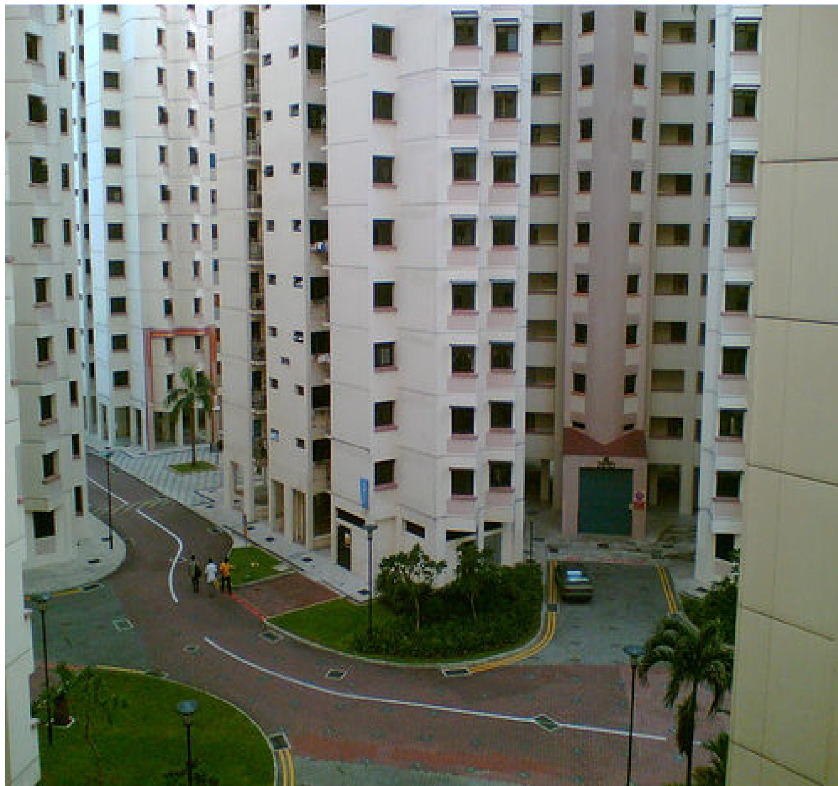
THE ANTISOCIAL URBANISM OF LE CORBUSIER*

By Simon Richards



*** This paper was first published in "Common Knowledge" Volume 13 Issue 1, Winter 2007, pp. 50-66**
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I have often said that the sole cause of man's unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room.
— *Pascal*, Pensées

The greater part of our ills are our own making, and . . . we might have avoided them nearly all by adhering to that simple, uniform, and *solitary* manner of life which nature prescribed.
— *Rousseau*, Discourse on the Origin of Inequality

Thus they keep their distractions on the go to avoid having to face themselves.
— *Le Corbusier*, The Decorative Art of Today

Why is socializing in cities taken to be a good thing? Why do we assume it is beneficial for people to experience urban variety, opportunity, and intrigue? These are not questions normally asked, and it feels perverse to frame them *as* questions. Still, we have not always been so sure about socializing in cities. We have forgotten the negative argument — that the unregulated social life of large cities is a corrupting influence best avoided.

It had never occurred to me to raise these questions until I began research on Le Corbusier. At the same time that he is celebrated as the visionary architect of such modernist masterpieces as the Villa Savoye (1928) and the pilgrimage chapel at Ronchamp (1955), he is decried as an irresponsible and perhaps mentally

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disturbed city planner. In his Plan Voisin from 1925, for example, Le Corbusier

proposed to demolish the center of Paris and replace it with towers in parkland. The prospect of German cities bombed flat by the Allies during World War II made him envious — the Germans were able to rebuild from ground zero. (Incidentally, many British planners offered thanks to the Luftwaffe for returning the favor.) He made plans that would mean (as he put it himself) the "Death of the Street." In proposing the elimination of side alleys and shops, in granting limited space for cafés, community centers, and theaters, in dispersing them over great distances, and constructing them of uninviting concrete, glass, and steel, Le Corbusier expressed his contempt for the teeming hubbub that urbanists now esteem.

The main criticism of Le Corbusier, reiterated without fatigue for more than seventy years, has been that he forgot cities exist to facilitate socializing[1]. Some commentators have gone further: Le Corbusier was not simply negligent or naive but sick, perhaps mad. Peter Serenyi has paired Le Corbusier with Charles Fourier, the nineteenth-century utopian theorist, as deeply unhappy men — "vagabond," "rootless," "single," and "lonely" — who as a consequence loathed human society[2]. Indeed, Fourier's basic argument was that human beings are driven by antisocial "passions" and that their natural tendency is to drift apart or, if forced to live together, become hostile to one another. Fourier's "ideal" society was shaped to manage this situation. In *The Social Destiny of Man* (1808), he proposed to divide society into units of about sixteen hundred inhabitants apiece — live-in workshops (for want of a better description), each occupying a

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[1] The earliest example of this criticism is Cornelius Gurlitt, "Le Corbusier and the 'Pack-Donkey's Way' " (1929), in *Le Corbusier in Perspective*, ed. Peter Serenyi (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 122 – 23. The latest of which I am aware is Mardges Bacon, *Le Corbusier in America: Travels in the Land of the Timid* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 63 – 64, 74, 157 – 58. To cite all the instances of such criticism would amount to an almost complete bibliography of Le Corbusier scholarship.

[2] Peter Serenyi, "Le Corbusier, Fourier, and the Monastery of Ema," *Art Bulletin* 49.4 (December 1967): 277 – 92.

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large building that he termed a “phalanstery.” The productivity of each unit was to be managed by a professional executive, the “areopagus,” which would also try managing the social relations of inmates. And just before they started kill ing each other, as inevitably they would, the inmates would be dispersed to new phalansteries. Serenyi argues that this plan of Fourier’s and the urban designs of Le Corbusier are similarly deranged. More recently, the architecture theorist Anthony Vidler has used the word *warped* to characterize affinities between Le Corbusier and Blaise Pascal[3]. As legend has it, Pascal became intensely agoraphobic after a carriage ride along the Seine nearly ended in tragedy. His horses bolted and plunged over a parapet, their harnesses snapped away from the carriage and the river washed them away. The carriage, containing Pascal and some friends, was left seesawing on the edge. Pascal did not go out much after this incident and, even indoors, was terrified by hallucinations of an abyss threatening to swallow him. Vidler analyzes this story and diagnoses Pascal as having a variety of antisocial phobias and maladies — each of which, according to Vidler, Le Corbusier would later share.

Cities are now valued, without question, as being sites of social activity par excellence. Therefore an urban planner proposing to make antisocial cities is an idea so alien to contemporary habits of thought that we must dismiss someone like Le Corbusier as either negligent or mad. But however odd it seems, antisocial thinking about cities has been the dominant strain of urban discourse throughout most of its two and a half millennia history. Moreover, the adjective *antisocial* used to signify much more than it does today.

Sociable People: Locke and Simmel

We have forgotten the antisocial discourse about cities because of a shift in the way we tend to think about human beings. What qualities or processes must be at work in the life of an individual for him or her to be truly human? The currently

[3] Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 17 – 24, 51 – 64.

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dominant answers to this question maintain that humans are by nature social beings and require social life in order to be fulfilled and whole. According to such views, the self is fluid and takes proper shape only in a complex interchange between our senses and the collective processes — social, cultural, and linguistic — in which every self participates.

Most accounts agree that a crucial marker of this shift, perhaps even its catalyst, was the work of John Locke, especially his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689)[4]. Locke's views have passed into unconscious general use, but it is important to revisit the source to remind ourselves that they developed in a context of polemic against the antisocial implications of Cartesian method. If we were to take Descartes's *Discourse on Method* (1637) and *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) seriously, this would mean excluding social input from any effort to determine truth. Indeed, Descartes argued that our tendency to arrive at differing opinions results from the untrustworthiness of the information flooding in through our senses; and he developed a corrective philosophical method purporting to be objective and guaranteed to produce agreement. Although it may seem that the knowledge determined by this means is *discovered* it is, rather, *innate* in every psyche — albeit dislodged in the trauma of childbirth. The aim of Cartesian reasoning is to strip us of almost all we have learned and experienced in the world in order to locate the final, irreducible point of knowledge that resides within each of us. Society and its history are at best obstacles to reaching this point and coming to understand the world. The most important truths are discoverable by each of us alone, and no consensus is required to validate them. Anyone applying Cartesian method properly will reach the same conclusion, all selves being uniform and all truths impersonal, unchanging, absolute.

Locke countered each facet of this antisocial philosophy. He maintained that human selves are empty vessels at birth, that everything we come to know is processed through our senses, and hence that we have an embodied experience

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4 See, e.g., Anthony Elliott, *Concepts of the Self* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001); Roy Porter, ed., *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1997); Shaun Gallagher and Jonathan Shear, eds., *Models of the Self* (Thorverton, U.K.: Imprint Academic, 1999); Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans, and Peter Redman, eds., *Identity: A Reader* (London: Sage, 2000).

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of the world. For our purposes, Locke's key proposition is that "all that are born into the world [are] surrounded with bodies that perpetually and diversely affect them."[5] A person is a living process, reflexively adapting to times, circumstances, other people, and society. If an individual were unable to take part in the process of socialized development — say, as a result of physical or mental impairment — then he or she might never become a "person" in the full sense but only an inferior kind of creature (indeed, a "substance"). Sociability was for Locke a physiological fact that characterized each stage in the development of every healthy human being. But sociability was also a moral duty, as we find in the *Two Treatises of Government* (1690). Here the polemic is directed not against Descartes but against Sir Robert Filmer. To suggest conditions before the birth of society, Locke, like many Enlightenment philosophers, evoked a hypothetical "State of Nature." In Locke's version of "Natural Law," all people had equal rights to three kinds of "Property": "Life," "Liberty," and "Estate." If one person transgressed the rights of others (for instance, by attempting to kill, enslave, or rob them), the transgressor would thereby forfeit all of his own rights to self-preservation, freedom, and property. The aggrieved party was free to take revenge, but in the state of nature it was difficult to monitor and manage these transgressions: as their own judge and their own jury, plaintiffs were naturally biased toward their own interests. And in the absence of an impartial authority, the strongest and most vicious were likely to triumph over the weakest and best tempered. People therefore agreed to give up their right to prosecute and punish those who injured them and transferred this authority to a higher power. Although no longer absolutely free to do as they pleased, people were now at least free from the random tyrannies of their fellows[6]. Though society develops later than natural law, it develops in defense of natural law and thus is natural itself. Moreover, in the state

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[5] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. A. S. Pringle-Pattison (1689; Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 45 – 46; see, more generally, 42 – 52, 182 – 200.

[6] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (1690; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 269 – 78, 283 – 302, 318 – 53. The "State of Nature" was "very unsafe, very unsecure. This makes [man] willing to quit this Condition, which however free, is full of fears and continual dangers" (350).

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of nature people are social, and a person who behaves antisocially forfeits his or her humanity. Miscreants could be executed straightaway or enslaved until they were worn out. The details did not matter to Locke: their antisocial behavior meant that such people were already technically dead.

Nonetheless, Locke's model of the socialized self was so influential that to give an account of every thinker who has elaborated it would be to account for practically all of the most respected commentators on the subject over the succeeding three centuries[7]. It will be useful in our context, however, to remember in particular the model developed by the German sociologist Georg Simmel, who argued that individual development was dependent entirely upon *metropolitan* sociability. Writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Simmel was concerned to show that cultivation of the individual soul can be achieved only in urbane society:

For culture exists only if man draws into his development *something that is external to him*. Cultivation is certainly a state of the soul, but one that is reached only by means of the use of purposely created *objects*. This externality and objectivity is not to be understood only in a spatial sense. The forms of comportment, the refinement of taste expressed in judgments, the education of moral tact which make an individual a delightful member of society — they are all cultural formations in which the perfection of the individual is routed through real and ideal spheres outside of the self. The perfection does not remain a purely immanent process[8].

The dialectical richness of Simmel's concept of individuality is best revealed by his discussion in "Group Expansion and the Development of Individuality" (1908). There he argues that individuality develops as a result of involvement

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[7] I provide a gloss on some of these thinkers and their opponents in my book *Le Corbusier and the Concept of Self* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 4 – 9, 197 – 202, and esp. 205 – 207, nn. 8 – 9.

[8] Georg Simmel, "Subjective Culture" (1908), trans. Roberta Ash, in *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, ed. Donald L. Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 227 – 34; quotation from 230 – 32.

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in ever larger groups, since the natural, healthy tendency of groups is toward the discovery of things they have in common with other groups and toward formation of productive links between them. The most important element of Simmel's model is also its most elegant: "[as our social] circle enlarges, so too do the possibilities of developing our inner lives; as its cultural offerings increase, regardless of how objective or abstract they may be, so too do the chances of developing the distinctiveness, the uniqueness, the sufficiency of existence of our inner lives."[9] The implications are clear: since we develop as individuals the more that we engage with other people, the best setting for individual development is a large and socially intricate city.

But the line between the individual and the collective is not fixed: "A person," Simmel holds, "is never merely a collective being, just as he is never merely an individual being."[10] *Individuality*, moreover, is not a term that can be restricted for application to individuals. Because there is an indefinite number of "superimposed circles" or bounded groups between the atomized self and the monolithic state, the concept of individuality must be redrawn continually: "As soon as something is present that is more inclusive, antithetical; over against this something, the (now relatively individual) collective structure can gain its conscious particularity, its character of uniqueness or indivisibility."[11] To put it in less tortuous terms, a group looking at groups smaller than itself will consider itself a collective, while the same group looking at larger groups will consider itself an individual. The groups on this sliding scale will regard themselves as individual or collective depending on whether they look up or down. What matters most, for our present purpose, is Simmel's underlying contention that *the individual is always a group*.

Simmel argues further that the essence of individual life and sociability is discovered in the continual transgression of group boundaries, but transgressing

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[9] Georg Simmel, "Group Expansion and the Development of Individuality" (1908), trans. Richard P. Albares, in *Individuality and Social Forms*, 251 – 93; quotation from 273 – 74.

[10] Simmel, "Group Expansion," 261.

[11] Simmel, "Group Expansion," 265 – 66.

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them is not easy on the individuals involved. Faced with the baffling stimuli of the enormous variety of metropolitan groups, the individual tends to erect new barriers to shut out the dissonance. Simmel explores this difficulty in his famous essay of 1903, "The Metropolis and Mental Life":

Thus the metropolitan type . . . creates a protective organ for itself against the profound disruption with which the fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu threaten it. Instead of reacting emotionally, the metropolitan type reacts primarily in a rational manner, thus creating a mental predominance through the intensification of consciousness, which in turn is caused by it. Thus the reaction of the metropolitan person to those events is moved to a sphere of mental activity which is least sensitive and which is furthest removed from the depths of the personality.[12]

What Simmel describes here is the "blasé attitude" of the metropolitan sophisticate, apparently indifferent to his or her fellows. But crucially, Simmel adds, "this sphere of indifference is not as great as it seems superficially. Our minds respond, with some definite feeling, to almost every impression emanating from another person."[13]
Rather than indifference, then, the metropolitan attitude might be characterized best as "a slight aversion, a mutual strangeness and repulsion."[14] This moment of aversion represents the individual's attempt to gather reserves of psychological strength and self-identity before engaging with the metropolis again, incorporating its lessons and (in the ideal case) developing a more expansive sense of self. Once achieved, according to Simmel, a new boundary and new aversions will be set up in preparation for the next assault at the next group boundary.

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[12] Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903), trans. Edward A. Shils, in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. Neil Leach

[13] Simmel, "Metropolis and Mental Life," 74.

[14] Simmel, "Metropolis and Mental Life," 74.

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Ever newer and deeper reserves of personality are therefore called into being as the individual is forced to hold him- or herself together in the face of the disaggregating forces of larger social groups and ever more challenging stimuli. Only cities are rich enough to catalyze this process. Simmel's basic *divergence* from Locke (though not *disagreement* with him) is in this last assertion. Both hold that our potential, both as individuals and as social beings, could be realized only when drawn out by the challenges of all that is around us; and both Simmel and Locke hold that an antisocial person must be subhuman. Simmel's innovation is in claiming that nonurban people are and must remain psychologically backward. Simmel can perhaps be credited with developing the first philosophical model of the country bumpkin.

In summary, a little over three hundred years ago the notion began to spread that the more chaotic, rich, and unregulated a population center is, the more it is to be valued as providing the kind of life experience required for development of one's human potential.[15] This view of urban socializing has since become the norm. But not everyone has at all times been convinced of the worth of the city or even the worth of socializing. When did the discourse of antisocial urbanism begin?

Another Tradition

Although not a town planner in the usual sense, Plato is the obvious theorist with whom to begin: the *Republic* can be read as an argument against the free socializing that is characteristic of cities. An urban population free to socialize indiscriminately would become corrupt, their sexual and consumer desires inflamed by wide exposure to stimuli. Plato believed that the internal workings

15 Jules Lubbock, *The Tyranny of Taste: The Politics of Architecture and Design in Britain, 1550 – 1960* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 89 – 143, offers an account of how this shift took place in the context of the "Luxury Debate" in London during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Lubbock's account, which deals with such figures as Bernard de Mandeville, Joseph Addison, David Hume, and Adam Smith, is especially valuable for showing how the shift was tied to the development of liberal-capitalist economic models.

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of the psyche and those of the city were both out of balance in his day and place, and this for him represented "injustice." To realign the psyche and the city, and thus to restore justice, the population needed division into three starkly distinct, segregated, and hierarchically arranged castes ("rulers," "auxiliaries," and "third class") to correspond with the tripartite hierarchy of psychological faculties ("reason," "spirit," and "appetite"). Just as appetite must be constrained by reason for the soul to be balanced and just, so the plebeian third class must be constrained by the city's "guardians" (comprising rulers and auxiliaries). In books 4 and 5 of the *Republic*, the methods that Plato suggested for maintaining these constraints included censorship, brainwashing, eugenics, and infanticide. A city that was not arranged with a view to preventing mobility between castes (thus limiting intercourse between varieties of resident) would become inevitably a kind of hell.

Such arguments were not lost, centuries later, on the learned fathers of the church, though Plato's dour optimism became in their writings a dour pessimism. St. Augustine wasted no energy planning a "City of Man" where good Christians could live both sociably and righteously as this would have been impossible — the city was irredeemably wicked. To get from the City of Man up to heaven (or the "City of God"), Augustine demands that the Christian withdraw from urban society into small segregated communities, preferably celibate, or even into an isolated hermitage. But *why* were cities so bad? Observing that Cain had built the first one, Augustine argued that the sin of fratricide had germinated there into the myriad evils that would subsequently be found in "the city" — any city.

The discourse of city planning and architecture in this tradition begins not later than the Renaissance. Leon Battista Alberti, for instance, argued in the fifteenth century that human viciousness cannot be eradicated, only restrained. His evidence was his own somewhat paranoid experience of early modern Genoa, Florence, Rimini, and Mantua, where, if someone approached on a public street, it was to rob, abduct, or kill you. Alberti's remedy for the dangers inherent to cities was to use their physical fabric as a defensive weapon. Walls and gates, he advised architects, should incarcerate the troublesome working classes into zones determined by occupation. Streets should be narrow and winding to confuse invading forces and make it easy to spring ambushes on them. Palazzi should be riddled with secret passages, hidey-holes, and listening tubes so that one can spy

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on the treacherous goings-on among one's household staff and even family. Taking his cue from Roman discourse on the viciousness of life in the metropolis, Alberti concluded that, while cities might be necessary as seats of government and commerce, it was best to retreat to one's suburban villa as soon as one's public affairs could be concluded.[16]

Negative views such as these have dominated urban discourse for most of the last two and a half millennia. Moreover, the chief distinction between the negative and positive traditions about city life is a matter of valence more than of substance and vocabulary. Plato, Augustine, and Alberti had emphasized, as much as Locke and Simmel came to do, that any judgment of city life depends on which qualities one believes must be at work for a person to be or become fully human. Far from seeing human beings as robustly social, however, those who revile cities regard human beings as fragile and hence liable to corrupting influences. According to this negative view, people must do what is required to isolate themselves from questionable or even unfamiliar experiences. Information garnered through the corporeal senses are not believed to be constitutive of the self but indeed can damage it. Social experiences become unimportant or irrelevant to selfhood, to be avoided where possible, and always at least somewhat dangerous. The idea of the city as a place for socializing — and of human beings as creatures that benefit from extensive and various social experience — is a fairly recent one. An urban thinker taking a long view might regard the positive idea of city life as merely a fashion. Le Corbusier did not care for this fashion. He sought recourse in older styles of thought.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was an inescapable figure of Le Corbusier's youth in the Jura mountains of Switzerland[17]. In the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1755), Rousseau argues that society made human beings weak by making them

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[16] Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), esp. 92 – 94, 100 – 107, 117 – 25, 189 – 92, 294 – 96.

[17] For a detailed and imaginative account of the influence of Rousseau on Le Corbusier, see Adolf Max Vogt, *Le Corbusier, the Noble Savage: Toward an Archaeology of Modernism*, trans. Radka Donnell (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

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increasingly dependent on each other for individual survival. Social organization increases prosperity; but while prosperity may give us more leisure time, we fill our extra hours in consuming unnecessary luxuries that only further sap our strength. “As [man] becomes sociable,” Rousseau writes, “[he] grows weak, timid, and servile; his effeminate way of life totally enervates his strength and courage.”[18] Moreover, life in society provokes comparison of one’s own attributes with those of others, and out of that experience arise emotions such as vanity, envy, and shame. To present oneself well in pursuit of social approval becomes more important than one’s own conscience and inner peace. Rousseau detested these consequences of higher social order and desired a return to the self-sufficiency and honesty of the primitive. He was at a loss to understand how people had been so misguided as to leave this state of nature — a transition that “made man wicked while making him sociable.” But something had gone wrong and society was now a regrettable fact: “The original man having vanished by degrees, society offers to us only an assembly of artificial men and factitious passions, which are the work of all these new relations.”[19]

Although it was too late to go back, Rousseau wanted to stop the rot. If people were not to degenerate utterly, he reasoned, they would have to recapture some of their primitive inner strength — that is, search for an identity not dependent on social conventions. We must, Rousseau concluded, be weaned of the collective:

The savage lives within himself, while the social man lives constantly outside himself, and only knows how to live in the opinion of others, so that he seems to receive the consciousness of his own existence merely from the judgment of others concerning him. . . . these are too fatal proofs that the greater part of our ills are our own making, and that we might have avoided them nearly all by adhering to that simple, uniform, and *solitary* manner of life which nature prescribed[20].

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[18] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality” (1755), in *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. G. D. H. Cole (London: Dent, 1993), 57.

[19] Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” 82, 115.

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Rousseau's *Social Contract* of 1762 is superficially readable as a blueprint for a better society. Read in the context of the discourse on inequality, however, *The Social Contract* appears to be a caution for beings who had been destined to be solitary and were now lost in unavoidable company[21]. People in general could no longer do without society, but *The Social Contract* examined ways of limiting and countering its degrading effects. In other words, this crucial modern social treatise is fundamentally antisocial.

An even more powerful influence on Le Corbusier's antisocial thinking was Pascal's *Pensées* of 1670. Pascal was concerned that too much time is generally spent on activities that distract people from facing the "wretchedness" of their individual souls. Whatever pleasure one may derive from interacting with other people is nothing but the satisfaction, however momentary, of forgetting one's true condition: "They have a secret instinct driving them to seek external diversion and occupation, and this is the result of the constant sense of wretchedness."[22] But in diversion there is finally no solace "because it comes from somewhere else, from outside." Nevertheless, "take away their diversion and you will see them bored to extinction. Then they will feel their nullity without recognizing it, for nothing could be more wretched than to be intolerably depressed as soon as one is reduced to introspection with no means of diversion."[23] We need to find our happiness in solitary introspection, Pascal says, as "the sole cause of man's unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room." But inevitably, we turn back to the distractions of society as they are so narcotically diverting and addictive: "That is why men are so fond of hustle and bustle; that is why prison is such a fearful punishment; that is why the pleasures of solitude are so incomprehensible."[24] Pascal considered all human relations pointless. Since we

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[20] Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,"

[21] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (1762), in *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. Cole, esp. 179, 190 – 96.

[22] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (1670; London: Penguin, 1995), 40; see also 7, 19, 29 – 30, 35 – 36, 42 – 43, 59, 275.

[23] Pascal, *Pensées*, 8, 37; see also 26, 38 – 41.

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see in each other only external qualities, and since these are constantly changing, we must remain forever incomprehensible to one another. With introspection we might be able to come to an understanding of our own self, but even so we cannot communicate this understanding to others. Consequently, Pascal urges us not to become attached to other people — such unfathomable and "transitory creatures."[25]

Le Corbusier referred to Pascal as an inspiration for the style of life he expected among the residents of his austere cities:

Leisure will require a man to spend more time in his room (Pascal's desideratum). . . . we must be vigilant, for the whole of our lives and every minute we must be ready to seize the miracle which lies latent in all things. It seems that Pascal, also, said this to Christians, which only goes to prove how right he always was.[26]

And when faced with "distractions," Le Corbusier raved in a manner that would have impressed Pascal:

Then background noise to fill in the holes, the emptiness. Musical noise, coloured noise, embroidered noise or batiked noise. A low volume of noise, a high volume of noise, reading the newspaper (description of the actions of others), cinemas, dance-halls, Pigalle's . . . in order to get away from oneself, never be alone. "If I were to come face to face with my soul (fearful thought)? What would I say to it? Watch out!" Thus they keep their distractions on the go to avoid having to face themselves.[27]

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24 Pascal, *Pensées*, 37 – 38; see also 120, 208, 274, 288 – 92.

25 Pascal, *Pensées*, 207, 217 – 18; see also 51, 117, 214.

26 Le Corbusier, *The Four Routes* (1941), trans. Dorothy Todd (London: Denis Dobson, 1947), 18, 100.

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In his book *The Home of Man*, coauthored with François de Pierrefeu during the time of their collaboration with the Vichy regime, Le Corbusier extended his diatribe against distractions to cover the mass media. Society makes us dependent, he and de Pierrefeu argued, upon unnecessary goods and luxuries, cabaret and cinema. The active agent of society is advertising — the "poisonous," "lust"-inducing ads on radio and in the press — and these media subject people also to "the perfidy of propaganda" issued by the political parties. This combination results in "futile political squabbles in cafés instead of spontaneous happiness, instead of intellectual and moral exercise. . . . Whence loss of individualism."[28] The authors' disgust is encapsulated brilliantly in this passage:

By repetition [the media] . . . split the person before reducing it to dust and casting it into limbo. . . . [their] artificial dreams corrod[e] the alert mind and its ability to be alert . . . [and their function is to release] those supreme poisons that man alone is able to exude for man: the dream of others. Newspaper, radio, cinema pour out this poison. Numberless images, barrages of slogans with a punch, rhythms repeating lascivious or stupid tunes, crowd and jostle at the door of our senses, the better to lodge within brains made defenceless by the sweeping away of its filter, our memory. Then the subconscious gives way; and, as with a blocked drain, a flood of scoriae, vanities, filth, spreads over the conscience and covers it with a thick film, slow to vanish[29]*.*

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[27] Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today* (1925), trans. James I. Dunnett (London: Architectural Press, 1987), 30 – 31. See also Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (1923), trans. Frederick Etchells (Oxford: Butterworth Architecture, 1989), 120 – 21.

[28] François de Pierrefeu and Le Corbusier, *The Home of Man*, trans. Clive Entwistle and Gordon Holt (1942; London: Architectural Press, 1948), 14; Le Corbusier, *Four Routes*, 195; see also 125 – 26, 147 – 48, 201.

[29] De Pierrefeu and Le Corbusier, *Home of Man*, 19; more generally, see 18 – 20 and Entwistle's introductory remarks on the "forfeiture of inner freedom" by our "becoming slaves to an ever-multiplying brood of otherwise unnecessary obligations, disorders, and diseases" (8).

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The individual is rent asunder by the media and brainwashed by them to dream the "*dream of others*," rather than his or her own.

Given opinions like these, it is unsurprising that every aspect of Le Corbusier's cities was designed to keep people apart and maximize the amount of time that they spent alone. The individual's daily work would be finished quickly thanks to Taylorized methods of human management and the most modern technologies, such as assembly lines, filing cabinets, and the miraculous rolodex. The commute home would be conducted swiftly along the multilevel, traffic-free superhighways. The evening meal would be delivered by catering services. The walls of the apartment "cell" would be soundproofed against neighbors. The views outward would be of trees and sky — nothing else. In the end, Le Corbusier said, "a basic human need had to be fulfilled, that of personal solitude. When the door is shut, I can freely enter my own world."[30] These ideas induced shock and recoil at the time Le Corbusier promoted them, but his way of conceiving the city was ancient, though in terminal decline. The great irony is that these revanchist views were held by a revolutionary architect who was at the forefront of the modernist avant-garde[31].

But Le Corbusier was not alone in these antisocial aspirations, and neither was he unaware of its principal danger: criminality. C. G. Jung argued that healthy individual development requires the cultivation of "tendencies that represent the antisocial elements in man's psychic structure," though he understood that doing so would mean embracing "the 'statistical criminal' in everybody."[32] The personality can only "crystallize" when refusing to accept social conventions

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[30] Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City* (1935), trans. Pamela Knight, Eleanor Levieux, and Derek Coltman (London: Faber and Faber, 1967),

[31] Jeffrey M. Perl has argued that this irony — of the revanchist revolutionary — is more the rule than the exception among modernists. In *The Tradition of Return: The Implicit History of Modern Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), Perl assesses this phenomenon with respect to Nietzsche, Freud, Yeats, Henry James, Joyce, Pound, Lawrence, T. S. Eliot, and others.

[32] Carl Gustav Jung, "Psychology and Religion" (1938), in *Psychology and Religion: West and East* (1958), trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge, 1991), 75.

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and withdrawing from “personal entanglements”:

Indeed, it seems as if all the personal entanglements and dramatic changes of fortune that make up the intensity of life were nothing but hesitations, timid shrinkings, almost like petty complications and meticulous excuses for not facing the finality of this strange and uncanny process of crystallization.[33]

The proper developmental route leads into solitude, but rejection cuts both ways: one who comes to regard personal relationships and social conventions as “petty” will render him- or herself “incomparable” and “unknowable” — “an irrational datum” so alien to society that it will consider him or her a criminal.[34] Jung believed, however, that social maladjustment was the prerequisite of psychic maturity, and ostracism was a fair price that must be paid.
Likewise Albert Camus (one of Le Corbusier’s drinking buddies in 1930s’ Algiers) explored the value of antisocial thought and behavior in terms of their association with crime. “Every ethic conceived in solitude,” Camus writes in *The Rebel* (1951), “implies the exercise of power.” The antisocial person has a choice, but only between different types of “crime”: “There are crimes of passion and crimes of logic.
The line that divides them is not clear.”[35] More specifically, the

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[33] Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (1953; London: Routledge, 1992), 7, 217 – 18: the belief that all problems are susceptible of political or other communal solutions is attributed to “the prevailing tendency of consciousness to seek the source of all ills in the outside world. . . . The consciousness of modern man still clings so much to outward objects that he makes them exclusively responsible. . . . The social and political circumstances of the time are certainly of considerable significance, but their importance for the weal and woe of the individual has been boundlessly overestimated” (Carl Gustav Jung, *The Undiscovered Self* [1958], trans. R. F. C. Hull [London: Routledge, 1996], 81, 85, 112). See also Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1963), ed. Aniela Jaffé, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Fontana, 1995): “We rush impetuously into novelty, driven by a mounting sense of insufficiency, dissatisfaction, and restlessness” (263).

[34] Jung, *Undiscovered Self*, 12; see also 9 – 10.

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choice is between public and private violence. The paradox of the public course is embodied, for Camus, in the dilemma of the French revolutionaries: "By guillotining God on 21 January 1793, they deprived themselves, forever, of the right to proscribe crime or to censure wicked instincts."[36] Alternatively, a rebel can follow the course taken by the Marquis de Sade: unable to subjugate the world to one's immediate satisfaction, the antisocial rebel can turn even further inward, shut away in a domain of imagination where one's personal values and violence hold full sway. The problem for Camus was that he believed rebellion to be an essential component of life, "an appeal to the essence of being," even though the moment of individual rebellion might slip into violence, whether in mind or in deed, in solitude or in society. "Is this contradiction inevitable?" Camus asks: "Does it characterize or betray the value of rebellion?"[37] Rebellion is legitimate, he appears to answer, only if it does not pass from thought into action; yet without that transgression, rebellion will be sterile. Somehow the rebel must not "flee this tension" but instead find a way to exist on the frontier between solitude and society:

Whatever we may do, excess will always keep its place in the heart of man where solitude is found. We all carry within us our places of exile, our crimes, and our ravages. But our task is not to unleash them on the world. . . . From the moment that he strikes, the rebel cuts the world in two. He rebelled in the name of the identity of man with man and he sacrifices this identity by consecrating the difference in blood.[38]

Camus sent a copy of *The Rebel* to Le Corbusier, who annotated this passage of the book in his spidery hand: "vers la limite critique . . . le dilemme tragique":

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[35] Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, trans. Anthony Bower (1951; Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1971), 32 – 56, 72 – 75;

[36] Camus, *Rebel*, 35.

[37] Camus, *Rebel*, 76; see also 250 – 51.

[38] Camus, *Rebel*, 72, 245, 265.

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"toward the critical limit . . . the tragic dilemma." Le Corbusier had no illusions about the hazards to be faced in constructing an antisocial city. Perhaps the same may be said of Camus and Jung and the many antisocial urbanists who preceded them. Presumably, they all thought the effort was worth the risk.

Casual Tyrannies

The idea that cities have beneficial effects on our lives has become so successful that it has almost eclipsed the antisocial way of thinking about cities and lives. It is perhaps for this reason that Lewis Mumford was so baffled when asked to write the introduction to a book called *Can Our Cities Survive?* (1942) by the modernist planner José Luis Sert, one of Le Corbusier's many disciples. Mumford refused and gave the following rationale:

[There is] a serious flaw in the general outline. . . . The four functions of the city do not seem to me to adequately cover the ground of city planning: dwelling, work, recreation, and transportation are all important. But what of the political, educational, and cultural functions of the city. . . . The leisure given by the machine . . . frees [mod ern city dwellers] for a fuller participation in political and cultural activities. . . . The organs of political and cultural association are, from my standpoint, the distinguishing marks of the city. . . . I regard their omission as the chief defect of routine city planning; and their absence from the program [here] I find almost inexplicable.[39]

Le Corbusier may have dominated thinking about cities in the first half of

[39] Letter of Lewis Mumford to Jose Luis Sert, December 28, 1940, cited in Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 133 – 34. Mumford reiterated the absence of this "fifth function" in a letter to an associate: "Did I tell you that Sert . . . had in accordance with CIAM instructions written his whole book . . . without a single reference to the functions of government, group association or culture?" (Lewis Mumford to F. J. Osborn, November 27, 1942, cited in Mumford, *CIAM Discourse*, 132; see also 142).

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the twentieth century, but Jane Jacobs — an urban economist who is anything but antisocial — has typified planning orthodoxy ever since. In her seminal book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), Jacobs argued that "real people are unique, they invest years of their lives in significant relationships with other unique people, and are not interchangeable in the least. Severed from their relationships, they are destroyed as effective social beings — sometimes for a little while, sometimes forever."[40] In other words, people do not have identities unless engaged in a dense web of responsible social activity. Observing a group of unruly kids in a public housing project, Jacobs added that "these were anonymous children, and the identities behind them were an unknown. . . . Impersonal city streets make anonymous people."[41] When I asked her to elaborate, she replied simply: "I think that people need other people."[42] One might think that people who need people should live in tightly knit villages. But Jacobs's argument is that cities provide a greater variety and thickness of relationships, as long as antisocial planners like Le Corbusier are prevented from rendering city streets "impersonal" and their denizens "anonymous." The urban sociologist Richard Sennett is known for having radicalized this idea of Jacobs's. He argues, in conversation, that people need to be immersed in dense and indeed dangerous cities, which inspire "that whole Simmelian dialectic of stimulation and defence . . . where people become Simmelian creatures."[43] Without that dialectic, Sennett concludes in his book *The Uses of Disorder*, we remain psychologically immature and intolerant of others.[44]

The "New Urbanism," which is informed by these and related ideas, seeks

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40 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (London: Penguin, 1994), 67.

41 Jacobs, *Death and Life*, 146 – 47.

42 Jane Jacobs, private interview, April 7, 2003, Toronto.

43 Richard Sennett, private interview, December 20, 2002, London.

44 Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life* (1970; London: Faber and Faber, 1996).

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to shape new cities and "retrofit" existing ones so that their spaces make socializing not simply available but unavoidable. The New Urbanism has a "charter" that advocates compact, walkable neighborhoods and extensive, efficient public transportation to minimize dependence on one-person or one-family cars. The charter favors dense integration in neighborhoods of housing, commerce, light industry, and civic institutions like schools and hospitals. New Urbanists also prefer modest enterprises (which plow funds and resources back into the local economy) to multinational corporations (which divert funds and resources elsewhere). Underpinning all these preferences is a commitment to the reinvigoration of civic values and pride in citizenship through wide and deep participation in collective affairs.[45] This approach to town planning has generated considerable interest on the part of Western governments, especially in Britain and the United States. Moreover, New Urbanist discourse has been absorbed by the popular media and is fed to us daily, in the form of Local Knowledge snobbery. The London edition of *Time Out*, for example, gives us advice of a kind we can read in any metro-lifestyle magazine or newspaper review every day of any week: "Don't order the same dishes that you can order in Cardiff or Dundee. You came to the big city to experience and learn, after all."[46] Our popular language expresses the pressure we are under to "get out there" and experience all that our cities have to offer. How often does one hear, in life and on television, that someone or other "needs to get out more"? The person condescended to is usually a "nerd" holding tenaciously to idiosyncratic (or even just passé) opinions or tastes. It is interesting too, in this connection, that the program introduced recently by the British government to prevent certain types of damage to property, to prevent petty theft and shoplifting, teenage gangsterism, and disruptive and violent neighbors, bears the name of Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs). The terminology is telling: antisocial behavior is conflated by the responsible public with petty criminal behavior.

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[45] See Michael Leccese and Kathleen McCormick, eds., *Charter of the New Urbanism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000).

[46] "Food and Drink: Dos and Don'ts in the *Best* Possible Taste," *Time Out*, London ed., Autumn 2000.

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It is unlikely that we will witness a resurgence any time soon of the old antisocial urban discourse, especially as its advocates tended to be mystics and hermits, would-be despots, and writers a little too interested in manslaughter. Still, it is useful to remember that the approved marriage of cities and socializing is a fairly recent academic fashion. For the greater part of the last twenty-five hundred years, the question "what are cities good for?" would have garnered the answer: "good for nothing." But it is useful also to remember the terms in which the sociable city was first celebrated. The celebration involved judgments about human thought and behavior that were no less tyrannical than the ideals that they replaced. Nowadays these tyrannies spread not through force but, more casually, through popular opinion. The new rules are clear and enforced by disdain. Those who "cannot handle" metropolitan social life are judged as at best nerds, more likely criminals, certainly backward, and (at the outer limit) perhaps inhuman.

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