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1/13/8

Unusual News: Stayput Flats

At the bottom of the "Age" Real Estate page for June 29th. 1968 appeared an item whose implication could be far-reaching.

12 O.Y.O's at 118 Holden Street North Fitzroy-East Brunswick sell at \$7900--less than the average price of houses around about. Elderly people could thus sell their old house, yet remain "stayput" in the same area by merely shifting "up the street", into a brand new unit, and have some money to spare!

Quiz: If this can be done at a profit by private-industry, why could not the Housing Commission undertake more extensive operations of the same kind providing better amenities in place of the profit? This sort of process could remove the nasty and inhumane aspects of present Commission uprooting of people's lives.

2/13/8

Mexico City Versus City of Melbourne

There is no need to comment on these excerpts from the "Australian" column of Laurie Thomas, arts editor on 13/2/68 kindly recommended to us by Jonathon:

"What is important from a townplanning point of view, is one keeps insisting, the sense of scale: and this means primarily a feeling both for space and for the integrity of the place itself."

"The massive open planning of the old cities of pyramids finds an echo in a city, which, though crowded, has yet the sense to push some building back from the street, to build them around trees, to leave open spaces between them, to create wide terraces where people can eat and drink under sunshades off the foot-paths."

"The attitude to the proper use of a city by the people who live in it seems to represent qualities of feeling which, though they may bud, do not always burgeon among planners and architects tied to the land-grubbing policies of Australian civic and local government"

Thomas contrasts "that gimerack bit of American suburbia called Surfers Paradise, with its single line of flashy lights all on the footpath and not a square inch of frontage "wasted" by leaving a few trees standing---and of the home units and flats there in danger of falling into the sea--"

"Or of the great coast north of Brisbane, hundreds and hundreds of miles of magnificent beach, with its great resources being cut into 50-ft. frontages, all cheek by jowl (and the lot bulldozed into a desert first) just because a "developer" is given the rights if he puts in a single access road leading to them"

"---What is disturbing is that this approach to the value of "frontages" dominates all officialdom in Australia when it comes to the developing of the cities themselves. You would think that we were a population of 12 million living in Tasmania " ?

"But to come back to Mexico: it is not just the sensible use of space but the respect and love for its own past--" ---"there is no need to create bodies like national trusts. It is just unthinkable that the best of the past should be allowed to rot or be pulled down to make way for the (temporarily) new."

Thank you, Laurie Thomas; thank you Jonathon. But in the city where, oh where, could we start? If you push one building back from the facade (which they are beginning to do in some parts) are not the exposed side walls of the buildings either side uglier still? (Architects comment wanted).

3/13/8

Give Jane Her Due---But.

(Jane Jacobs: "The Death and Life of Great American Cities---the Failure of Townplanning---Pelican \$ 1.40)

There have been some nasty things said about the ideas of Jane Jacobs. For instance, Paul Ritter:

"Jane Jacobs in her shallow analysis of planning problems orientated towards large cities of the U.S.A argues in favour of many small blocks. She insists on 'streets' " (i.e for pedestrians as distinct from pedestrian pathways favoured by Ritter)"and limits her illustrations to grid-iron Manhattan. She denounces the super-block, as if it had to act in a frustrating way to citizens on the move with its more extensive and traffic-free path areas. She describes only bad use of this principle: "these streets are meaningless because there is seldom any active reason for a good cross-section of the people to use them! This merely means that a path system must make meaningful and plentiful connections with the surrounding areas, satisfying 'desire lines' and giving opportunities for creative additions, citizen-participation" (Paul Ritter "Planning for Man and Motor" Pergamon Press 1964 about \$ 19.00) at p 22)

4/13/8

We return to this point. We think he has a point. To give Jane her due, though, she is not dealing with Australian cities. Particularly she is not dealing with Melbourne, one of the most suburbanised cities in the world.

"Irregular" 7/8/8 to 16/8/8 shows the qualitatively different densities of Jacobin territory and Melbourne. Jacobs reckons 300 persons per acre is the lowest possible density at which a city can become vital, and would prefer double that: 600 per acre. Melbournians live at densities of 17.5 per acre ("People in Melbourne" p.20), the older inner suburbs average about 50 per acre, and even Housing Commission high-rise densities are only about 150 per acre.

5/13/8 Let Jane herself speak: "I have concentrated on great cities, and on their inner ~~suburban~~ areas, because this is the problem that has been most consistently evaded in planning theory---Also, to be frank, I like dense cities and care about them most"

"But I hope no reader will try to transfer my observations into guides as to what goes on in towns, or little cities, or in suburbs which are still suburban. Towns suburbs and even little cities are totally different organisms from great cities" (P.177)

Furthermore she specifically warns: "We are in enough trouble already from trying to understand big cities in terms of behaviour and the imagined behaviour of towns. To try to understand towns in terms of big cities will only compound confusion" (p.177)

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There are similar arguments, even stronger ones, surely, against equating "great cities" with suburbs or suburban-type cities like Melbourne?

Is there then nothing to learn from Jane Jacobs of use to Melbourne? I believe there is, even though I do not agree with all her propositions.

4/13/8 First a general criticism. Basically the drive for the renovation, the un-slumming, and the re-vitalising proposed by Jacobs are to be achieved by the middle class as they emerge from the working class, and by private enterprise at that.

"Cities grow the middle class" she says. "But to keep it as a stabilising force in the form of a self-diversified population, means considering the city's people valuable and worth retaining, right where they are, before they become middle class" (p. 296).

She is not a snob, Jane. She likes the working class, but, as you see, she sees their value rather as potential middle class, home-grown, instead of imported from the suburbs!

"Perfectly ordinary housing needs can be provided for almost anybody by private enterprise. What is peculiar about these people" (i.e. low-income groups) "is merely that they cannot pay for it" (p. 337)

On this basis she attacks public housing by public ~~authorities~~ authorities. She proposes an Office of Dwelling Subsidies (ODS) which would subsidise rent so that entrepreneurs could build profitably for low income earners. The ODS would not even have ~~any~~ responsibility to enforce its own standard of design or construction! (p. 344) This is really an extreme, even re-actionary non-planning stance, akin almost to the laissez-faire economists of early capitalism. Public money is to support private enterprise completely unfettered.

If Jacobs justly attacks Ebenezer Howard for the neat "almost feudal" unchanging classes in his garden city, she has left herself open for being equally out-of-time by basing herself on small capitalist enterprise as if it were the beginning of the capitalist system, in an era when either very big business dominates or socialism dominates, and when the working class increase their numbers at the expense of the middle class systematically year by year.

Moreover, it is surely unscientific to deal with central city areas without their swelling suburban hinterlands that threaten to drown them. There can be no "I'm alright Jack" attitude by the central city to its suburb, or vice versa. Degeneration of either affects the other.

5/13/8 That said, there is however, some ~~very~~ correct concepts developed in Jane's book:

Melbourne has its opportunity. From a suburban sprawl, it could, with proper political perspective, which would require precisely substituting public control for private laissez-faire, become something nearer to a "great city" not just quantitatively but qualitatively. From here, following Jacobs, I will be speaking only of the Melbourne central areas.

Some principles drawn from Jacobs which could profitably be adapted to Melbourne.

6/13/8 A city heart. There are, says Jane, "general dependencies by a city on its heart. When a city heart stagnates or disintegrates a city as a social neighbourhood of the whole begins to suffer: people who ought to get together, by means of central activities that are failing, fail to get together---it fails at producing something greater socially culturally and economically than the sum of its separate parts (p. 177)

Every planner worth his salt would applaud so much. It is fashionable now to decry the fact that our "heart" closes shop between 5 and 6 p.m. If we are to look for an ^{idea} idea

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it is from Mr N.F.Clark head of the transportation section, Melbourne University who attacked the underground for the reason that "the trend" was for all central city functions except "executives" to migrate to the suburbs (Australian 23/5/'68 and "The Age/Herald" 2/6/'68)

A planners job is to set his face against such bad trends. I agree with "Ed." ("Irregular No 12) that the force of big business behind the bad trends is immense, and maybe not controllable by Jane's guerilla tactics; but if such tactics don't work, others must be found.

It is true that relatively there are less shops and pubs, and entertainment barely holding its own. This too is what local planners decry. The only sort of solution they offer is to bring people back near to the city and right into the city by siting residential on top of shops. One suggestion is a three tier cake: say, five storeys of shops, topped by five storeys of offices topped by five storeys of home units.

If you draw out the implications of this concept it is precisely: - Mixed Primary Uses"

7/13/8

Mixed Primary Uses Jacobs has erected a whole theory on this, one could almost say, the core of her theorising. Recall her conditions for the purpose:

"To generate exuberant diversity in a city's streets and districts four conditions are indispensable:

"1. The district, and indeed as many of its internal parts as possible, must serve more than one primary function; preferably more than two. These must ensure the presence of people who go outdoors on different schedules and are in the place for different purposes, but who are able to use many facilities in common."

"2. Most blocks must be short: that is, streets and opportunities to turn corners must be frequent"

"3. The district must mingle buildings that vary in age and conditions, including a good proportion of old ones so that they vary in the economic yield they must produce. This mingling must be fairly close-grained."

"4. There must be a sufficiently dense concentration of people for whatever purposes they may be there. This includes dense concentrations in the case of people who are there because of residence." (pp 162-163, and she then proceeds to expand each item into a chapter.)

8/13/8 Personally I agree with Ritter about item 2. But leave out item 3. I consider that items 1, 3 & 4 combined are correct principles and applicable, not of course to the suburbs, except maybe the projected "district centres", but to the city and the future inner areas. The small special shops---bookshops, record shops, frock shops, gift shops, confectioners, the small concert halls, the small craftsmen, the scores of different societies, the dozens of national minority clubs, the dancing classes, the small cafes and restaurants, the small firms of all types, the "small man" generally has a place in the city's "heart", helps create the diversity, the "mixture of primary uses", helps ward off the ubiquitous standardised product dealt with by "Ed"

In the suburbs he will die, killed by the supermarket. But left in lower-rent old buildings "close-grained" with new ones, he can help maintain the attraction towards the "Heart". The small man is not the only "primary use". Of importance in Melbourne are the sports-recreation-cultural facilities: ~~MCC~~ MCC, arts centre, music bowl, Botanic gardens, Flemington course, Showgrounds, Yarra bank, other gardens, theatre etc--all enhanced by Moomba competitions, May Day etc.

Also workplaces. Offices mushroom without planning. Of greater importance is to plan for development of high-density un-obnoxious factories close-grained with other primary uses in the inner areas to avoid commuting-in-

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reverse but to comply with the principle of diversity through mixed primary uses.

9/13/8 If so much is agreed, then the planning principles of the MMBW would need drastic overhaul. The 1954 Master Plan was zoned for "mixed primary uses", in a certain sense. The amount of areas zoned for industries was calculated to provide enough jobs within the various MMBW "sectors" or sub-sectors to match the amount of area zoned as residential or, where this was impossible, to level up the industrial as near as possible to the residential. For example, in the area or sub-sector Oakleigh-Moorabbin-Dandenong-Frankston-C&elsea-Mordialloc-Sandringham the zoning was estimated to provide residences for 57,000 "resident industrial workers" and 57,000 "industrial jobs". There was much open space in this direction. In other built-up "middle" areas the disproportion was very high e.g. in Kew-Hawthorn-Camberwell there were 26,500 resident industrial workers, and only 4,000 jobs. Thus commuting either inwards or outwards was inevitable. (See MMBW Report :Map 8 at p.49)

However, this type of wide-sector matching of two primary land uses, industrial and residential, are on a scale so vast that they are the opposite to Jacob's ideas, and in fact she attacks them as idealistic attempts to neatly sort out human functions into different geographic areas for aesthetic or theoretic purposes without any relation to how a city works or should work. Within each sector, the MMBW (to the extent they were able to consistent with existing land use in the built up areas) zoned all factories together, all residences together, all commerce together and so on, although Jacobs contemplates primary uses of land to be mixed close-grained, in such fashion that they not only "ensure the presence of people who go outdoors on different schedules--- but who are able to use many facilities in common"

Leaving aside for separate argument the correct development of middle and outer suburbs, surely it is correct that the reconstruction of the city itself, and the inner areas should follow the Jacob's principles of mixing uses (apart, of course, from obnoxious uses, or immediately incompatible uses) !

10/13/8 Renovation Where Possible The principle of "unslumming the slums" wherever possible i.e wherever there is suitable sound housing to be unslummed in sufficient quantities such as in Parkville and many similar areas is surely correct.

I agree with Jonathon ("Irregular 4/11/8) when he says that at least such reclamation as has occurred in North End Boston "must be worthy of consideration, after making allowances for differences of environment and circumstances. Perhaps something like this might be organised alongside the activity of the Housing Commission".

I would only add that perhaps the Housing Commission could well enter into competition with private industry in this field. The London County Council counts "rehabilitation" of old buildings amongst its activities, as well as new building.

Some principles drawn from Jacobs which could not be adapted to Melbourne.

11/13/8 1. Density We could possibly have one Kings-Cross or Greenwich Village type experiment at very high densities. But only an experiment. For Melbourne such high densities as, say, 600 per acre would hardly be acceptable and couldn't become typical at least until the car ceased to be a worker's favourite mode of transport, which couldn't be until there were tremendous improvements in public transport.

12/13/8 2. Pavement Life Because we would not tolerate such very high residential densities, the sort of concentrated

side-walk life that Jacobs advocates would only be possible apart from shopping centres, in the city itself, and even then not in the full Jacobin sense, unless outside office hours very high city residential densities could be achieved.

I think Jacobs has gone overboard on the virtues of pavements-along-streets, although the assault-rate and rape-rate may be so much higher in U.S than here that there may be some excuse for it. But, even so, why there can't be "pavements" in the form of arcades, courtyards, piazzas, squares and simply pavements other than those alongside the automobile thoroughfare, I can't understand.

I am not talking about aimless footpaths or open-never-used-spaces, but paths and places that meet "desire lines" as Ritter says. I agree with Jacobs: "the myth that playgrounds and grass and hired guards or supervisors are innately wholesome for children and that city streets, filled with ordinary people are innately evil for children, boils down to a deep contempt for ordinary people."

But surely planning can do better than congregate "ordinary ~~skit~~ people" and children in a narrow side-walk along a car-race? Nor should we erect another myth, in the process of demolishing myths, that properly trained coaches, trainers, leaders, teachers, instructors in the sports, hobbies and culture that attract children, if also given the facilities, are doomed to failure, as Jacobs seems to imply to round out her leave-life-alone-on-the-footpath thesis.

13/13/8 3. Unslumming the Slums Maybe Australian banks and lending institutions don't lend money on reasonable terms for home renovation, but they are currently advancing an amazing amount of first mortgage money to finance purchase of old inner-suburban houses (especially the Commonwealth Bank). This leads to a rapid turn-over of such houses amongst migrants, often with renovations of sorts in between sales.

In my opinion, however there are very large areas of housing in Melbourne, basically unsuitable for renovation. The situation is quite different, for example, from the North End Boston quoted from Jacobs by "Jonathon": "Housing was mainly flats and five-storey tenements."

Melbourne's inner suburban areas are simply not like that. There are two distinct types, both about 100 years old:-
(a) Solid, soundly-built stone or brick houses or terraces built for the middle and even upper classes
(b) Speculator-built timber shacks for factory hands on 15 or 20 foot frontages.

The middle class, mainly academics and professionals are returning now to renovate and live in type (a). These are worth renovating, and are good enough too for working people who prefer them.

But in the main, by modern standards, most of type (b) are not capable of renovation except at such expense that ~~would~~ would be quite uneconomic compared to rehousing. Moreover, such houses would be quite incapable of extension either horizontally or vertically, and hence unable to contribute to the desirable increase in density in the inner areas.

Within type (b) therefore there are very few possibilities of sensible renovation, and Boston-type experience can not help. Despite Jacobs Melbourne must have "cataclysmic money" for big new housing estates, must experiment with proper amenities properly staffed, and a humane policy for displaced persons enabling them to stay-put in the same locality when shifting into improved accommodation.

Note: More contributions on Jane Jacobs welcomed Is she shallow? Do you agree with "attrition of automobiles"? Do you agree or disagree with Ritter, Jonathon, Ed, Alpha?