Jane Jacobs and the Knowledge Problem in Cities

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I. Urbanization and Its Problems

Transport a person from the 21st century to any large city two centuries ago and what will she notice first? One of the first things she would probably notice is the stench. The world reeked of the unwashed, animal waste, sewage, smoke, rotting offal, and piles of uncollected garbage – truly, the wretched refuse of civilization.

Paul Seabright (2004) quotes modern writer Patrick Susskind (1988), who vividly describes the atmosphere of early Paris:

> In the period of which we speak [18th century Paris], there reigned in the cities a stench barely conceivable to us modern men and women. The streets stank of manure, the courtyards of urine, the stairwells stank of moldering wood and rat droppings, the kitchens of spoiled cabbage and mutton fat; the unaired parlors stank of stale dust, the bedrooms of greasy sheets, damp featherbeds, and the pungently sweet aroma of chamber pots…People stank of sweat and unwashed clothes; from mouths came the stench of rotting teeth…The rivers stank, the market places stank, the churches stank, it stank beneath the bridges and in the palaces. The peasant stank as did the priest, the apprentice stank as did the master's wife, the whole of the aristocracy stank, even the king himself stank, stank as a rank lion, and the queen like an old goat, summer and winter.

You get the picture. Perhaps exaggerated a little; or maybe not at all.

Although the messiness of urban life has probably been taken for granted since ancient times, the rise in human material well-being and greater literacy and communication since the 1800s (McCloskey ????) played a major role in finally transforming the urge to address negative externalities into municipal policy. This essay addresses the role and the limits of urban planning based on my interpretation of the great urbanist, Jane Jacobs.

In order to understand the role and limits of urban planning and urban interventionism, we need to look more closely at the underlying reasons behind those tradeoffs, reasons that center on the "knowledge problem" (or what Jacobs (1961: 418) refers to as "locality knowledge") and the way that problem might or might not be solved. We will see that effective solutions to urban problems hinge crucially on the extent to which we appreciate the nature and significance of the knowledge problem and that, in fact, the failure of planning and interventionism in general (Ikeda 1998) is a direct consequence of the failure to appreciate or even to acknowledge the existence of that problem.

II.1 Constructivism and "Cartesian Rationalism"

I write this not as an authority or expert on the concept of rationality. I arrived at my understanding of rationality, rationalism, and reason primarily from the work of F.A.

Hayek, knowing full well that other sources – e.g. Popper, Oakshott – are equally valid starting points. Hayek defines "constructivism," or what he elsewhere (Hayek 1967: 85) refers to as "Cartesian rationalism," as "the innocent sounding formula that, since man has himself created the institutions of society and civilization, he must also be able to alter them at will so as to satisfy his desires or wishes" (Hayek 1978: 3).

Jacobs's critique of mid-20th-century urban planning focuses on the absence of planners' appreciation for street-level human interactions and the actual influence that the built environment has in enabling or undermining those interactions (e.g. social capital and "webs of communication"). Those interactions form an overall invisible social infrastructure that is not the result of any person's or group's rational, deliberate design but the outcome of myriad unpredictable contacts that take place in public space. In short, Jacobs sees the living city as a spontaneous order, or to use her terminology a "problem of organized complexity" (Jacobs 1961: 429). This means that a city thrives when the individual plans of its inhabitants collectively, but unconsciously, contribute to the unplanned emergence of complex and dynamic social networks. It is in this sense that, as she puts it, "Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody" (Jacobs 1961: 238).

In both Jacobs's critique of centralized urban planning and the economic critique of collectivist economic planning, planners ignore the "knowledge of the particular circumstances of time and place" (Hayek 1948: 80) that individuals possess within the context of their daily lives. In the economic critique of central planning the absence of meaningful money prices, owing to the absence of market transactions of property rights ordinary people cannot determine the relative scarcity of resources and rationally calculate profits and losses (Lavoie 1985). In Jacobs's critique it is the failure of local planning authorities to understand how the design of public spaces impacts the fine-grained and intricate interactions among people who, for the most part, are strangers to one another.

> Among those responsible for cities, at the top, there is much ignorance. This is inescapable, because big cities are just too big and too complex to be comprehended in detail from any vantage point— even if this vantage point is at the top— or to be comprehended by any human; yet detail is of the essence (Jacobs 1961: 121-2).

These are different kinds of contextual knowledge, but they are the same category of knowledge. The problems identified by economists in the early 20th century are robust in the sense that they apply *mutatis mutandis* to the knowledge problem that Jacobs identified in the mid-20th century. Where her critique differs from the market-process version, they tend to complement rather than conflict.

This led Jacobs, in the famous last chapter of her 1961 classic to identify a living city, following Warren Weaver, as a "problem of organized complexity." Here is how Gene Callahan and I summarize Weaver's three categories of scientific problems.

> The first are *problems of simplicity*, which deal with situations involving a very few independent variables, in which the rules of ordinary algebra are appropriate. The second level are *problems of disorganized complexity*, which concern situations involving so many independent variables that their interactions produce random variations. Here formal statistical analysis is appropriate. Finally, there are problems of *organized complexity* that lie between the first two kinds of problems. This is the realm of social orders in which the movement of individual elements are not predictable but overall, non-statistical patterns are discernable. Jacobs's and Weaver's warning is that the methods appropriate to solving one problem should not be used for the solution of the others (Callahan & Ikeda 2014: 17; emphasis added).

The problem, according to Jacobs is that "the theorists of conventional modern city planning [circa 1961] have consistently mistaken cities as problems of simplicity and of disorganized complexity, and have tried to analyze and treat them thus" (Jacobs 1961: 435). Which boils down to treating a living city as a machine completely comprehensible to the human mind, much as an experienced architect may design an efficient apartment building; or as one might approach the purely problem of calculating the optimal amount of light and air necessary to maintain the health of an "average person."

Unlike either problems of simplicity or of disorganized complexity, a city as a problem of organized complexity can be predictable only insofar as we can discern general patterns rather than specific outcomes. There is in fact no assurance that any particular pattern will emerge, no matter how much we want it to; only that these conditions tend over time to create the an overall sense of safety that encourages people to interact, informally in more or less creative ways. What emerges in that process no one can say with complete accuracy. If you could, it would not be a problem of organized complexity; it would not be a living city. To view a city therefore as anything other than a problem of organized complexity, or in our terminology a spontaneous order, is to risk missing *the* essential quality of urban life, and indeed all genuinely social life.

Moreover, policies based on such a misunderstanding have little hope of attaining their intended goal, except perhaps by accident. Rather, the outcomes of such ignorant policy-making can and have indeed resulted in tragic, unintended consequences.

Jacobs was not alone among urbanists in characterizing a living city in this way. Indeed, she acquired much of her understanding of cities from researchers such as William Whyte (1988), who carefully observed and analyzed the various and subtle ways in

which ordinary people use public spaces, such as plazas, from which he drew important conclusions for the design and placement of public plazas.

Christopher Alexander, whom Jacobs admires, deciphers the "pattern language" shared by successful spaces in general, private and public.

> A building or a town will only be alive to the extent that it is governed by the timeless way. *It is a process which brings order out of nothing but ourselves; it cannot be attained, but it will happen of its own accord, if we will only let it in* (Alexander 1979: ix; emphasis original).

Ken-ichi Sasaki's discussion of the "urban tactility" one experiences at street level when in a public space highlights an indispensible dimension to the urban experience. As we become familiar with a place, what we feel becomes more important than what we see (Sasaki 1998: 36).

"Tactile knowledge" is what we feel in the presence of an object: the smells of a street, the texture of a building, the grade of a hill. It is the knowledge gained though contact or direct experience with an event or environment, and is related to Jacobs's concept of "locality knowledge" as well as to F.A. Hayek's "local knowledge." The bias in urban policy toward the car and away from the pedestrian has profoundly shifted our experience of the city from the tactile to the visual, making it in the processes duller. This in turn has discouraged the formation of social capital, which is the foundation for tactile/local knowledge and its utilization, because there will be less meaningful contact as people shun dull places.

Similarly, Kevin Lynch describes the way in which people spontaneously come to a common understanding of their image of a city, one that is useful for navigating the complex urban environment.

> There seems to be a public image of any given city which is the overlap of many individual images. Or perhaps there is a series of public images each held by some significant number of citizens. Such group images are necessary if an individual is to operate successfully within his environment and to cooperate with his fellows. Each individual picture is unique, with some content that is rarely or never communicated, yet it approximates the public image, which in different environments is more of less compelling, more or less embracing (Lynch 1960).

What all these approaches have in common – Jacobs, Whyte, Alexander, Sasaki, and Lynch – is an understanding that for planners to successfully plan they need to observe and appreciate the intricate ways in which people see and interact with the urban environment; something that completely escapes planners who treat a city as a problem of simplicity or of disorganized complexity.

II.2 The Consequences for Urban Design

In *Death and Life* Jacobs identifies a number of consequences of failing to see a city as a problem of organized complexity and of using a rationalist constructivist approach. But I believe three are especially important for the analysis of urban planning and design.

Border vacuums

Jacobs defines a "border vacuum," as "a single massive or stretch-out use of territory (Jacobs 1961: 257). A single, massive use in a neighborhood or district – e.g. a river, a park, an enormous residential or office complex, a sports stadium, a parking lot, a university campus – means that a people crowd into and dominate that area only during certain times of the day or on certain days of the week. When not used, however, it becomes a border vacuum is largely devoid of people, making it less interesting and potentially dangerous. The influence of a border vacuum radiates from that "great blight of dullness" to the surrounding streets and public spaces that surround it, making those adjacent spaces duller and less attractive in turn. It may take some distance before livelier streets can offset the forces of dullness that a border vacuum generates.[1] In her time, although critical of private endeavors as well, Jacobs took particular aim at the massive projects that were funded by taxation, such as urban renewal, monument building, and housing projects: "Extraordinary governmental financial incentives have been required to achieve this degree of monotony, sterility and vulgarity" (Jacobs 1961: 7).

Cataclysmic money

> Cataclysmic money pours into an area in concentrated form, producing drastic changes. As an obverse of this behavior, cataclysmic money sends relatively few trickles into localities not treated to cataclysm. Putting it figuratively, insofar as their effects on most city streets and districts are concerned, … [cataclysmic money behaves] like manifestations of malevolent climates beyond the control

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[1] This may be the place to forward a hypothesis of mine that the farther away from a border vacuum you go the better the quality of the restaurants gets. That is because the high concentration of persons using a border vacuum, say a civic center, the majority of users have only a short time to have lunch, so that restaurants will cater to higher-volume, quickly prepared meals. The capital requirements, especially human capital, are generally too great for such establishments to also offer a lower-volume of diners a better-quality menu. Farther from a border vacuum these lunch-time pressures are thus lower and, ceteris paribus, we would expect the quality of restaurants to be higher. While I have not yet conducted a rigorous test analysis of this hypothesis, my casual empiricism supports it over a range of locations and for different kinds of border vacuums.

of man— affording either searing droughts or torrential, eroding floods (Jacobs 1961: 293).

As a practical matter, cataclysmic money that floods into (and also out of) an area often produces border vacuums. With budget constraints funded in whole or in part by government taxation, public projects or public-private partnerships that rely on the power to tax and eminent domain tend to be much larger-scale than purely private, market-based projects. As the scale of a project or plan increases (or a design becomes more detailed) the mind of the planner increasingly substitutes for, rather than complements, the spontaneous complexity of a socio-economic order driven by many independent, experimenting minds.

Visual order

The way an area looks, particularly from a distance, is less important than the way it is perceived, and following Sasaki, felt, up close and personal. A city should be legible, first and foremost, by the people who live in it and not by the planner or designer. But "there is a basic esthetic limitation on what can be done with cities" (Jacobs 1961: 372). And that esthetic limitation is imposed on the conscientious planner because the beauty of a living city is in the eyes of the inhabitants who behold it on the street, not of the planner or designer who wants to shape the city in according to a pet image, either in whole or in part.

Which is not to say that Jacobs sees no role for active urban planning, or even for an ideal of visual order, as long as the planner respects the nature of a living city.

The first kind of visual order often arises when planners impose a visual uniformity such as we find in much of Corbusier's work (Jacobs 1961: 229). The second kind of visual order might be what we find in Disney World (Ibid). Both of these are massive builds built at the same time by the same architects, designers, or planners – or by people who anyway grow up under the same set of cultural and educational influences – so that the style of their product, no matter how hard they try, all reflect a temporal or stylistic homogeneity.

> There is a quality even meaner than outright ugliness or disorder, and this meaner quality is the dishonest mask of pretended order, achieved by ignoring or suppressing the real order that is struggling to exist and to be served (Jacobs 1961: 15).

The third "hopeful" kind of visual order emerges spontaneously over time and from a variety of planners, inspired by different things. Again, like capital, the elements of the city need to complement each other, not be homogenous or perfectly substitutable for one another. Visual diversity can then generate order by enabling a city's inhabitants to

read and navigate, a la Lynch, its public spaces; without that visual diversity navigating public space would be like trying to find your way through a snow storm.

The diversity of land use (and of the skills, knowledge, and tastes of the city's inhabitants) enable experimentation among a diverse set of elements, and that on-going process usually isn't clean and attractive, at least not for all people at all times.

III. Constructivist Theories of Urban Planning & Design

As in all Utopias, the right to have plans of any significance belonged only to the planners in charge (Jacobs 1961: 17).

The following are brief sketches of major planning theorists whose work reflected the emerging high-modernist ethos of urban planning and design, and whose influence on the profession as a whole is unquestioned.

Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903)

Olmstead is one of the giants of landscape architecture and planning. Contrary to the trend among many of the urban and regional planners who followed, Olmstead sought not to scatter inhabitants of the modern city across the wilderness but to bring nature into the city in order to promote well-being, both physical and mental (Olmstead 1970: 339). Olmstead relies on estimations of such variables as the cubic feet of sunshine and fresh air that typical urbanites require, and the square-footage they need to avoid the kind of mental stress that comes just from walking from place to place on city streets.

> We may understand these better if we consider that whenever we walk through the denser part of a town, to merely avoid collision with those we meet and pass upon the sidewalks, we have to constantly watch, to foresee, and to guard against their movements. This involves a consideration of their intentions, a calculation of their strength and weakness, which is not so much for their benefit as our own. Our minds are thus brought into close dealings with other minds without any friendly flowing toward them, but rather a drawing from them (1970: 338).

Olmstead means to relax this hustle and bustle so that the city, and its image, does not disfigure the human body and psyche, much as Georg Simmel discusses the impact of the market economy and the exacting demands of time schedules (Simmel 1903). Not for Olmstead is Jacobs's "eyes on the street." He speaks disparagingly of neighborhood where you see people "a half a dozen sitting together on the door-steps or, all in a row, on the curb-stones, with their feet in the gutter; driven out of doors by the closeness within; mothers among them anxiously regarding their children who are dodging about at their play, among the noisy wheels on the pavement" (Olmstead 1970: 342). Here, parks and trees are desperately needed. "Air is disinfected by sunlight and foliage"

(1970: 339) and parks offer space for much-needed recreation "strongly counteractive to the special, enervating conditions of the town" (1970: 340).

But Jacobs not only appreciates, as Olmstead does not, the scene as a "street ballet" but she warns that "parks are volatile places" that can easily become border vacuums. You cannot count on a park of any size to automatically complement the character of the neighborhood or district in which it is placed. Unless you take great care in its design and location, a park will drain the life out of an area.[2] In the 1960s and 1970s Central Park itself threatened did indeed notoriously decline, giving the Park and the City of New York a reputation for danger and dereliction that it still has to many, mostly non-New Yorkers, despite being much less deserved these days. With the greater economic vitality and growing population, Central Park is today at least as safe as it has ever been.

Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928)

Jacobs's characterization of Ebenezer Howard, the early and influential utopian urban planner, is typical of her view of the urban planners of her day.

> Howard looked at the living conditions of the poor in late-nineteenth-century London, and justifiably did not like what he smelled or saw or heard. He not only hated the wrongs and mistakes of the city, he hated the city and thought it an outright evil and an affront to nature that so many people should get themselves into an agglomeration. His prescription for saving the people was to do the city in (Jacobs 1961: 17).

Howard, who developed and popularized the concept of "Garden City," evidently found much inspiration in the writings of the American economist, Henry George (of land-value tax fame), who following William Cobbett, likened a great city, such as London, to a tumor (George 1879: Loc 21655-21659).

Howard believed that the town and the country of his time, particularly of his English homeland, were each a mixed blessing. The city is rich with opportunity of all kinds and full of liveliness, but crowded and polluted; while the country is full of healthful, natural beauty but life is dull, isolated, and poor. His answer was his so-called "town-country magnate" which, it should come as no great surprise, would contain the best of town and country and shed the worst of each, "in which all the advantages of the most energetic and active town life, withal the beauty and delight of the country, may be secured in perfect combination (Howard 1998: 247).

His carefully designed, utopian Garden City consisted of 6,000-acre plots, segmented into functionally divided zones and imprinted with enormous roadways that formed concentric circles, and linked with similar settlements by highways and high-speed rail

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[2] Jacobs devotes her entire Chapter 5 in *Death and Life* to parks.

lines. His ambition was evidently to empty the great cities that had formed under industrial capitalism and disperse their populations across these interconnected pinwheels, each limited to a population of about 30,000 persons, that in the aggregate represents a grand, integrated Garden City. Residents live and work within a carefully subdivided matrix of lots averaging 20 feet by 130 feet with plenty of open space, today we might call them "green belts," for parks, nature, and farmland, that focuses the relatively thin population within pre-determined districts (1898: 315).

While Garden City looks, and indeed is, highly constructivist in concept, Howard was no socialist. Nevertheless, according to Jacobs, Howard's concept of the market, consistent with the static approaches to utopias of the day, was hardly dynamic and entrepreneurial in our sense:

> He conceived of commerce in terms of routine, standardized supply of goods, and as serving a self-limited market. He conceived of good planning as a series of static acts; in each case the plan must anticipate all that is needed and be protected, after it is built, against any but the most minor subsequent changes (Jacobs 1961: 19).

The appeal of the Garden City is like that of the modern planned community, with none of the grittiness of a city of innovation and radical change, and has had a powerful and continuing influence on urban planning.

Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1559)

Where Howard dreams of creating a "town-country magnate" Wright envisions a kind of techno-suburban magnate founded upon "three major innovations": the "motor car," "electrical inter-communication," and "standardized – machine-shop – production" (Wright 1935: 377-8). What he called "Broadacre" would somehow "automatically end unemployment and all its evils forever" (1935: 379).

While he would evidently devolve government down to the level of the county, it would hardly be laissez-faire but instead highly authoritarian: "In the hands of the state, but by way of the county, is all redistribution of land – a minimum of one acre going to the childless family and more to the larger family by the state" (Wright 1935: 378). As Wright envisions it, on their one-acre plots, individuals liberated from the constraints of density by distance-annihilating technology, would build their single-level, low-cost Usonia houses out of cinder block. All of this would be administered by the wise and benevolent hand of the architect: "The agent of the state in all matters of land allotment or improvement, or in matters affecting the harmony of the whole, is the architect" (Wright 1935: 378). Change must be carefully, artfully controlled.

Charels-Edouard Jeanneret a.k.a. Le Corbusier (1887-1969)

Olmstead wanted to bring the country into the city, Howard to decentralize the city to low densities, and Wright to transform the city into a techno-suburb. Le Corbusier, like Olmstead, sought the greening and opening up (and tidying up) of the city, not by decentralizing it but by hyper-densification. Le Corbusier seeks to achieve this "by constructing a theoretically water-tight formula to arrive a the fundamental principles of modern town planning" (Le Corbusier 1929: 368-9). Those principles include what he refers to as site, population, density, lungs/green open spaces, the street, and traffic. Drawing on Howard and Olmstead, Le Corbusier intends to make cities both greener, more spacious, and denser (Le Corbusier 1929: 370). For him, the city is essentially a problem of two independent variables: How do you decongest a city center while increasing its density? He aims to achieve these seemingly contradictory objectives by constructing "machines for living": super-tall offices and somewhat shorter residences – his famous "towers in a park" – that populate his "Radiant City." The result is a population density of 1,200 persons per acre with two-thirds fewer streets than Paris,[3] and where streets are separated by an astonishing four-hundred yards creating his famous "superblocks" (Le Corbusier 1929: 371)!

> Furthermore, his conception, as an architectural work, had a dazzling clarity, simplicity and harmony. It was so orderly, so visible, so easy to understand. It said everything in a flash, like a good advertisement (Jacobs 1961: 23).

This is a city made for covering macro distances at very high speed. Indeed, Corbusier is explicit that his design perspective at ground-level is that of a person in a "fast car" (Le Corbusier 1929: 374) speeding down one of the above-ground super-highways as row after row of symmetrical skyscrapers whizz past her window. The problem, of course, is how people will travel the micro distances between such widely spaced and segregated primary uses. And as some have noted, where to park all those cars and how to address the resulting pollution were details that escaped his attention (Hall 1988: 209).

The architect Ken-ichi Sasaki's (1998) exploration of "urban tactility" is relevant here.

> The most important factor in the aesthetics of the city is not visuality but tactility. I consider visuality as the viewpoint of the visitor to a city, and tactility as that of its inhabitants (Sasaki 1998: 36).

In contrast Radiant City is almost purely visual and that very stark, indeed. There is no tactility inside a car, no perspective from the street except when going exceptionally fast speeds, because the meaningfulness of the urban environment, its legibility and detail, is the bird's-eye perspective of the designing architect's or of the first-time visitor and not that of the actual inhabitants of the city.

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[3] Compare this with the Upper East Side of Manhattan, one of the densest districts in New York City, with 185 persons per acre.

From a Jacobsian perspective, what would people find visually and tactilely interesting in the broad, homogenous superblock grids of Le Corbusier's "City of Three Million" and make them want linger in public spaces and informal contact with strangers? How do Le Corbusier's super-high densities, without short navigable blocks and nearby mixed primary uses, enable people in to serve as the eyes on the street and form the spontaneous social networks and webs of communication that foster the trust in public spaces, which for centuries have done the heavy lifting of providing safety and security on the street? Without cheap, worn-down buildings, where would poor young people with fresh ideas get their start? Will people be so content in their high-modernist residences, separated by great, unwalkable distances from their jobs and recreation (their necessaries, conveniences, and amusements) that they would simply and inexplicably behave in a trusting, civil manner toward one another? Or is formal policing and monitoring supposed to substitute adequately for the social capital that great cities have historically relied upon? Or does he assume that all the inhabitants of Radian City all just nice people?

In Le Corbusier's Radiant City there is no wiggle room for anything as unpredictable, seemingly chaotic, and messy as a living city to emerge. Not surprisingly then, "he came to believe in the virtue of centralized planning, which would cover not merely city-building but every aspect of life" (Hall 1988: 210). For Le Corbusier, border vacuums, cataclysmic money, and pretended visual order combine in spectacular ways. According to Peter Hall, "the evil that Le Corbusier did lives after him…."

> Ideas forged in the Parisian intelligentsia of the 1920s, came to be applied to the planning of working-class housing in Sheffield and St. Louis, and hundreds of other cities too, in the 1950s and 1960s; the results were at best questionable, at worst catastrophic (Hall 1988: 204).

But these failings are not in Le Corbusier, alone. All of the schemes for urban design outlined here combine the same three errors on a huge scale.

Jacobs's problem with all of these visionaries is not so much that they are grandiose. The problem is that they don't even begin to grasp the nature of cities or their significance. Rather than having distilled, through close observation of how people in a great city actually live in it, they instead treated the city as a problem of simplicity or disorganized complexity rather than as a problem of organized complexity or spontaneous order. They leave no significant space for unpredictable improvisation save in the ways and directions in which they dictate: "As in all Utopias, the right to have plans of any significance belonged only to the planners in charge (Jacobs 1961: 17). Only the planners, not ordinary people, are permitted to experiment and to fail.

VI. Concluding Thoughts

Urbanization causes unique problems unknown and hard to imagine in non-urban settings. A great city's problems, its messiness, is an unavoidable product of ordinary

people trying to better their situation when knowledge is imperfect. Experiment is necessary in that case, but experiment entails trial-and-error, disappointment, and *apparent* chaos. A city is creative not only because it is able to successfully address most of those problems in unpredictable ways – which is the result as well as the cause of emergent social orders – but because a creative city actually *causes* the problems that it needs solve. Novel problems, novel solutions. An organism without problems is dead.

This chapter focused on large-scale constructivist responses to the problems that many believe are caused by urbanization. It analyzed and evaluated those responses from a Jacobsian perspective, in which the worst errors of urban planning and policy-making stem from treating a complex, dynamic city as either a problem of simplicity or disorganized complexity rather than one of organized complexity.

The designs of Howard, Le Corbusier, Wright all reflect a rationalist constructivist mindset in which the designer-architect-planners impose a comprehensive vision onto the living flesh of a city – or attempt to create an entirely new settlement out of whole cloth – in just this way. They err precisely in proposing border vacuums, cataclysmic money, and superficial order. They fail to account for the microfoundations that enable people in cities to discover, solve, and cope with the inevitable problems that come with the astonishing benefits of city life. While their intent may be to bring order (on their terms) to the messiness of dynamic urban environments, their plans typically ignore or discount imperfect knowledge, genuine change, and the resourcefulness and unruliness of ordinary people. The consequence is to stifle the creativity unique to a great city. In short, they do not appreciate the nature of a living city as an emergent, spontaneous order. As Hayek (1959: 523) has put it, their position – with their authoritarian abuse of property rights and neglect of the signaling role of prices – could be characterized as "anti-economic"; and in that sense, contrary to reason, rightly understood.

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