

Jane Jacobs (1916–2006)

Jane Jacobs Before *Death and Life*

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Jane Jacobs embodied the classical ideal of living both the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*. While writing her first two books, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) and *The Economy of Cities* (1969), she played key roles in saving her home and West Greenwich Village neighborhood from urban renewal redevelopment, and in preventing the obliteration of much of Lower Manhattan by Robert Moses's proposed Lower Manhattan Expressway. In the following decades, after her family emigrated to Toronto in 1968 in protest of the Vietnam War, Jacobs remained involved in similar urban causes and related debates. In her new home city of Toronto, she became involved in another successful fight against an expressway project and participated in the debate of Quebec's secession from Canada, leading to her third book, *The Question of Separatism: Quebec and the Struggle over Sovereignty* (1980). By the time of her fourth book, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations: Principles of Economic Life* (1984), Jacobs's ideas about cities, radical and outlandish in the late 1950s, had become increasingly commonplace urban theory, influencing redevelopment in the United States and abroad.¹ Her wide-reaching conceptions ranged from the function of city sidewalks to the city's importance to regions, nations, and societies. In the next few decades, while remaining active in public affairs, her intellectual horizon continued to expand, from cities and nations to the fate of civilizations. Her fifth major work, *Systems of Survival: A Dialogue on the Moral Foundations of Commerce and Politics* (1993), was a meditation on moral philosophy and Plato's *Republic*, and was a bestseller in Canada. Continuing the dialogue of her previous book, *The Nature of Economies* (2000)—one of her best works—was a discussion of the similar ecologies of nature and economies. Four years later, at the age of eighty-eight, she published her last book, *Dark Age Ahead* (2004), a commentary on the decline of Western culture.²

Despite the development and complexity of her work, recent obituaries of Jacobs reveal that she remained stereotyped—often chauvinistically—as an activist-housewife and dogmatic amateur. Nicolai Ouroussoff's obituary in the *New*

York Times, for example, presented a typical misinterpretation of Jacobs's thought as anti-modern and prescriptive, failing to account for her appreciation of modern architecture, diversity in urban form, and architectural innovation.³ In such assessments lingers an old stereotype of Jacobs as a doctrinaire and angry young woman who wanted all cities modeled on the domestic scale of Greenwich Village and who opposed all planning. In the 1960s, when there were few women in planning, many presumed Jacobs's understanding of the city to be limited to the domestic scale, and her ideas were frequently dismissed as an antiplanning position, as if the choice was between tabula rasa redevelopment or nothing. Yet Jacobs's ideas were more dialectical and wider ranging than critics have allowed. By highlighting the largely forgotten but important literary and activist projects of her early years, this essay sheds new light on Jacobs's work before *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* and presents her as an individual of great depth.

In contrast to familiar biographical sketches, Jacobs's writing career did not begin with *Death and Life* and her activism on behalf of cities did not start with Greenwich Village. But if, even after a recent biography, relatively little is known about the first twenty-five years of her career, the gap remains largely attributable to Jacobs's own reticence.⁴ Published when she was forty-five, *Death and Life* marked a break with her previous work: the end of her career as a writer and the start of her life as an author—"author" being the title she insisted on when labeled an "urbanologist" or alleged "expert" on cities. (Jacobs was exceptionally sensitive about titles, credentials, and their representations of expertise, and turned down numerous honorary degrees on this account.⁵) Suddenly recognized as a notable author and public figure when *Death and Life* was published, she became increasingly resistant to interest in her biography, spoke little of her early work, and wanted her books to be judged only on the merits of their ideas.

Death and Life was also particularly shaped by the circumstances of Jacobs's life, circumstances that contributed directly to her empirically grounded theories of city com-

plexity. She studied the city by direct observation, building her concepts through induction (as she advocated in the book's conclusion), in part because she had no academic training in city planning, architectural or urban history, or sociology to influence her research.⁶ With no degrees beyond a high school diploma, Jacobs did not expect readers to accept her ideas on the basis of academic credentials. Moreover, not long after starting to write the book, she found herself alienated from her career as an architectural journalist when her personal views on urban renewal came into conflict with her role as an editor of *Architectural Forum*. A decisive experience in this regard came in July 1959 when Jacobs, less than a year into her book project, was interviewed for a *New York Times* review of the city's slum clearance program. "Jane Jacobs, associate editor of *Architectural Forum*, now on leave to write a book about city planning," the *Times* reported, "says that 'firing Mr. Shanahan [Slum Clearance Committee vice chairman] or even Mr. Moses would help—but not much. . . . Title I,' she continued, 'in its very nature is a track for the gravy train. It hands great chunks of the city over to officially anointed barons, makes city rebuilding and city commerce into a monopolistic set-up for the favored few. Whether their motives are pure or greedy is beside the point.'"⁷

Executive editors from Time Inc., parent company of *Architectural Forum*, were not happy with these statements. At the time, Jacobs's was a minority position; few people, even her close colleagues, as Peter Blake later noted, agreed with her critical view of urban renewal.⁸ *Forum* editor Douglas Haskell generally supported Jacobs's work enthusiastically, but he told her frankly, "We don't see the urban renewal situation as black and white as you do."⁹ His message, furthermore, was a gentle reprimand: "you really should not have sounded off in the *New York Times* without making a check because you are identified there as an editor of *Forum* and not as an individual."¹⁰ Haskell smoothed things over with the executives, but Jacobs would not make the mistake again. She wrote *Death and Life* "as an individual," and so no one would mistake her ideas for the editorial position of *Architectural Forum* or Time Inc. chairman Henry Luce, she made no mention of her previous writing experience, extensive research, participation at academic conferences, or the close contact she had with many prominent architects and planners as an editor at *Forum*.

Jacobs's self-effacement left her readers with the now-stereotyped picture of the author as a housewife watching the "sidewalk ballet" outside her storefront home on Hudson Street. However, Jacobs's activist-housewife doppelgänger was a new incarnation. Jacobs's long writing career had begun in 1933, when, at the age of seventeen,

she started out as a cub reporter for a newspaper in her hometown of Scranton, Pennsylvania. From 1934 when she moved to New York until she left *Forum* in 1962 to be an independent author, she worked to support herself and her family through journalism and editorial work—a role that did not change after her marriage to architect Robert H. Jacobs Jr. in 1944. Thus, as she explained in *Death and Life*, she knew the Hudson Street ballet mostly from her days off. "The heart-of-the-day ballet I seldom see because part of the nature of it is that working people who live there, like me, are mostly gone, filling the roles of strangers on other sidewalks."¹¹ Indeed, from the early 1940s, she spent most of her working days neither on Hudson Street nor in Greenwich Village, but in three midtown Manhattan office buildings: the Chilton Company publishing offices on Park Avenue at 42nd Street, the offices of the State Department's Magazine Branch just below Columbus Circle, and Time Inc.'s *Architectural Forum* offices in Rockefeller Center.

Jacobs's formative experiences with New York's heart-of-the-day ballet came during the mid-1930s as she looked for her first magazine job in the city. Finding employment during the Great Depression, let alone a position with a magazine or newspaper, was difficult, and Jacobs later described these years as among the hardest times she ever had.¹² On the other hand, the search for work offered a great opportunity to explore the city, which, despite the Depression, was in other ways still at its zenith. Jacobs took the subway in from Brooklyn (where she shared an apartment with her older sister), answered want ads, and spent the rest of the day stopping at random stations to experience the city's different neighborhoods. Unable to find a full-time job, she soon turned to freelance work and wrote a series of four essays on the city with which she had quickly fallen in love.

Published in *Vogue* between 1935 and 1937, Jacobs's first articles on the city anticipated her later books on city dynamics and complexity.¹³ Vignettes of four Manhattan working neighborhoods, the essays focused on the city's fur, leather, diamond, and flower districts and, as a series, revealed ways that the great city differed from other types of human settlements. Jacobs had seen her hometown of Scranton hit hard by its almost exclusive dependence on anthracite coal and a Western North Carolina hamlet, where she had spent time after high school with an aunt, struggle to maintain a subsistence-level existence. Manhattan's working neighborhoods, by comparison, maintained not just an economic vitality, but something of the interdependent and self-organizing complexity of great cities that she would discuss in *Death and Life* and subsequent books.

Perhaps inspired by the varieties of flowers she observed in the Flower District, Jacobs described, for example, a city of diverse people, where immigrants from Italy, Greece, Korea, and other countries worked side by side behind brownstone storefronts, receiving flowers from one part of the world and sending them back out again, in a daily routine that was but one small part of the city's living system. While reminiscent of the city portraits by artists and writers employed by the Works Progress Administration during the same years, her first essays suggest Jacobs's deeper, protoscientific curiosity about the city's underlying processes. "From eleven o'clock in the morning until four or five o'clock in the afternoon," she wrote of the Fur District, "a steady flow of fur-heaped handcarts and racks runs north, and a stream of both empty and full ones runs south. Those going north are to fill the orders of manufacturers and retailers farther up-town," she explained, "and the loaded ones running south are furs being returned as unsatisfactory."¹⁴ Jacobs initially described the book that would become *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* as a study of "the relation of function to design in large cities," and this first essay on the city already expressed her interest in the functioning of the city, or "how the city works"—a phrase that would become her mantra.¹⁵

In 1938, having temporarily satisfied a youthful impulse to get out into "the real world," Jacobs decided to continue a more formal education. She had disliked school since the third grade—the year she began her self-education by hiding books of her own choosing under her desk—but Columbia's College of General Studies turned out to be ideal. With no fixed curriculum, she chose only the courses that interested her, and for the first time, she enjoyed school and made good marks in a variety of introductory courses—anthropology, chemistry, geography, political science, and psychology, as well as geology and zoology, her favorite courses. After two years, she earned enough credits to become, in her words, "the property" of Barnard College, which did not, however, admit her. "Fortunately," she sarcastically recalled, "my high school marks had been so bad that Barnard decided I could not belong to it and I was therefore allowed to continue getting an education."¹⁶ The episode sealed a lifelong suspicion of academia and academic credentials expressed in her hostility toward so-called experts of city design and planning, a theme of *Death and Life* echoed more recently in *Dark Age Ahead*, where she described the granting of degrees in such fields as traffic engineering as a fraud.¹⁷

Jacobs's antagonism toward the academy was such that while frequently mentioning leaving Columbia without a degree, she rarely acknowledged her university press pub-

lication. *Constitutional Chaff: Rejected Suggestions of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 with Explanatory Argument*, published by Columbia University Press in 1941 under her maiden name, Jane Butzner, developed from a research project for a course on constitutional law. *Constitutional Chaff*, albeit primarily an edited work, was her first book, not *Death and Life*. It received a brief but favorable review from the eminent constitutional scholar Max Farrand in *The American Historical Review* and is still cited in contemporary scholarly papers.¹⁸

Although there is relatively little of Jacobs's voice in this two-hundred-page volume, the work itself, an argument that the Constitution is a living document, was an early exemplar of Jacobs's anti-dogmatic and dialectical thinking.¹⁹ "The Constitution we have," she offered, "is contrasted with the constitutions we might have had." When the delegates of the Constitutional Convention won their arguments, resulting in this fundamental document, she continued, "what they thought time would prove has given way to what we think time has proved."²⁰ As a radical intellectual archaeology of a basic social institution, *Constitutional Chaff* emphasized not so much the institution's temporal or historical relativism or its resulting errors as its intersubjective and evolutionary nature. "The authors of the Constitution were compelled to set up *some* organization and endow it with *some* power," she emphasized. But at the end of the day, "On September 17 the Constitution was signed, and the rest was up to the people."²¹ She thought of the Constitution, in other words, in much the same way that she would come to think of the city—an institution with *some* framework, directed by leaders and planners with *some* power, but where the rest was up to the people. Dialogue and debate were the essential mechanisms.

What drew a person who was interested in alternative versions of the Constitution to examine manhole covers on city streets is at first difficult to fathom. But where *Constitutional Chaff* studied the unobserved evolutionary development of the living things that Jacobs frequently called "systems of thought," her contemporaneous essay, "Caution, Men Working," published in *Cue* magazine in May 1940, was actually a similar sort of study. Here, Jacobs followed the paths of the city's underground infrastructure, the essential life force hidden below the surface. Describing herself as a "city naturalist," Jacobs made her first direct analogy between ecology and the study of the city. "Despite the almost hopeless variety," she wrote, "the city naturalist, keeping an eye on the letters of the covers, can tell whether he is following the course of one of the greatest underground rivers, whether he is on the trail of a main stream of electricity, or gas, or one of the tributaries, whether brine to

chill the produce markets or steam to head the skyscrapers is running under his feet.”²² Five decades later, in her 1992 foreword to the Modern Library edition of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs noted that in the course of writing the book, “I realized I was engaged in studying the ecology of cities.”²³ But her study of the ecology of cities had, in fact, started much earlier.

Having been promoted to associate editor of *The Iron Age*, Chilton Company’s metals industry trade magazine, Jacobs took advantage of her new position to draw attention to the plight of her hometown in a short but influential article, “30,000 Unemployed and 7,000 Empty Houses in Scranton, Neglected City,” published in March 1943. “While manpower and housing shortages cause problems in war production centers,” Jacobs wrote, “there exist in the U.S. eighty-two paradoxical industrial areas of unemployment and empty houses.”²⁴ The article came in the wake of Jacobs’s key participation in a letter-writing campaign to persuade the War Production Board, the agency supervising all manufacturing and materials use during the war years, to involve the Scranton region in wartime production and to urge a Pennsylvania state senator to do more for the city of Scranton. Her article influenced a manufacturing company to build a new defense plant in the city, but she wondered what would become of the place after the war. (Decades later, Jacobs would take up such questions in *The Economy of Cities* and *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*.) As a result of her article and other activities on the city’s behalf, she was asked to be one of the principal speakers at a protest rally organized by the Labor Party, a protest that, like her article, called on the government to utilize the resources of the region for the war effort. These efforts and a follow-up piece in the *New York Herald Tribune*, to which Jacobs contributed freelance articles on a variety of subjects in the early 1940s, led to a headline back home: “Ex-Scranton Girl Helps Home City: Miss Butzner’s Story in Iron Age Brought Nationwide Publicity.”²⁵ It was a role she would later play again in Greenwich Village and Toronto.

At the end of 1943, Jacobs left *The Iron Age* to work for the government, first as a feature writer for the Office of War Information and, when the OWI was shut down in 1945, for the State Department’s Magazine Branch. Jacobs worked dutifully for both federal agencies, writing pamphlets and articles, and contributing to books on United States history, geography, culture, science, military prowess, and other subjects that were translated and distributed overseas. At the Magazine Branch, Jacobs spent most of her time as a writer and editor for *Amerika Illustrated*, a Russian-language magazine designed to strengthen ties between the United States and the Soviet Union during World War II

and to promote American values and achievements during the Cold War. Like *Life* magazine, *Amerika Illustrated* was profusely illustrated and expensively produced, but without advertisements or constraints on article length. The variety nature of the magazine gave Jacobs the opportunity to write on American architecture, school planning, housing, slum clearance, and U.S. places and cities, like Washington Square, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. Experience with these topics would lead directly to her work for *Architectural Forum*, where she covered similar subjects, including features on redevelopment in Philadelphia and Washington. Moreover, her article on slum clearance for *Amerika Illustrated*, written about a year after the passage of the United States Housing Act of 1949, prepared her to follow the development of the urban renewal program almost from its inception.²⁶

Despite contributing to the national campaign against communism as an employee of the State Department, Jacobs found herself on the frontlines of the Red Scare. In July 1949, more than a half year before McCarthy’s charges of Communist sympathizing in the State Department, Jacobs was questioned by the Loyalty Security Board regarding her union membership and activities; whether she subscribed to the *Daily Worker*; why her supervisor at *The Iron Age* described her as a “trouble-maker”; and why she and her husband had applied for a visa to travel to the Soviet Union. She answered that she had not been a union organizer, only a member for reasons of “wages, particularly equalization of pay between men and women for similar work,” and not for “anything to do with political ideologies.”²⁷ She had never subscribed to the *Daily Worker*, although she read it occasionally, “just out of curiosity to see what it is up to,” explaining that she bought “copies of all other papers I know of, but in which I have no particular interest, with just about the same frequency.”²⁸ The managing editor at *The Iron Age*, she offered, had been a chauvinist who simply disliked her; he referred to her as a typist although she “had the title, did the work and received the pay of associate editor.” She requested a visa to the Soviet Union because of “considerable curiosity about Siberia,” and she had hoped to combine travel with a freelance writing project that interested the *New York Herald Tribune*, *Harper’s*, *Oxford University Press*, and the journal *Natural History*.²⁹ The Jacobses visited the Soviet consulates in both New York and Washington, but the couple’s visa applications had been denied.

In March 1950, the Tydings Committee found McCarthy’s accusations against the State Department to be without merit, but his publicity campaign wore on and, in March 1952, just a few months before the Magazine Branch’s



Figure 1 Jane Jacobs (left) at work for the State Department, ca. 1949

offices were closed in New York and reorganized in Washington with a new staff, Jacobs was questioned again by the Loyalty Security Board. Many questions were repeated, but this time she wrote at length about her political views. “I am interested, as a citizen deeply concerned in the preservation of traditional American liberties,” she stated, “in presenting my viewpoint as fully and as plainly as possible.”³⁰ She had been brought up to believe that “freedom to deviate from the accepted viewpoint is not a cliché or of secondary value.”³¹ Expressed by independent or political third parties, this was part of the American tradition, and it was part of her inheritance. Her grandfather had run for Congress in 1872 on the Greenback-Labor ticket, and she wrote with pride that many of that party’s proposals, although “outlandish at the time,” had since become “respectable law and opinion.” Thus she argued that the Labor Party, which she supported through the 1940s, had been equally capable of putting forward progressive ideas in the American tradition of third parties, despite its communist associations. “You may wonder why I did not register in the Liberal Party,” Jacobs anticipated, and answered that the Liberal Party spent “a great part of its energy on attacking the American Labor Party,” while the Labor Party spent most of its time on such things as “price control enforcement, housing, medical insurance, and such reforms.”³²

Jacobs was not asked about her role at the Scranton labor rally and did not mention it. Nor did she mention her

affinity for the radical democracy espoused by Saul Alinsky, the activist folk hero and founding father of community organization who, in *Reveille for Radicals* (1946), wrote that where Liberals *talked*, Radicals *acted*.³³ Alinsky’s politics, however, had affected her thinking about the Communist Party’s organization of “control from above,” a flow of power that was anathema to her idea of grassroots democracy, and she alluded to this in her Loyalty interrogatory. “I abhor the Soviet system of government,” she wrote, “for I fear and despise the whole concept of a government which takes as its mission the molding of people into a specific ‘kind of man,’ i.e. ‘Soviet Man’; that practices and extols a conception of the state as ‘control from above and support from below’ (I believe in control from below and support from above); that controls the work of artists, musicians, architects, and scientists; that controls what people read and attempts to control what people think.”³⁴ She wholeheartedly agreed, in other words, with Alinsky’s statement that, “The Radical is deeply interested in social planning but just as deeply suspicious of and antagonistic to any idea of plans which work from the top down. Democracy to him is working from the bottom up.”³⁵ In the coming years, she would apply the same philosophy to the urban renewal regime, cite Alinsky in *Death and Life*, and draw on his practical ideas for community organization in Greenwich Village.³⁶

In May 1952, soon after the Magazine Branch closed its New York office, Jacobs’s writing career took a decisive turn

when she visited the Time-Life Building at Rockefeller Center and came away with a trial position at *Architectural Forum*. She had considered seeking work with *Natural History*, which reflected her interest in the life sciences, but was drawn to *Forum* by her long-standing interest in the city, her husband's work as an architect (she had become a regular reader of his subscription), and the magazine's coverage of urban redevelopment. Editor Douglas Haskell needed a new hospital and schools editor with a fresh and critical approach to the standard architectural magazine fare of building-type studies. Following Haskell's new editorial policy, *Forum* would cover "not just hospitals, but what makes the 1940s hospital obsolete; not just schools, but *Forum's* proposed school for the 1950s."³⁷ Jacobs had already written on similar subjects for *Amerika Illustrated*, and although Haskell knew that she had no formal architectural training—something they had in common—he believed that critical questions could be well answered by someone unfettered by formal or professional allegiances.

Jacobs's first article for *Forum*, an eight-page feature on a new hospital in Lima, Peru, by Edward D. Stone and the United States Public Health Service shows this to be the case. With the assistance of her husband, a 1942 graduate of Columbia's School of Architecture who gave her a crash course in reading architectural drawings, Jacobs wrote a review that emphasized her characteristic interests—functionality, relationships of part and whole, and the human dimension. She described the hospital as noteworthy for its "simple organization of tremendously complex functions," "thoroughgoing traffic rationale, consistent in detail and in the whole," and "careful regard for the customs of those who will use it."³⁸ The greatest challenge of this "double hospital" had been "how to make the maternity hospital and the general hospital completely distinct and yet completely integrated." Thus its "complete and decisive division of some facilities and its equally complete and convenient integration of others" had been an accomplishment, especially because in Peru, she observed approvingly, "child-birth is regarded as an exciting, wholesome event which has nothing to do with illness."³⁹

Even before officially joining *Forum's* masthead in September 1952, Jacobs was working closely with Haskell in choosing which buildings were worthy of publication. By this time, Haskell had outlined his new editorial agenda in detail. In addition to a critical approach to building types, the magazine would follow urban redevelopment while other magazines focused on the new suburbs. Moreover, after much effort, Haskell persuaded *Forum's* executives to support a reinvigoration of American architectural criticism, which, since the 1930s when he started as an architectural critic, had

declined due to complacency, unspoken gentlemen's agreements, and the threat of libel suits. As Jacobs joined the editorial staff, Haskell reported that *Forum* would restore "genuine architectural criticism—not the wrist slapping kind, but the kind where you first consult your lawyers about possible action."⁴⁰ This emphasis on criticism would decisively influence Jacobs's writing in *Forum* and *Death and Life*.

Jacobs contributed to nearly all of the seventy-five issues published while she was on staff of *Architectural Forum*, from May 1952 to October 1958, when she left to write *Death and Life*. In the first few years, most of her articles were not bylined, as was the magazine's convention until the late 1950s. Initially Jacobs covered schools, hospitals, and the new typology of the regional shopping mall but, by the mid-1950s, she reviewed all manner of buildings. A structure with which she was particularly enamored was Louis Kahn's Trenton Bath House, which she described in 1955 as a "marvelous creation" where the "columns are actually little rooms (he is all for hollow columns, the interiors of which are used), some of them for toilets, some for the mazes by which people enter and leave the dressing areas."⁴¹ Moreover, she contributed with increasing frequency to features on urban redevelopment and, as the urban renewal regime continued to expand, became increasingly skeptical of the program's means and ends.

In 1955, Jacobs joined a letter-writing campaign organized by Greenwich Village activist Shirley Hayes to protest "the plans to run a sunken highway through the center of Washington Square," which she had learned about "with alarm and almost with disbelief."⁴² Jacobs and her husband, she wrote Mayor Robert Wagner, believed in the city, had renovated a storefront building into a home, and were raising their children there. But, she continued, "it is very discouraging to try to do our best to make the city more habitable, and then to learn that the city itself is thinking up schemes to make it uninhabitable."⁴³ As she wrote in the same month in an article on urban redevelopment in Philadelphia, "hundreds of thousands of people with hundreds of thousands of plans and purposes built the city and only they will rebuild the city."⁴⁴

By 1956, Jacobs had written on redevelopment in New Orleans, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Washington, and Fort Worth, and had become *Forum's* urban renewal specialist. She had also spent a good deal of time in East Harlem, where urban renewal was more extensive than anywhere in the country. Thus when Haskell found himself unable to attend Jose Luis Sert's invitational Urban Design Conference at Harvard that year, he suggested Jacobs as his substitute. "If another woman besides [GSD professor and conference co-organizer] Miss [Jaqueline] Tyrwhitt would



Квартал Дикман — 1950



Квартал Вильямсбург — 1936

Многоквартирные дома

Планировка некоторых многоквартирных домов, предусматривающая повышенную освещенность комнат, расширение свободной площади участка, устройство спортивных площадок и парков, повышение удобства жизни. Это иллюстрируют дома, построенные в 1936 г. в квартале Вильямсбург, в Нью-Йорке, а также здания в квартале Джекоб Риис, заселенные в 1947 г. и многоквартирные дома в квартале Дикман, строительство которых будет закончено в 1950 г. Дистрикт озе-

Квартал Джекоб Риис — 1947



Figure 2 A page from Jane Jacobs's article "Slum Clearance" ("Planned Reconstruction of Lagging City Areas" in Russian), published in the State Department's Russian-language magazine *Amerika Illustrated* (1950). The caption reads: "Multi-Apartment Homes. The planning of affordable apartment dwellings providing increased natural lighting, ample outdoor space, recreation areas, and parks has continuously improved. This is illustrated by the New York City dwellings built in 1936 at Williamsburg Houses, Jacob Riis Houses, occupied in 1947, and the apartment homes of Dyckman Houses, construction of which will be finished in 1950."

not be out of place,” he wrote Sert in March 1956, “might I suggest that my substitute be Mrs. Robert Jacobs—Jane Jacobs on our masthead. She has handled more of our redevelopment stories than anybody and will be fresh back from Ft. Worth [visiting architect-planner Victor Gruen].”⁴⁵

Jacobs’s paper at the First Harvard Urban Design Conference, later published in the June 1956 issue of *Forum* as “The Missing Link in City Redevelopment,” was an early iteration of her urban theory. The destruction of more than 1,500 multiuse East Harlem buildings to make way for a dozen housing projects, she argued, meant more than the loss of homes and businesses: the storefronts also housed churches, political clubs, and other institutions in the self-organized social fabric of the community.

By the end of 1957, Jacobs was prepared to write what *Forum* executives described as “Jane’s blockbuster on the superblock.”⁴⁶ To Haskell’s disappointment, her blockbuster was diverted to *Forum*’s sister publication *Fortune* magazine, to be included as the capstone of a series of essays on the city organized by her counterpart, *Fortune* associate editor William H. Whyte. Her essay “Downtown Is for People” received among the most positive responses of any article published by *Fortune*. “Look what your girl did for us!” Whyte penciled on the top of a memo sent to Haskell transcribing thirty of these letters. “This is one of the best responses we’ve ever had!”⁴⁷

Even before publication, Jane’s blockbuster attracted the interest of Chadbourne Gilpatric, associate director of the Humanities Division of the Rockefeller Foundation, who had become the champion of the Foundation’s urban design research program. Since 1954, the Foundation had supported a basic research project on the perception of urban form by Kevin Lynch and Gyorgy Kepes at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a major historical project by E. A. Gutkind at the University of Pennsylvania, and a study of the urban fringe by Christopher Tunnard and Yale’s Graduate Program in City Planning.⁴⁸ Gilpatric learned of Jacobs’s work while he was searching for “other Lewis Mumfords, who could bring [their] critical, philosophical and historical background to bear on problems of urban planning.”⁴⁹ In September 1958, following a series of meetings between Jacobs and Gilpatric—and with recommendations from Whyte, Catherine Bauer Wurster, G. Holmes Perkins, Martin Meyerson, Random House’s Jason Epstein (who had already offered to publish Jacobs’s work), and Lewis Mumford himself—Jacobs was awarded the first of a series of grants to write a book on the city.

Gilpatric was interested in Jacobs’s book as a vehicle for “urban design criticism,” and when he read the manuscript of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* in March 1961, he wanted more criticism and less theory. He suggested that Jacobs abbreviate her précis of Dr. Warren Weaver’s essay “Science and Complexity,” which served as a scientific corroboration of her theory of city complexity in the book’s concluding chapter, and include more criticism of the sort that she offered in the introduction. “I was sorry to note that you didn’t include in this chapter a critique of some of the governing images of city organization and physical layout, which are out-dated,” Gilpatric wrote. “This is more than made up, perhaps, by the lambasting you give the Garden City planners and addicts of the Radiant City.”⁵⁰

In October 1961, three weeks after *Death and Life* appeared on bookstore shelves, the New York City Planning Commission designated West Greenwich Village an urban renewal district, and Jacobs’s activism began in earnest. Her book project complete, she led the Committee to Save the West Village and acted out the role of local neighborhood organizer that she discussed theoretically in *Death and Life*. In the end, she fought not against planning, but for a democratic form of planning that worked—by design and by nature—“from the bottom up.”

Death and Life was never meant to be only a “shout in the street,” as Marshall Berman later described it.⁵¹ As Jacobs wrote in the first lines of *Death and Life*, her book was “an attack on current city planning and rebuilding,” but her purpose was “also and mostly, an attempt to introduce new principles of city planning and rebuilding.”⁵²

Stated more directly, as she had while developing the book, Jacobs meant to present nothing less than a new “system of thought” about the city. “This book,” she explained to Gilpatric in 1959, “is neither a retelling in new form of things already said, nor an expansion and enlargement of previously worked out basic ground, but it is an attempt to make what amounts to a different system of thought about the great city.”⁵³ Despite her antagonism toward the abstract understanding of cities evidenced by many architects and planners, Jacobs was also a theorist. Yet, compared to the bird’s-eye view and arm’s-length approach of professional theorists, her approach, like her activism, was eye level and hands on; her urban theory was the corollary of her activism, and vice versa. Thus, Jacobs’s legacy is not only the memory of epic, implausible battles with City Hall and the urban renewal goliath, but also a system of thought about the great city that has since become indelibly our own.

Notes

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1. Originally published in New York in 1961, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* appeared the following year in the United Kingdom and has since been translated into German (1963); Spanish (1967); Italian (1969); Japanese (1969); French (1991); Portuguese (2000); and Chinese (2005). While no rigorous analysis of the international influence of Jacobs's urban theory has yet been undertaken, Peter Blake anecdotally described the significance of her ideas in the urban redevelopment of Berlin's Internationale Bauausstellung; see Peter Blake, *No Place Like Utopia: Modern Architecture and the Company We Kept* (New York, 1993), 270. I have briefly described Jacobs's relationship with the British townscape movement in "Contradictions and Complexities: Jane Jacobs's and Robert Venturi's Complexity Theories" (*Journal of Architectural Education* 59 [Feb. 2006], 49–60), and at greater length in my dissertation, "A Vital Science: Jane Jacobs's Ecology of Cities" (University of Pennsylvania, forthcoming) which offers an interpretation of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* in the context of Jacobs's lifework and influences, particularly her experiences as an architectural journalist and her scientific interests.

2. Peter L. Laurence, "Dark Age Ahead? Jane Jacobs's Latest Book in Context," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 64 (Mar. 2005), 126–27.

3. While presenting Jacobs as a dogmatist opposed to, among other things, "the shimmering glass towers that frame lower Park Avenue," Nicolai Ouroussoff's obituary—"Outgrowing Jane Jacobs," *New York Times*, sec. 4, 30 Apr. 2006—fails to account for her emblematic, and in this case ironic, praise for the Seagram Building and other iconic Fifth Avenue office buildings as "masterpieces of modern design"; see Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York, 1961), 227.

4. Alice S. Alexiou's *Jane Jacobs: Urban Visionary* (New Brunswick, N.J., 2006) is the first biography of Jacobs and does little to illuminate the first half of her career.

5. As Jacobs wrote the chancellor of the University of Denver in 1970 in declining an honorary doctoral degree, "I feel honored that the Trustees of the University have selected me as a candidate for an honorary doctoral degree, and I thank you, and them, most sincerely. But I do not feel able to accept. I have become more and more dubious about the value of academic degrees and am inclined to believe that the granting of degrees does more to interfere with true education, for many reasons, than to further it. Of course I realize that an honorary degree is only symbolic, but it is a symbolism that I just don't feel comfortable with." Jane Jacobs to Maurice Mitchell, 21 Feb. 1970, MS, box 28, folder 1, Jane Jacobs Collection, John J. Burns Library, Boston College.

6. Jacobs's methodology also relied on induction and direct observation because of her affinity for the scientific method and her desire to build a new science of the city from the ground up. Scientific thinking was important to Jacobs rhetorically—she called city planning, for example, a "pseudoscience"—and intellectually: she drew on and found confirmation in Warren Weaver's complexity theory and other recent scientific developments. Cf. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York, 1961), 18, 559, 574; and Laurence, "Contradictions and Complexities: Jane Jacobs's and Robert Venturi's Complexity Theories," 49–60.

7. Wayne Phillips, "Title I Slum Clearance Proves Spur to Cooperative Housing in City," *New York Times*, 2 July 1959. This article was the fourth and last in a series examining the city's urban renewal program on its ten-year anniversary.

8. Blake, *No Place Like Utopia*, 180, 216.

9. Douglas Haskell, memo to Jane Jacobs, 2 July 1959, box 79, folder 6, Douglas Putnam Haskell Papers, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

10. Ibid.

11. Jacobs, *Death and Life* (1961), 51.

12. Mark Feeney, "City Sage: Over the Past 30 Years, No One Has Shaped Our Understanding of the Urban Environment as Much as Jane Jacobs Has," *Boston Globe*, 14 Nov. 1993.

13. The series included "Where the Fur Flies," *Vogue* 86 (15 Nov. 1935), 103; "Leather Shocking Tales," *Vogue* 86 (1 Mar. 1936), 139ff; "Diamonds in the Tough," *Vogue* 88 (15 Oct. 1936), 154ff; and "Flowers Come to Town," *Vogue* 89 (15 Feb. 1937), 113–14.

14. Butzner [Jacobs], "Where the Fur Flies," 103.

15. The Rockefeller Foundation, "Announcement of grant award to Ms. Jane Jacobs," in *The Rockefeller Foundation Annual Report, 1958* (New York, 1958), 291. Although beyond the scope of this article, Jacobs's urban theory in *Death and Life* was closely tied to the contemporaneous postwar debate on architectural functionalism. In June 1958 in one of her earliest outlines of the book, her proposal was "to investigate five factors of the city . . . the street, the park, the scale, the mixture, and the focal centers" in order to "get a much clearer idea than we have of what the big city is and how it functions." Jane Jacobs to Chadbourne Gilpatrick, 14 June 1958, RF RG 1.2, ser. 200R, box 390, folder 3380, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.

16. Jane Jacobs to Ms. Talmey, 22 Nov. 1961, MS95-29, box 13, folder 12, Jane Jacobs Papers (see n. 5).

17. Jane Jacobs, *Dark Age Ahead* (New York, 2004), 72. Jacobs's views on "credentialism" in *Dark Age Ahead* elaborated on those she expressed when declining an honorary doctorate in 1970 and on half a dozen other occasions.

18. Max Farrand, "Constitutional Chaff: Rejected Suggestions of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, with Explanatory Argument" (book review), *The American Historical Review* 47 (Oct. 1941), 197–8. A contemporary citation can be found in Douglas D. Heckathorn and Steven M. Maser, "Bargaining and Constitutional Contracts," *American Journal of Political Science* 31 (Feb. 1987), 166.

19. Jacobs dedicated *Constitutional Chaff* "To 1712 Monroe Avenue," her Scranton family home. She would later dedicate *Systems of Survival*, another study of systems of thought, "To 1712 Monroe Avenue, 555 Hudson Street, and 69 Albany Avenue," adding her New York and Toronto addresses.

20. Jane Butzner [Jacobs], *Constitutional Chaff: Rejected Suggestions of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 with Explanatory Argument* (New York, 1941), 2.

21. Ibid., 4.

22. Jane Butzner [Jacobs], "Caution, Men Working," *Cue* 9 (18 May 1940), 24–25.

23. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York, 1993), xvi.

24. [Jane Butzner (Jacobs)], "30,000 Unemployed and 7,000 Empty Houses in Scranton, Neglected City," *The Iron Age* 151 (25 Mar. 1943), 93–95.

25. *The Scrantonian*, 26 Sept. 1943.

26. Technically speaking, Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 provided for "urban redevelopment," while the Housing Act of 1954 introduced the term "urban renewal," which signaled "a broader and more comprehensive approach to the problems of slums and blight, [and] a redirection of the urban redevelopment program." See Ashley Foard and Hilbert Fefferman, "Federal Urban Renewal Legislation," *Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy*, ed. James Q. Wilson (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), 96.

27. Copy of affidavit, answers to interrogatory for Jane Butzner Jacobs, 22 July 1949, box 12, folder 8, p. 1, Jane Jacobs Papers.

28. Ibid., 1.

29. Ibid., 2.

30. Copy of affidavit, answers to interrogatory for Jane Butzner Jacobs, 25 Mar. 1952, box 12, folder 8, foreword, p. 1, Jane Jacobs Papers.
31. *Ibid.*, 2.
32. *Ibid.*, 7.
33. Saul D. Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals* (Chicago, 1946), 28.
34. Copy of affidavit, 25 Mar. 1952, 10.
35. Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals*, 24.
36. Cf. Jacobs, *Death and Life* (1961), i, 297.
37. Douglas Haskell, memo to staff, 23 July 1952, box 57, folder 3, p. 2, Douglas Putnam Haskell Papers (see n. 9).
38. [Jane Jacobs], "Big Double Hospital," *Architectural Forum* 96 (June 1952), 138.
39. *Ibid.*, 139.
40. Haskell, memo to staff, 23 July 1952, box 57, folder 3, p. 3–4, Douglas Putnam Haskell Papers.
41. Jane Jacobs, memo to Douglas Haskell, Joe Hazen, and Mary Jane Lightbown, 16 May 1955, box 10, folder 7, Douglas Putnam Haskell Papers.
42. Jane Jacobs, copy of letters to Mayor Wagner and Borough President Hulan Jack, 1 June 1955, box 3, folder 10, Shirley Hayes Papers, The New York Historical Society. Although Jacobs became an important Greenwich Village community organizer in the early 1960s, Shirley Hayes's fight to save Washington Square from Robert Moses's plan to extend Fifth Avenue dated from 1952. Jacobs's participation in Hayes's ongoing letter-writing and petition campaigns in 1955 helps date the start of her Greenwich Village activism. Jacobs wrote Hayes around this time: "Thanks for your good work. I've written the Mayor and Borough President, each, the attached letter. Please keep me informed of any other effective action that can be taken." Jane Jacobs, Tear-Off Campaign Petition to the Washington Square Park Committee, 30 Apr. 1955, box 4, folder 1, Shirley Hayes Papers.
43. Jane Jacobs, copy of letters to Mayor Robert F. Wagner Jr. and Borough President Hulan Jack, 1 June 1955, box 3, folder 10, Shirley Hayes Papers.
44. [Jane Jacobs], "A Lesson in Urban Redevelopment: Philadelphia's Redevelopment, A Progress Report," *Architectural Forum* 103 (July 1955), 118.
45. Douglas Haskell to Jose Luis Sert, 19 Mar. 1956, box 20, folder 5, Douglas Putnam Haskell Papers.
46. Lawrence Lessing, memo to Douglas Haskell, Joe Hazen, and Paul Grotz, 24 Jan. 1958, box 80, folder 1, Douglas Putnam Haskell Papers.
47. William H. Whyte and Ruth Kammler, selection of letters received in March and April 1958 by *Fortune* magazine Letters Dept. re "Downtown Is for People" by Jane Jacobs, RF RG 1.2, ser. 200R, box 390, folder 3380, Rockefeller Foundation Archives. Recalling this period many years later, Whyte described Jacobs as a caption writer who had "never written anything longer than a few paragraphs" ("Preface: C. D. Jackson Meets Jane Jacobs," in *The Exploding Metropolis*, 2nd ed. [Garden City, N.Y., 1958; Berkeley, 1993], xv). His misstatement may be attributable to rivalry with Jacobs as well as memory lapse. There was also a sibling rivalry between *Architectural Forum* and *Fortune*. Soon after the *Fortune* series on the city, Haskell attributed its success to Jacobs and *Forum*, and described Whyte as *their* "student," in contrast to the reversed roles later portrayed by Whyte. As Haskell wrote in May 1958 to Ian Nairn, one of Jacobs's collaborators on "Downtown is for People": "Of course your praise of *Fortune* was all deserved. I am proud to say, though, that far ahead as they were as compared to architectural thinking in America, they got their cram course from *Forum*, and, alas, they got the first comprehensive piece on this subject by *Forum's* own best writer. Since it will travel farther in *Fortune*, we can only be happy that [William] Holly Whyte was so brilliant a student. Moreover, the work he is doing under his own steam, and with no help from us, on open space, is quite wonderful." Douglas Haskell to Ian Nairn, 7 May 1958, box 2, folder 3, Douglas Putnam Haskell Papers.
48. For more on Jane Jacobs and the Rockefeller Foundation's urban design research program see, Peter L. Laurence, "The Death and Life of Urban Design: Jane Jacobs, The Rockefeller Foundation, and the New Research in Urbanism, 1955–1965," *Journal of Urban Design* 11 (June 2006), 145–72.
49. Chadbourne Gilpatric, interview visit to Institute for Urban Studies, University of Pennsylvania, 7 May 1958, RF RG 1.2, University of Pennsylvania—Community Planning, ser. 200, box 456, folder 3900, Rockefeller Foundation Archives.
50. Chadbourne Gilpatric to Jane Jacobs, 27 Mar. 1961, RG 1.2, ser. 200R, box 390, folder 3381, Rockefeller Foundation Archives.
51. Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York, 1988), 312.
52. Jacobs, *Death and Life* (1961), 3. Emphasis added.
53. Jane Jacobs to Chadbourne Gilpatric, 23 July 1959, RG 1.2, ser. 200R, box 390, folder 3381, Rockefeller Foundation Archives.