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# The grid as generator<sup>†</sup>

Leslie Martin  
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The activity called city planning, or urban design, or just planning, is being sharply questioned. It is not simply that these questions come from those who are opposed to any kind of planning. Nor is it because so many of the physical effects of planning seem to be piecemeal. For example roads can be proposed without any real consideration of their effect on environment; the answer to such proposals could be that they are just not planning at all. But it is *not* just this type of criticism that is raised. The attack is more fundamental: what is being questioned is the adequacy of the assumptions on which planning doctrine is based.

What are those assumptions? To put this in the most general terms, they resolve themselves into two powerful lines of thought. The first, which stems from the work of the Viennese writer Camillo Sitte, whose book *City Planning according to Artistic Principles* was published in 1889, can be called the doctrine of the visually ordered city. To Sitte the total city plan is the inspired and the all encompassing work of art. But Sitte went further: civic art must be an expression of the life of the community, and finally 'works of art cannot be created by committee but only by a single individual' (Collins 1965).<sup>‡</sup> The planner then is the inspired artist expressing in the total city plan the ambitions of a society. There are indeed many who, though not prepared to accept this total – it would not be inaccurate to say this totalitarian – role of the

planner, have nevertheless been profoundly influenced by Sitte's doctrine of the visually ordered city. The doctrine has left its mark on the images that are used to illustrate high density development of cities. It is to be seen equally in the layout and arrangement of Garden City development. The predominance of the visual image is evident in some proposals that work for the preservation of the past: it is again evident in the work of those that would carry us on, by an imagery of mechanisms, into the future. It remains central in the proposals of others who feel that, although the city as a total work of art is unlikely to be achieved, the changing aspect of its streets and squares may be ordered visually into a succession of pictures. The second line of doctrine is severely practical. It can be called the doctrine of the statistically ordered city. We know it well. It is the basis of those planning surveys in which uses are quantified, sorted out and zoned into particular areas; population densities are assessed and growth and change predicted. It is the raw material of the outline analyses and the town maps of the 1947 Act.

Now it is precisely these two aspects of planning (the first concerned with visual images and the second with procedure, and sometimes of course used in combination by planners), that were so sharply attacked by Mrs Jane Jacobs in her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). For Mrs Jacobs, both 'the art of city planning and its companion, the pseudo-science of city planning, have not yet embarked on the effort to probe the real world of

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<sup>†</sup> Some parts of 'The grid as generator' were used in the Gropius Lecture at Harvard University in June 1966. The argument was developed later into the theme delivered at the University of Hull under the title, 'The Framework of Planning', as the inaugural lecture by Leslie Martin as Visiting Ferens Professor of Fine Art. It is presented here in essentially that form.

<sup>‡</sup> See also a review of both Sitte 1889 and Collins 1965 in L. March (1966).