



1.8 • Hulme, Manchester. Patterns of revolution and counter-revolution.

highway engineering as a formative influence on urban layout, in effect, *disurban creation*.¹⁶

Disurban creation refers to the tendency of highway-led approaches to result in dull or dysfunctional layouts, where new development is lacking identity, vitality or urbanity (Figure 1.7). While the cost of urban destruction is tangible, disurban creation is more of an opportunity cost; the opportunity lost for creating good urban places. While less immediately pathological than urban destruction, the problem of disurban creation would have to be faced up to, sooner or later.

COUNTER-REVOLUTION

The historical transformation from traditional streets assembled in street grids to modernist point blocks set in open space and then back to street grids again must be one of the most significant reversals in urban design history. An observer from space could read the morphological volte-face in the classic image of the redevelopment and re-redevelopment of Hulme in Manchester between the 1960s and 1990s (Figure 1.8).¹⁷

Since the early 1990s, movements such as New Urbanism have drawn attention to the problem of roads-driven disurban creation, and have taken the initiative towards solving it. The rhetoric of the 'motor age' has been replaced by the rhetoric of sustainability and neo-traditional urbanism. Compact, dense, mixed-use neighbourhoods are back in fashion, with a new breed of traditional-style buildings and street patterns to choose from. The street itself, once seemingly in terminal decline, has undergone something of a renaissance. Street grids are back in vogue.

Hand in hand with this neo-traditional urbanism are what we could call neo-traditional transport policies. That original form of transport – walking – is now lauded as the most favoured mode of movement, followed closely by cycling, with both complemented by public transport for longer journeys. Traffic engineers trained to squeeze the maximum traffic flow out of city streets are now urged to 'calm' those streets, slowing down traffic and giving space back to the pedestrians. The 'monolithic modernism' of highway engineering and car-oriented urban 'solutions' are on the back foot.¹⁸

However, it has taken some time for the curbing of the worst of roads-driven urban destruction to be followed through by tackling roads-driven disurban creation. Efforts do not seem to have got far beyond recognition of the symptoms of the problem.¹⁹ And, despite increasing recognition of streets as 'people places', on closer scrutiny, we find some familiar Modernist principles still exerting a powerful influence on the layout of our towns and cities.