drama, and their sense of community and place. Such qualities can be had in a city, a suburb, a small town, but they must be fostered and nurtured. What we can learn from older views about cities, argues Murray Bookchin, is a great sense of what makes up "communities of the heart." Premodern cities in Sumer, Greece, and elsewhere, he finds, share "moral, often spiritual attributes with deep roots in a natural environment." Our own civic concern, says Bookchin, "could assume a highly spiritual form such as we find in the Jews' reverence for Jerusalem or a highly ethical form as in the Greeks' admiration for Athens."

In order to save cities we need to have a vision of them as places we can love. That vision goes beyond, for lack of a better term, a Woody Allen view of a city, from atop a penthouse with the skyline shimmering in splendor. It has to encompass all the elements of the city organism. Many have been the torch songs to New York City—my own closest city these days—with its miraculous mix of street theater and style, exhilaration and exhaustion, heartlessness and compassion. That vision encompasses a sense of humor necessary for survival: when subways shut down because there is debris—or a dead body—on the tracks, a panache to meet head-on any of the million adventures that await when you step out of your apartment. A current radio ad says, "A school of gefilte fish was sighted for the first time in the East River...nothing will surprise New Yorkers." Perhaps not even the growing cadre of "green city" advocates who envision restoring its salt-water marshes and striped bass, building "greenways" and "blueways," and turning the neglected ghettos into gardens.

On a drive through the Bronx one day, a friend told me she was getting ready to ask her friend (who was driving) to stop so she could check out the bargains on T-shirts and jeans, perhaps shop for vegetables at one of the food stalls. Before she could ask, the door locks clicked down in unison and the windows were rolling up, as her suburbanite friend sped off in panic. "Oh my god, we're lost. Where's the Bronx Zoo?" she cried, her hands gripping the steering wheel of the station wagon. "Why didn't we stay on the parkway?" But this was not some crack-infested, desolate urban wasteland, but a vibrant city street with markets and one little shop after another, teeming with busy families and children.

Before the inner city was something we drove through in armor-plated tanks, it was a real place. Americans can make it that place again. ●

Francesca Lyman, who is writing a book on cities and the environment, is the author of The Greenhouse Trap (Beacon Press, 1990). She teaches writing at The Cooper Union college in New York City.

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only children could
roll and play upon),
I thought: Central
Park is wonderful,
but could such gentle-
ness and respect be
learned there too?*