LEGIBILITY AND LIVEABILITY: A CRITIQUE

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The terms legibility and livability are widely, though differently, used in discusión of city form and city cultures. The former follows Lynch (1960) and refers to the need for easily read landmarks and other visual features in the spatial configuration of a city, and has been adopted by urban designers; its use is that it takes attention away from buildings to the spaces between them. The latter is used particularly in US debate, is the subject of annual conferences and a certain literature, and indicates the provision of urban spaces for conviviality. Similarly, the pioneering work of W H Whyte in New York in the 1970s emphasized the need for provision of flexible, small urban social spaces.

But, progressive though they were once, whose city do these frames figure?

The paper ventures a critique of what have become familiar if rather universalized concepts, and begins by contrasting them with images of other presences at street level – for instance in Davis (1990), and the projections onto public monuments of artist Krzysztof Wodiczko. From a perception of difference, the paper critiques legibility as a conventionally visual and distancing approach to cities, and livability as the export of a culture (way of life) specific to a particular social vantage-point. It concludes that other frames are needed to develop other kinds of tools for conviviality (Illich), or to recognize moments of presence (Lefebvre) in everyday urban lives.

LEGIBILIDAD Y HABITABILIDAD: UNA CRÍTICA

Los términos legibilidad y habitabilidad son, aunque de modos distintos, ampliamente utilizados en la discusión sobre la forma y las culturas de la ciudad. El primero se toma de Lynch (1960) y se refiere a la necesidad de hitos y otras características visuales fácilmente legibles en la configuración espacial de la ciudad y ha sido adoptado por los diseñadores urbanos; su utilidad se debe a que desplaza la atención de los edificios al espacio entre éstos. El segundo es especialmente utilizado en los Estados Unidos, objeto de congresos y de una cierta literatura e indica la provisión de espacios urbanos para la convivialidad, en la línea del trabajo pionero de W. H. Whyte en Nueva York que, en los años setenta, enfatizaba la necesidad de una provisión de pequeños y flexibles espacios sociales en la ciudad.

Pero por progresivo que fuera en su momento ¿cuál es el tipo de ciudad que implican estas nociones?

Este artículo aventura una crítica a estos conceptos convertidos en familiares, aunque también universalizados, y comienza poniéndolos en relación con imágenes de otras presencias al "nivel de la calle" –por ejemplo en Davis (1990), y en las proyecciones sobre monumentos públicos del artista Krzysztof Wodiczko. Desde la percepción de la diferencia, el artículo crítica la "legibilidad" como aproximación convencionalmente visual y distanciada a las ciudades, y la "habitabilidad" como la exportación de una cultura específica (way of life) hacia un particular punto de vista social. Concluye que se precisan otros esquemas conceptuales para desarrollar otro tipo de herramientas de convivialidad (Illich), o reconocer momentos de presencia (Lefebvre) en la vida cotidiana de las ciudades.

Introduction

MY PURPOSE IS TO RECONSIDER THE CONCEPTS OF legibility and liveability as defined by Kevin Lynch, and Jane Jacobs and William H Whyte. The concepts were progressive in their day: legibility drew attention to the spaces and routes between buildings, questioning the autonomy of architectural forms and contributing to the establishment of urban design as a profession; liveability drew attention to positive aspects of street life as contributing to safety in and enjoyment of urban spaces. Legibility and liveability are humane approaches, and depart from the technocracy of the rational comprehensive planning model of the Chicago School.[1] In place of predetermined objectives addressed through instrumentalist procedures, legibility observes contemporary uses of urban spaces, and liveability (though the concept of liveability itself can be seen as an objective) emphasises the means to well-being in any urban space. But, in 2004 – 44 years after the publication of Lynch's *The Image of the City* (Lynch, 1960), 43 after Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Jacobs, 1961), and 24 after Whyte's *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (Whyte, 1980) – it is appropriate to reconsider legibility and liveability, and to ask if both concepts are now encapsulated in history, linked to nineteenth-century liberal reformism and twentieth-century modernism. Both may seem of little use to a world of globalised capital and communications, post-industrial cities, and post-structuralist theory. Yet legibility is still at least implicit in urban design education and criticism, while liveability has been co-opted by neo-liberalism in what it is pleased to call a new urbanism.

The paper begins with critical accounts of the concepts of legibility and liveability. It analyses the difficulties presented, and finally indicates some of the available frameworks for alternative approaches.

Legibility and the City

The Image of the City was published in 1960 under the auspices of the Joint Center for Urban Studies at the Massachusets Institute of Technology (MIT), founded in 1959 to bring together researchers from anthropology, economics, engineering, sociology, and political science, as well as urban and regional planning. Inter-disciplinarity has histories in critical theory, where it questions the assumptions from which theory as well as its objects are produced, and, more to the point here, in the liberalism of the Chicago School which fuses empirical and technical research to produce all-embracing and seemingly non-ideological deductions. Lynch was progressive in linking planning and design to urban spatial experience, and in situating himself in a broad and holistic approach beyond the conventional boundaries of planning and architecture. This, however, follows the Chicago's School's ethos in as much as that ethos was derived from Georg Simmel's construction of a specifically metropolitan viewpoint (from Berlin in the 1900s), just as their early studies on urban types such as the hobo and the taxi-hall dancer constitute a pre-history for the interest in street life shown by Jacobs and Whyte.

The Chicago School's research projects, and progressive urbanism in the post-war period, valued the incidental. City streets were seen not as purely design problems to be solved through a mix of technical expertise and aesthetic taste, but situated in a new sociological frame arising from rapid urban expansion in the industrial period. In 'Urbanism as a Way of Life', Louis Wirth writes "On the subjective side, as Simmel has suggested, the close physical contact of numerous individuals necessarily produces a shift in the mediums through which we orient ourselves to the urban milieu" (Wirth, [1938] 2000: 100). He continues that urban dwellers have close physical contact but are socially distant, and that "The urban world puts a premium on visual recognition" (ibid). This is crucial to the legacy of the Chicago School, and borne out in Burgess' frequently cited concentric ring diagram which universalises a diagram of the

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1   For a review of planning models including the rational comprehensive model, see Sandercock, 1998b: 169-182.

Loop in Chicago and surrounding transitional zones as an urban template.

Lynch translates visual recognition into a structured approach to urban design, breaking with a privileging of architectural elements over their settings and the spaces between them, but not breaking with the distance of the eye:

> Moving elements in a city, and in particular people and their activities, are as important as the stationary physical parts. We are not simply observers of this spectacle, but are ourselves a part of it … Most often, our perception of the city is not sustained, but rather partial, fragmentary, mixed with other concerns. Nearly every sense is in operation, and the image is a composite of them all (Lynch, 1960: 2).

Every sense … but – illustrating the difficulty of thinking beyond dominant frames – it is the visual which predominates as a composite *image*. He adds: "This book will consider the visual quality of the American city …", and from this promotes legibility as "the ease with which [the city's] parts can be recognized and can be organized into a coherent pattern" (Lynch, 1960: 2-3).

Lynch writes of urban publics as taking part in the shaping of a city's reality. This may allude to Wirth's proximate bodies, but, contrary to Simmel's claim for a new metropolitan sensibility, the view Lynch develops in *The Image of the City* depends on a visual perspective through which the component parts are recognised. Only the visual sense, anchored to at least semi-permanent features such as landmarks, provides such images and recognition. Leaving that aside, Lynch sets his viewpoint significantly apart from that of, say, Le Corbusier or Mies van der Rohe, and the international Modernists represented by the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM). If humanism, in a post-war spirit of renewed or retrieved optimism, was a guiding principle for CIAM, there was as Barry Curtis notes no "widespread agreement on the specific terms of a humanist approach" (Curtis, 2000: 52). Liberalism is not strong on specifics. It tends, too, to an aporia between planning and laissez-faire. CIAM's eighth meeting, at Hoddesden, England in 1951, the year of the Festival of Britain, considered the dichotomy of post-war planning poised between a horror of visionary totalitarianism and a relaxation of regulation which might limit planning to a merely technical role.

The Frontispiece and Endplate of CIAM 8's collected papers show an aerial view of Piazza San Marco, Venice with its users strolling casually, singly or in small groups, too distant to be recognised as individuals and registering more as a populace but not a crowd. It illustrates the city conceptualised as a peopled civic realm and fits CIAM's concern for a democratic future. There is inter-disciplinarity: "In 1951, J M Richards recalled, 'the world of the architect had suddenly expanded to embrace that of the town planner and sociologist'… a major preoccupation of CIAM 8" (Curtis, 2000: 56); yet the architect remains in charge. There is, too, a concern for the use as well design of urban sites, though it is limited to space conducive to casual mixing rather than political organisation – again a horror of the demagogue, charisma reassigned from leaders to city images. There is little interest in the spaces of demonstrable sociation in everyday life. As Curtis comments:

> The ways in which 'the needs of the people' were to be expressed provide little evidence of the dialectic demanded by Henri Lefebvre of the trivial and exceptional in daily life. Nor is there any psychogeographical sensitivity capable of conveying the 'unity of atmosphere' of various segments of the city (Curtis, 2000: 59).

Lynch, in contrast, takes the city "not just as a thing in itself, but the city being perceived by its inhabitants" (Lynch, 1960: 3), and has time for the nuances of unifying atmospheres. This contrasts with Robert Moses' view of cutting an expressway through a long-established residential neighbourhood in the Bronx: "more people in the way - that's all" (cited in Berman, 1983: 308), and with CIAM's evasion of the issue of the diverse needs of urban publics.

Lynch does not limit his vocabulary to visual terms, either. Alongside colour, shape, motion, and light are "smell, sound, kinaesthesia, sense of gravity, and perhaps electric or magnetic fields" (Lynch, 1960: 3) as means to orientation. Rejecting instinct,

Lynch opts for "a conscious use and organization of definite sensory cues from the external environment" as fundamental to "free-moving life" (ibid). This is contextualised by a Wirthian assertion that the city's growth can be only partially controlled, and by an idea that a city should be beautiful. The built environment affects human dynamics: "Obviously a clear image enables one to move about easily and quickly" (Lynch, 1960: 4); and "A good environmental image gives its possessor an important sense of emotional security ... an harmonious relationship between himself [sic] and the outside world" (ibid). But if Lynch deals with human agency the question is whether it extends to the agent's intelligent reading of the city's structures, or to the making of new structures. When he writes that "The observer himself should play an active role in perceiving the world and have a creative part in developing his image. He should have the power to change that image to fit changing needs" (Lynch, 1960: 6), Lynch does not indicate how such change will be delivered.

Lynch sets out a vocabulary of delineating elements such as paths, landmarks, edges, nodes, and districts; and decides to "pass over individual differences, interesting as they might be to a psychologist" (Lynch, 1960: 7) in perceptions of a given environment by respondents to his inquiries, in favour of commonly expressed "public images" (ibid). Lynch sets aside his interest in experiential spaces and the human projection of meaning into them for a prioritisation of the physical qualifiers of the urban landscape, saying his study looks for

> physical qualities which relate to the attributes of identity and structure in the mental image. ... the definition of what might be called *imageability*: that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer. It is that shape, colour, or arrangement which facilitates the making of vividly identified, powerfully structured, highly useful mental images of the environment. It might also be called *legibility*, or perhaps *visibility* in a heightened sense, where objects are not only able to be seen, but are presented sharply and intensely to the senses (Lynch, 1960: 10).

John Urry says something similar on tourist photography: "To photograph is in some way to appropriate the object being photographed" (Urry, 1990: 138); and argues that the tourist seeks out, to photograph, sights which equate to those of the brochures.

It should not, however, be overlooked that the first chapter of *The Image of the City*, in which Lynch sets out a theory for urban design, is a rationalisation of his empirical work. This field work used questionnaires and interviews in the downtown districts of Boston, Jersey City, and Los Angeles - selected as contrasting cases, in the case of Jersey City for its lack of distinctiveness. Lynch asked people "to evoke their own images of their physical environment" (Lynch, 1960: 15). Thirty people, all long-term residents, were interviewed in Boston and fifteen in each of the other cities as a reconnaissance by a trained observer who would map the city's elements and their visibility, making "subjective judgements based on the immediate appearance of these elements in the field", and plot beside this the personal images of interviewees (Lynch, 1960: 14-15). Lynch admits a bias to professionals - perhaps more likely to have the time for an interview lasting 90 minutes - in selecting interviewees, but the detail of the questionnaire reveals other limitations. The interview was based on seven questions some of which were divided into several parts. Residents were asked for their presiding, or symbolic, image; to make a sketch map; then for directions for their route to work, including sounds and smells as well as sights, and a description of their feelings about the spaces encountered. This seems an attempt at multi-sensory representation but an emphasis on visuality is revealed when interviewees are requested to describe a place to which they are, fictionally, taken blindfolded: "when the blindfold was taken off what clues would you use to positively identify where you were?" (Lynch, 1960: 141). The withdrawal of sight acts here to privilege its return, and visuality is further affirmed through the use of maps to codify transcriptions from interviews in a conventional cartographic language (Lynch, 1960: 146-51). The photographs used to illustrate the book similarly employ mainly aerial or distant perspectives. Some interviewees underwent a

second session using photographs which they sorted into groups and tried to identify, after which they were taken into the city and asked "to point out what he [sic] saw along the way ..." (Lynch, 1960: 142). From the data provided, Lynch derived the set of key variables through which to measure legibility: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks which define a city's place-identity.

Legibility, then, is a function of reception of a city's visual landscape when elements of form which have accumulated over a period are subsumed in a unified image. The *organization* of elements into a pattern suggests legibility is produced rather than given, though the implication is also that cities can be designed to facilitate such organization. The assimilation of a series of interlocking if separately created spaces into a distinctive pattern is, for Lynch, a criterion for civic beauty, but legibility is also a means for citizens to gain emotional ownership of their city by having a mental picture of it.

Liveability

Liveability is less precise a term than legibility. In north America it continues to be used as a label for conferences and policies, increasingly co-opted by neo-liberalism in the 'new urbanism' of gated but homely, often nostalgically styled, residential compounds. It has, nonetheless, a basis in progressive thinking about the uses of urban spaces from the 1960s to 1980s. Roughly, it means the design of environments conducive to the ease of citizens. Today it tends to mean an emphasis on public safety, despite the more risk-oriented perspectives of Jacobs and Whyte. It is a successor to the idealised city of the nineteenth century, which acted as foil to the outcomes of industrialisation.

The work of Jacobs and Whyte remains worth re-visiting for its focus on street life – a partial equivalent, more confined to the physical and geographical site but aware of performativity – for the focus on everyday life in the work of Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau. Whyte's view is based on his Street Life Project in New York in the 1970s:

There was much concern over urban crowding, but most of the research ... was done somewhere other than where it supposedly occurred. The most notable studies were of crowded animals, or of students and members of institutions responding to experimental situations - often valuable research, to be sure, but somewhat vicarious (Whyte, 1980: 10).

He uses time-lapse photography to record the uses of urban plazas, in context of his doubts about behaviourist environmental science. This represents a shift towards a more social-ethnographic approach; at a time when planning retained the optimism of international Modernism – before the neo-liberal move towards de-regulation – his empirical data on the observed behaviour of users in real, everyday not laboratory conditions offered planning a human-centred rationale for regulation. Although Whyte's point of departure was the problem of over- crowding, his work indicates that density is not a difficulty. It is more that near-empty spaces are problematic, while some of those designed for single functions tend to be near-empty and hence uninviting because they lack variety of use. Whyte observes, for instance, that "many children play in the streets because they like to" (Whyte, 1980: 10) not because there is no playground space. This accords with Richard Sennett's comments on children playing on buildings rather than in playgrounds in *The Conscience of the Eye*: on Battery Park City he states that "Its playgrounds … are peculiar. There is too much room to play. The few infants cavorting are happy enough; older children seem at a loss for what to do" (Sennett, 1990: 193). In contrast, he notes the vitality of children who colonise redundant light industrial spaces in SoHo.

Jane Jacobs wrote of similar issues, a decade before Whyte's project:

Among the superstitions of planning and housing is a fantasy about the transformation of children … A population of children is condemned to play on the city streets. These, pale and rickety children, in their sinister moral environment, are telling each other canards about sex … If only these deprived

children can be gotten off the streets into parks and playgrounds with equipment on which to exercise, space in which to run, grass to lift their souls! Clean and happy places, filled with the laughter of children responding to a wholesome environment. So much for the fantasy! (Jacobs, 1961: 74).

Jacobs cites documentary film-maker Charles Guggenheim that children returning from a day centre to project housing with its lawns and playgrounds were subject to bullying from juvenile thugs, while those going to older streets felt safe because they had a choice of routes and potential points of support from adults. She adds that Guggenheim found the older streets, regarded as slums, "rich in interest, variety and material" (Jacobs, 1961: 75), and that moving children into playgrounds means they "have moved from under the eyes of a high numerical ration of adults into a place where the ratio … is low or even nil. To think this represents an improvement … is pure daydreaming" (Jacobs, 1961: 77).

Whyte and Jacobs go beyond behavioursim and rational comprehensive planning by moving into the street, Whyte in a direct insertion of his research team into downtown spaces:

> We started by studying how people use plazas. We mounted time-lapse cameras overlooking the plazas and recorded daily patterns. We talked to people to find where they came from, where they worked, how frequently they used the place and what they thought of it. But, mostly, we watched people to see what they did (Whyte, 1980: 16).

This preserves the objectivity of an observer distanced spatially and technically from the material observed. From his observations, Whyte made several points: that a supply of attractive spaces creates a public for their use; that the most used spaces were used more by people in small groups (such as couples) than by people alone; that use follows the routines of work which bring people into a downtown space; that men's and women's uses suggest differing design parameters; and that design is secondary to use, as when people use steps for seating (Whyte, 1980: 30-5). He writes:

> What attracts people most … is other people. If I belabor the point it is because many urban spaces are being designed as thought the opposite were true, and that [for designers] what people liked best were the places they stay away from (Whyte, 1980: 19).

Whyte notes that in responses to questionnaires people cited the attractions of retreats, yet in their acts opted for spaces used by others. Conversations, for instance, took place within not aside from the main flow of people in a street; people also tended to sit in the midst of rather than away from others:

> Sometimes there will be so many people [at Seagram Plaza, NY) that pedestrians have to step carefully to negotiate the steps. The pedestrians rarely complain … most will thread their way through it (Whyte, 1980: 21).

Among sites perceived by Whyte as most densely used were two downtown parks, Paley and Greenacre, both offering moveable garden seating, planting, water, natural light, and availability of refreshments under the discreet gaze of a security guard.

Whyte adopts a progressive view of street traders and 'undesirables'. Of the latter he says they are less a problem than the measures taken against them which alienate all users: "Many businessmen have an almost obsessive fear that if a place is attractive to people it might be attractive to undesirable people. So it is made unattractive" (Whyte, 1980: 60). Whyte goes on: "Places designed with distrust get what they were looking for and it is in them, ironically, that you will most likely find a wino … The best way to handle the problem of undesirables is to make a place attractive to everyone else" (Whyte, 1980: 61-3). Beyond Whyte's remit is the social and cultural problem of a taxonomy whereby some people are more desirable than others, or have more right to the city than others. But Whyte ends *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* with a criticism of corporate fortress-architecture, and the tendency to remove the street into highly regulated malls and underground or high-level walkways (Whyte, 1980: 82-93). Of self-contained megastructures such as Detroit's Renaissance Centre and Houston Center, he writes "their enclosing walls are blank, windowless, and to the street they turn an

almost solid face of concrete or brick" (Whyte, 1980: 86). These are spaces for drivers: "There are not many people ...the only acknowledgement that is made of the pedestrian consists of flashing lights and signs telling him [sic] he'd better damn well watch out for cars" (Whyte, 1980: 86-7). He adds that the resemblance of corporate architecture to a fortress is not accidental - a bid by developers to lure consumers to a secure environment away from the perceived insecurity of city streets.

The point, which Whyte does not make, is perhaps that the fusion of crime and difference is, despite statistical data, a cultural construction not an inevitable phenomenon. Whyte offers instead an antidote to the insecure street in guidance for New York's zoning regulations which includes a requirement for public space, seating, and trees in new high-rise developments.

Whyte's ideal of a street is a convivial place in which all classes meet - we might add races and genders now - while demarcating sites in a self-organised way. Sennett shares the emphasis on performativity, which he derives from Arendt.[2] Such unplanned but not unorganised mixing is a key component of the idea of liveability in the 1960s as formulated by Jacobs. Writing on the uses of sidewalks, she notes criticism of people "loitering on busy corners ..." assumed to lack decent homes to go to. She compares their behaviour to that of diners at a testimonial banquet who equally evidently lack wives to cook decently for them. Leaving aside the assumption that wives cook, her point remains interesting:

> This judgment represses a profound misunderstanding of cities. ... The point of both the testimonial banquet and the social life of city sidewalks is precisely that they arte public. They bring together people who do not know each other in an intimate, private social fashion and in most cases do not care to know each other in that fashion (Jacobs, 1961: 55).

This follows her case for safety in the maximised use of sidewalks, and links to her case in another

chapter in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) for mixed-use zoning to produce a high level of street use.

Jacobs sees street life as linking directly to other uses of space including participation in formal, civic activity. Her evidence is from a case in New York City in which a resident of a housing project complains at the lack of spaces for social life compared with those of the streets cleared to build the project blocks. Jacobs comments:

> There were not fewer places ... for people to gather in the project ... Of course there were no bars, no candy stores, no hole-in-the-wall *bodegas*, no restaurants in the project. But the project under discussion was equipped with a model complement of benches, malls, etc., enough to gladden the heart of even the Garden City advocates (Jacobs, 1961: 58).

From which anecdote she deduces that social life depends on a socio-cultural infrastructure, and that if this is absent – or planned out of a situation in favour of a more restrictive ordering – then social activity diminishes. Her conclusion is that successful street neighbourhoods "are physical, social and economic continuities" (Jacobs, 1961: 121). She goes on: "Where our city streets do have sufficient frequency of commerce, general liveliness, use and interest, to cultivate continuities of public street life, we Americans do prove fairly capable at street self-government (ibid). Her further conclusion that such factors are noted by professionals more in impoverished neighbourhoods – where external expectation of self-organisation might be low – reveals an expert partiality for middle-class society as the natural home of judgement. The corollary, which Jacobs implies but does not develop, is that environments designed for the poor design out their citizenship.

That is, the assumption of the experts responsible for housing projects, all well-intentioned public servants and professionals, is that the poor cannot order their own lives and need experts to do it for them. This is the finding of Edward Robbins in a study of the Thamesmead housing project in south-

2   Lecture by Sennett in the CivicCentre programme organised by the University of Surrey (Roehampton), at the London school of Economics, April 26th 2003.

east London, seen by the Greater London Council (GLC) as providing decent homes for the urban working and lower middle classes. Today it appears an epitome of planning blight, and was used in the filming of *Clockwork Orange*. Its open spaces are windswept, its health centre protected by razor wire and surveillance cameras, and its concrete walkways and stairways present a bewildering labyrinth. In a gesture of appropriation, one resident has almost filled a concrete balcony with a wooden garden shed of the kind seen more often on allotments or at the end of long, suburban lawns.

Re-visiting Thamesmead in the 1990s, Robbins contrasts intention and outcome:

> For the GLC policy-makers and designers, Thamesmead offered the latest in housing form and social possibility. They were providing a clean, well-ordered, safe, functionally delineated and segregated, and well-defined spaces into which people would come and build meaningful and happy lives (Robbins, 1996: 287).

But then of a "deeply felt anti-urbanism" (Robbins, 1996: 289) in which not only is green space taken as panacea but the poor are seen as incapable of ordering their own lives, hence needing a highly functionalised built environment to condition their use of it. While spaces corresponding more to an image of "middle-class familialism and individualism", as Robbins describes them, replace those of working-class solidarity from which most of the residents were relocated, he sees these dwellers "told through the design" that they belong to a social group which has no power over its environment (Robbins, 1996: 289).[3]

Functionalism, then, is a flaw in post-war planning and urban design to which writers such as Jacobs constructively drew attention. Legitimating the self-organised life of city streets and informal groups, Jacobs challenged the convention of urban ordering which sited play in playgrounds and strolling in parks. But to what extent do Jacobs, Whyte, and Lynch, who share an appreciation of streets, offer a real alternative? The next section of the paper outlines difficulties in the concepts of legibility and liveability. After that, I suggest a other ways of looking at the question of urban conviviality.

Common Flaws

The limitations of legibility could be summarised as: firstly, an emphasis on form rather than on occupation.[4] Secondly, a privileging of concept over actuality.[5] Thirdly, a privileging of visuality in the use of photographs and maps, and questions which refer to sight.[6] The emphasis on built rather than social architectures, and on conceptual rather than experiential spaces, can be contrasted with Lefebvre's reclamation of a place for occupation (Lefebvre, 1991: 33). And the derivation of legibility from a framework of Enlightenment planning can be contrasted with challenges to conventional ideals of liberty and equality in the work of Iris Marion Young (1990), in context of a world of increasing migrancy and transient occupation (Eade, 1997), and globalization (Bauman, 1998). Those of liveability are: firstly, that although its emphasis is on occupation - Jacobs and Whyte denounce the fantasies of functionalist planning and design - it still relies on a romanticised notion of the city as potentially conflict-free. Secondly, that liveability itself is a concept however much it is also a frame of reference for criticism of de-humanising planning and design. Thirdly, that it tends despite the immersion of its protagonists in street life to produce an image of the city. Behind Jacobs' impression is I think the image of the north American commons as a site of democratic intercourse, an exchange of views and values in a mixing of citizens - idealising a situation likely to have been as much riven by segregation of class, race and gender as any other site in its time.

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3   For fuller commentaries see Miles, 2000: 57-66; 2001: 45-7.

4   "the emphasis here will be on the physical environment ... physical qualities which relate to the attributes of identity and structure in the mental image" (Lynch, 1960: 9).

5   "what symbolizes the word `Boston' for you?" (Lynch, 1960: 141).

6   "The subject was asked to ... point out what he [sic] saw ... " (Lynch, 1960: 142).

The difficulty of liveability, then, is its universalisation of middle-class, white criteria for the built environment. A case is the Disney town of Celebration, Florida. Architectural styles are based on a superficial transplant of nineteenth-century housing types from the heritage districts of cities such as Charleston; and residents are required to observe a long list of regulations covering details such as the colour of curtains and types of shrubs to be grown in gardens. Bettina Drew, a sympathetic journalist who sees its parks and streets as like those of any well-managed town, still writes of Celebration that it is "a world in which the balance of power Americans have long been used to has radically shifted. It is a world in which government has been subordinated to business, is an adjunct to it, and not the other way around" (Drew, 1998: 183). Crime is low in Celebration, though it is in many middle- and high-income districts; and although it offers residents an orderly existence this is bought at the price of signing over a large number of personal choices of the kind seen in a sociology of consumption as contributing to identity formation.

Thinking back to Robbins on Thamesmead, and from the above, I wonder if urban planning and design can address the difficulties inherent in the modern privileging of expertise, or require deconstruction as professions and disciplines, to the point of becoming in effect something else. Manfredo Tafuri takes this view of architecture:

> Modern architecture has marked out its own fate by making itself, within an autonomous political strategy, the bearer of ideals of rationalization by which the working class is affected only in the second instance. The historical inevitability of this phenomenon can be recognized. But having been so, it is no longer possible to hide the ultimate reality which renders uselessly painful the choices of architects desperately attached to disciplinary ideologies.

> ...

For this reason it is useless to propose purely architectural alternatives. The search for an alternative within the structures that condition the very character of architectural design is indeed an obvious contradiction of terms (Tafuri, 1976: 181).

Does this suggest a commonality in legibility's limitation as a projection onto cities of a geometry which tacitly states 'the city', and liveability's in an equally projective realm of civic equilibrium? Whyte's work post-dates Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* with its recognition of street informality, yet (despite his nods in that direction) he concludes his project in a set of design guidelines for the design of urban plazas, potentially falling into the functionalist trap he implicitly and sometimes explicitly criticises.

Lynch, of course, did not stop writing and teaching after *The Image of the City*. In *Good City Form* (1981) he sets out a succession of rights for urban dwellers: presence (to be in a place), use (as in sidewalks), appropriation (for temporary purposes), modification (permanently), and disposition (as in legacy). He claims these as common rights in different cultures (Lynch, 1981: 205-7), an assumption unlikely to be made today in light of discourses of difference.

The rights allude to a gradation in Western society from a public realm of common use to spaces of private ownership and family retreat. This could lead to a critical urbanism, questioning the viability of such an axis, and whether the categories public and private retain their conventional meanings. Lynch notes the work of Castells, Harvey and Lefebvre (Lynch, 1981: 341), listing Lefebvre's *Le Droit à la Ville* (Paris, 1968) in his bibliography, which might inform such a questioning, but he notes them only in passing. Yet he cites, too, the benefits of self-help schemes in which dwellers empower themselves through building (Lynch, 1981: 421) – an interesting proposition in relation to Tafuri's inclination to what might be termed post-architecture. Jacobs also produced further work (such as *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*, 1984). And Whyte elaborated but did not significantly extend his ideas in *City* (1988). Since then, a private-sector new urbanism has overtaken its

civic-minded predecessor to combine intensive regulation and stereotyping with an illusory freedom. It is a freedom *from* urban ills rather than a freedom *for* urban interaction, and ignores much of what Jacobs and Whyte saw in street life. While liveability inherits the liberal idea that certain environments are conducive to good behaviour, new urbanism enforces good behaviour through rules and a segregation which reproduces the insecurity of the white middle-class suburb described by Richard Sennett in *The Uses of Disorder* (1970). While, as J B Jackson writes of Central Park, "The park, in short, was thought of as a means of inculcating traditional cultural values and acceptable modes of public behaviour" (Jackson, 1972: 212), Celebration parodies a past architectural style and scale to inculcate the values of neo-liberalism while imposing specific behaviours through rules.

I wonder what factors within legibility and liveability enable their co-option to less attractive regimes. Much in Celebration is, for instance, highly legible: its districts are marked by house types (for different prices), it has clearly defined nodes, pathways, and colour code (pastel washes for exterior walls, white or beige curtains). What nags is that both concepts lend themselves to visuality. Lynch uses photography and conventional cartography to illustrate his book, and in process affirms the god's-eye view of the city plan, the view from a position of power. Whyte relies on time-lapse photography from high vantage-points. This, perhaps, is a point of entry for a critique which might lead to an alternative in multi-sensory perception and representation, or mapping which affirms street-level experience, or - after Tafuri - a handing-over of the whole matter to self-organised activity.

To refuse the dominance of visuality is more than technical, and brings into play the ideological basis of its supposed objectivity. The most articulate challenges to it have come from feminist cultural and geographical theory. Doreen Massey argues in *Space, Place and Gender* that vision is the sense offering the most mastery because it is the most distancing, that visuality "impoverishes us through deprivation of other forms of sensory perception". She cites Luce Irigaray to effect that a privileging of visuality produces a dematerialisation of the body, and continues "the reason for the privileging of vision is

precisely its supposed detachment … necessarily … from a particular point of view" (Massey, 1994: 232). The eye controls but is not disinterested. Yet, of course, it is not the eye but capital which now takes control, using ingenious visual strategies to re-present city districts as corresponding to 'the city'. And, if the gaze is a means of vicarious possession, then possession is now more closely allied to legal ownership and restriction of use. In this context, I note a case which foregrounds the move to a market-led mode of urban liveability: Bryant Park, New York.

Whyte cites Bryant Park as "dangerous … the territory of dope dealers and muggers"; he attributes this to its under-use by other users, and its invisibility: "You can't see in. You can't see out. There are only a few entry points. This park will be used by people when it is opened up to them" (Whyte, 1980: 58). It has been. Today, alongside a redevelopment of West 42nd Street as a more respectable site than its previous cluster of outlets for the pornography industry denoted, Bryant Park has been largely cleared of crime through surveillance, and presents a safe image in an increased density of use. In its way, Bryant Park (designed in 1934) has been rehabilitated to the tradition of parks founded by Olmsted in his plans for Central Park in the 1850s. Yet the improvement, however genuine, is a sanitization contextualised by the growth of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) as private-public means to redevelopment, the aim of which is a rise in real estate values. Sharon Zukin writes:

> Central Park, Bryant Park, and the Hudson River Park show how public spaces are becoming progressively less public: they are, in certain ways, more exclusive than at any time in the past 100 years. Each of these areas is governed, and largely or entirely financed, by a private organization, often working as a quasi-public authority (Zukin, 1995: 28).

Bryant Park is run by the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation, funded mainly by telecommunications companies. An array of visible security features such as gates, cameras, and guards denotes its new identity. Whyte's prescription for moveable seating (painted green to resemble that in Parisian parks, as Zukin points out) has been adopted, and kiosks selling

refreshments are used to attract visitors on the basis argued by Whyte that high-density is the best defence against a space being colonised by 'undesirables'.[7] There is even public art in Bryant Park in the form of a sculpture by Alexander Caldwell. If Whyte's ideas are applied here, in a 1990s privatised scenario not envisaged by Whyte in the 1970s, their limitation is in their co-option to an assumption on the part of the proponents of BIDs of a norm of urban behaviour to match the well-designed environment which is said to encourage it. Zukin notes the predominance of white people in the Park today, and continues:

> the park visually represents an urban middle class: men and women who work in offices, jackets off, sleeves rolled up, mainly white in the same day, at the same hour, another public space a block away – the tellers' line at Citibank – attracts a group that is not so well dressed, with more minority group members. The cultural strategies that have been chosen to revitalize Bryant Park carry with them the implication of controlling diversity while re-creating a consumable vision of civility (Zukin, 1995: 31).

She notes, too, that a privately-owned, high-cost restaurant is planned to complete the redevelopment. Around the Park, the Bryant Park Business Improvement District allows businesses to levy on themselves a voluntary tax for such schemes, and to take on functions such as security and garbage collection hitherto seen as prerogatives of civic authorities. Zukin asks if such quasi-governance will produce a Disney-world in the streets as a new form of, or rather substitute for, a public culture.

Views from elsewhere

Azzedine Haddour writes of the Algerians in Camus' *La Peste*: "Ostracized from the city and the order of its politics, denied speech and representation, the caravans of this vagrant people cannot occupy a subject position" (Haddour, 2000: 45). The subject position of western, industrial society is evolved (with increasing inequalities) from that of Renaissance humanism. The public spaces of first Renaissance and then Baroque and later cities, designed as spaces of display, have a strong visual (legible) quality. But the human presence in them is bound by their delineation as regular places. Rob Shields reminds us that:

> Perspective corresponds to a built social space with room left for citizens' action. In this *perspectival* space the dominant strategy of *abstract space* proper emerges: a three-fold primacy of geometry ... of the visual, and of the phallic ... as the approved mode of expression (through an 'empty' and neutralised space) of power and the state (Shields, 1999: 175-6).

Something of the same kind could be said of the neutralised mechanisms of the rational comprehensive planning model, and an alternative approach may need to refuse a pretence of disinterest. This may be not only for reasons of social equity (if there is such) but because the fiction of disinterested judgement prevents interested engagement in a continuing negotiation and adaptation of urban spaces, a process necessarily of contestation because interests do not always coincide and may collide.

A further realisation is that the civic harmony of liberal images of the city, as epitomised in the City Beautiful movement, is as illusory as other modern notions such as the autonomy of the subject. Civic harmony tends, in fact, to mean the absorption of difference either through exclusion from visibility and confinement in institutions (as in the treatment of the vagrant and insane), or an equally exclusive but today less costly peripheralisation (as in the removal of homeless people from downtown sites). Iris Marion Young (1990) refuses the model of assimilation, writing that engagement with and recognition of difference requires a deconstruction of the eighteenth-century ideals of liberty and equality: "In recent years the idea of liberation as the elimination

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7   This echoes observations of Central Park in the 1860s noted by Jackson: "Observers were gratified to see that visitors, regardless of class, behaved beautifully. Drunks were remarkable scarce, and those who walked on the grass were taken care of without trouble" (Jackson, 1972: 213).

of group difference has been challenged by movements of the oppressed" (Young, 1990: 157). Oppressed groups, she argues, deserve differential treatment while legal equality is insufficient to ensure equality of access in social life. In place of an assimilation "to the unity of a common measure" marking as deviant "those whose attributes differ" (Young, 1990: 169), Young seeks plurality in group identity.

This implies a new understanding of what constitutes a democratic public sphere. Such a sphere might not be identified with public space, might be as much articulated by the self-build house and the allotment as by the public library or park. Three frameworks may inform its construction: recognition of difference as producing urban spatialities which need not be arranged in hierarchies or according to a centre-margin model; use of complexity theory (Byrne, 1997; Cilliers, 1998) to re-validate planning as a non-instrumental yet regulatory means to further the interests of publics; and an ecological model of non-assimilative inter-relation in which elements are mutually dependent and mutually (dialectically not biologically) formative.

The contexts in which the determination of urban processes takes place today include globalisation, the human consequences of which are a polarization of affluence and deprivation, of free movement for the money-rich and restricted migration for the time-rich (Bauman, 1998: 85-9); alongside the globalisation of capital and communications, that of resistance; and the emergence of single-issue political campaigns as arguably more engaging than conventional political representation. While past debates tended to focus on constructs such as community or public, Arjun Appadurai's idea of fluid 'scapes' negotiated by individuals in a dynamic relation to larger formations - from which Martin Albrow proposes, as John Eade summarises, socioscapes "produced by the intersection of individual sociospheres through routine procedures and pragmatic accommodations" (Eade, 1997: 7) – offers more insight into a possible means of permanent intervention on the part of those individuals (and, after Young, I would say groups). This may engender new understandings of solidarity. And while those debates looked, too, to instrumental

expertise to solve urban problems from overcrowding to congestion and pollution, it may be that the knowledges of professionals, academics, and dwellers can be accepted as equally produced in specific histories which they have a capacity to reproduce or change. As means become ends, there are no solutions. Leonie Sandercock writes that the planner's job today is "that of a person who has, essentially, gone AWOL from the profession, has crossed over 'to the other side', to work in opposition to the state and corporate economy" (Sandercock, 1998a: 99-100). If business and government are increasingly on the same side, a new adversarial relation emerges between them and coalitions of citizens' groups, campaigns, NGOs, and disaffected professionals.

The city gives way to cities. Outcomes cannot be predicted but small changes in the conditions in which any intervention is made produce large changes in potential outcome. As David Byrne summarises, writing of complex systems:

> their evolutionary paths depend on the relationship between timing of perturbation and exact initial conditions and are inherently unpredictable, but not inexplicable, over time. Here explanation becomes essentially historical ... There is no point in trying to deduce what will happen from a description of its present state, but we can understand how it got there. However, this does not render history merely contemplative (Byrne, 1997: 55).

Because, as he goes on to say, perturbations can originate in human action, so scrutiny of past activities enlightens present determinations. To me this sounds like a definition of praxis as the gaining of appropriate understandings of past conditions and changes in order to gain insights into present possibilities for change.[8] The point, as Marx asserted in 1845 in his 'Theses on Feuerbach', is to change it [the world], but this will be liberating rather than reproductive of old orders when the understanding of past conditions is that the means *are* the ends. Planning then ceases to become an instrument, and its processes are themselves a democracy.

8   I am indebted to David Reason for this definition.

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