BIG PLANS, DIVINE DETAILS:
THE BURNHAM PLAN AND CITYWIDE DEVELOPMENT IN MODERN CHICAGO

In late 1979 the Art Institute of Chicago restored and placed on exhibit its collection of original drawings from Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett's 1909 *Plan of Chicago*. In doing so, its curators could scarcely have imagined the enthusiasm with which Chicago's architects and planners would in the ensuing decade wrap themselves in the Burnham Plan. Almost exactly ten years later, in October 1989, when the preliminary guidelines were announced for the private development of the 72 acre "Central Station" project just southeast of downtown Chicago, city Planning Commissioner David Mosena commented approvingly that the new guidelines envision finishing the area "much as the Burnham Plan did." Mosena's comment aptly punctuates the preceding decade, which has witnessed the ritual invocation of Daniel Burnham by everyone from Bruce Graham to Harry Weese to Tom Beeby to yours truly. Hosannas to Burnham became so commonplace in the 1980s that Stanley Tigerman, in an *Inland Architect* essay published in November 1987, felt compelled to warn that in our current cultural circumstance Burnham ought to be viewed more as a pariah than a paradigm.

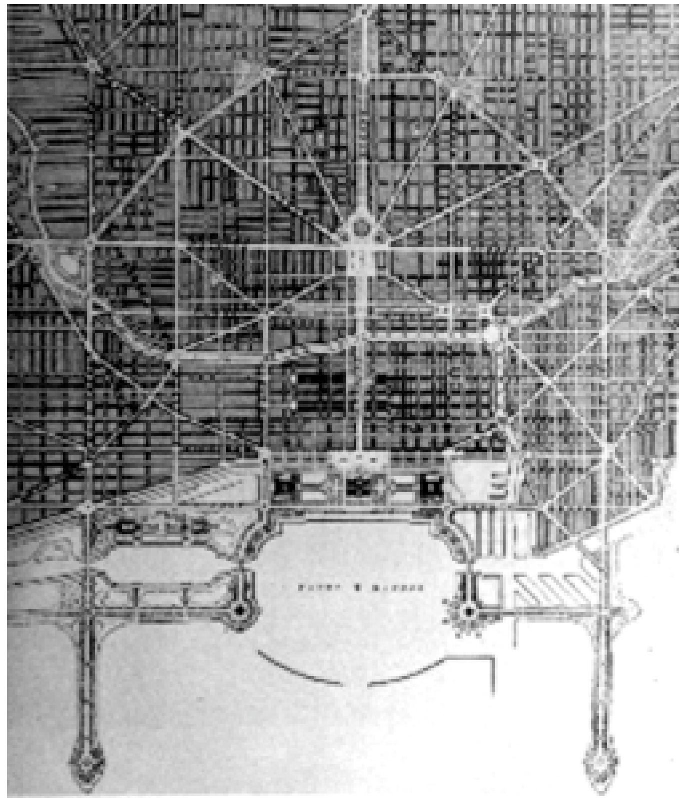

Figure 1
Plan view of Chicago showing proposed streets, blocks, parks, boulevards, lakefront and civic center development, from *The Plan of Chicago*. Land area shown covers about 13 square miles, approximately 8500 acres.

Given the ubiquity of these ritual invocations of Burnham, perhaps it is best to begin by thinking about the significance of ritual invocations. Persons unsympathetic to ritual activity are inclined to dismiss it as an inferior substitute for critical thinking. Others more sympathetic see ritual activity as a reminder and confirmation of hard won truths. In the latter view, ritual forms present these truths at their sleekest and sparest. More than this however, for those who participate knowingly the ritual is a kind of shorthand notation--or, to change the metaphor, a common doorway to storehouses of memories and hopes both shared and personal, that in their plenitude confirm both the validity of the ritual form and the truths that it represents.

From this perspective, Chicagoans' repeated invocation of Daniel Burnham and his Plan is not at all difficult to understand. It may be viewed as the ritual confirmation of, a sort of pledge of allegiance to, the authority of the best architectural and urban design traditions not only of Chicago, but of western culture. If most of us knew them, Chicagoans might just as well invoke Vitruvius, Alberti, or Le Notre; since we don't, we invoke Burnham. But Burnham knew

Vitruvius, et al; and indeed, was himself not only an architectural and urban design innovator, but also a bearer and synthesizer of several of the architectural traditions that trace themselves back to Vitruvius.

A culture--including its architectural sub-culture--survives principally, says Philip Rieff, "by the power of its institutions to bind and loose men in the conduct of their affairs with reasons which sink so deep into the self that they become commonly and implicitly understood. . .binding even the ignorants of a culture to a great chain of meaning."[1] Conversely, when a culture decays, its institutions are increasingly unable to so bind and loose its members. Ritualized forms become formulaic--oft-repeated, but less and less reflective of common experience, and less and less binding upon personal conduct; until they reach that point where critics begin to suspect that specific rituals have become, if not substitutes for thought, smokescreens obscuring other agendas. Like Stanley Tigerman therefore, but for different reasons, I too find myself suspicious of hosannas to the Burnham Plan--not because the Plan doesn't deserve them, but because past, present, and projected future development in Chicago has so very little to do with the Plan.

Figure 2
Plan view of metropolitan Chicago area showing proposed boulevard and park system, forest preserves, and lakefront islands and lagoons, from *The Plan of Chicago.*

A Noble Diagram

The formal merits of the Burnham Plan are well known, many, and varied. The Plan picked up on and extended the parcelization of Chicago into a manageable network of streets, blocks, and squares [FIGURE 1]. Its designation of open lands, public parks, and forest preserves, and its treatment of the lakefront were both public spirited and environmentally prescient [FIGURE 2]. Most of all, however, the Burnham Plan is instructive as one of the last great examples of urban design reflecting the sensibility that links the formal order of the city to the institutions both responsible for and emblematic of the moral order of the city.[2] The dominant buildings in the Plan, in terms of both size and location, are the public buildings that form the Grant Park lakefront complex; and, above all, the civic center complex of buildings proposed for the area around Congress and Halsted. There were to be no commercial high rises

Figure 3
"Bird's-Eye View of Grant Park at Night," from *The Plan of Chicago*.

in Burnham's Chicago; nor, incidentally (because it would be unnecessary), any such thing as historic preservation--both points demonstrated by the Plan's unceremonious proposed demolition of all previously existing commercial high rises, including (it appears) such "Chicago School" landmarks as William LeBaron Jenney's Home Insurance Building, and Burnham's own Monadnock, Railway Exchange, and People's Gas Company buildings. Commercial buildings in the Plan of Chicago were to be background buildings, and were typically rendered abstractly as such by Jules Guerin: zero-lot-line courtyard buildings self evidently subordinate to the civic buildings, public parks, and grand boulevards given pride of place by Burnham [FIGURES 3-4].

In hindsight, given that Chicago was then and is now first and foremost a commercial city, these features of the *Plan of Chicago* seem truly remarkable. And yet, no one has ever suggested that Daniel Burnham and the supporters of his Plan were either antagonistic to the advance of commerce (the Burnham Plan, after all, was sponsored by the Commercial Club of Chicago), or that they were anything less than thorough pragmatists. Burnham and collaborator Edward Bennett themselves wrote that their purpose in proposing the Plan had

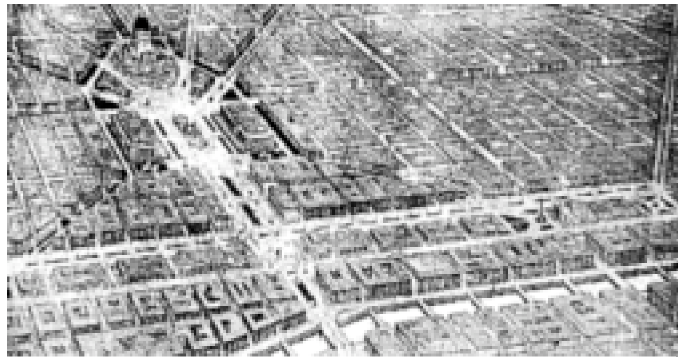

Figure 4
Aerial view of proposed civic center complex at Halsted and Congress Streets, from *The Plan of Chicago*.

> not been to invent novel problems for solutions, but to take up the pressing needs of today, and to find the best methods of meeting those requirements, carrying each particular problem to its ultimate conclusion as a component part of a great entity--a well-ordered, convenient, and unified city.[3]

As Chicago was already a major center of industry and traffic, they continue, the Plan devotes much attention to

> the betterment of commercial facilities; to methods of transportation for persons and for goods; to removing the obstacles which prevent or obstruct circulation; and to the increase of convenience.[4]

The important point here is simply that all of these practical concerns were addressed in the intellectual context of an idea about cities generally and Chicago in particular that required architectural grandeur not for the realm of commerce, but for public spaces and civic institutions.

Missing Details

The Burnham Plan is not without its detractors. The primary criticism of the Plan has always been the charge of elitism--that it was done by the rich for the rich, and ignored critical Chicago problems of poverty, disease, unemployment, and inadequate housing. This criticism was, if you will, a rehearsal of today's debates in Chicago about downtown vs. neighborhood development; and though the accusation of elitism may have some merit, the Burnham Plan's primary faults lie elsewhere, related to the fact that the Plan is indeed, above all else, a diagram. These faults I view more as errors of omission rather than commission; more precisely, they are errors of

abstraction, and have affinities with Burnham's embrace of French planning traditions that may not be coincidental.

I have suggested that Burnham's architectural / urban design pedigree is traceable ultimately to Vitruvius; but his most immediate formal influences were clearly French; in particular, Baron Haussmann's Paris and Pierre L'Enfant's Washington, D.C., with their long axes, monumental public buildings, and vast public spaces. Architectural historian Richard Wilson and others have pointed out that these particular features (typical not only of the *Plan of Chicago*, but of Burnham's other City Beautiful Movement plans generally) represent Burnham's pointed rejection of the smaller scale enclosed medieval or Renaissance squares being championed at the same time in the theories of Camillo Sitte.[5] But while Sitte is rightly identified with a very different formal expression of urban design as a "civic art", it is important to note that he and Burnham were agreed upon the propriety of linking architectural and urban grandeur to civic rather than commercial institutions.

A key "error of abstraction" in the Burnham Plan is that although it was promoted explicitly as a vehicle to encourage virtue and local patriotic sentiment among Chicagoans,[6] it omits from its formal considerations many of the specific types of social institutions that in cities like Chicago do the most to promote and sustain virtue and local patriotic sentiment. Here a possibly unintended effect upon Burnham of French planning theory invites conjecture, because the abstraction of French city planning bears affinities with the abstraction of a tradition of French social theory which, since Rousseau, has a tendency to glorify abstract ideals at the expense of the specific social arrangements that promote, sustain, and embody these ideals. It was in part this glorification of abstractions that prompted Englishman Edmund Burke, aghast at the horrors committed in the name of the ideals of the French Revolution, to observe that freedom, equality, and brotherhood can only be realized in specific communities; and to note that "To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of [larger] public affections."[7] In a similar vein, the Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville, touring America in the early 1830's to discover what lessons could be learned that would ease France's transition from aristocracy to democracy, noted the importance to American *political* institutions of what he characterized as "free associations," observing that: "In democratic countries the science of association is the mother of science [and public sentiment]; the progress of all the rest depends upon the progress [of free associations]."[8]

Burke's and Tocqueville's criticism of French philosophical and social abstraction has an urban design parallel pertinent to Burnham's *Plan of Chicago*. Historian Carroll Westfall has aptly summarized a salient feature of the Plan, noting that

> The Burnham Plan drawings contain only two categories of buildings: those serving the public, and those used for everything else. The great generality of buildings that make up the city is represented as a blurred abstraction dominated by the public buildings. . . . The open spaces--the lake, river, parks and boulevards and the great traffic arteries--were foils for public buildings and routes through the anonymous mass of other structures.[9]

The bulk of Chicago presented as a "blurred abstraction" makes the Burnham Plan vulnerable to various criticisms, such as those offered by labor historian William Adelman.[10] By way of contrast to the Burnham Plan, Adelman refers to a 1907 plan for St. Louis, where the stress was on *neighborhood centers*, each containing athletic clubs, religious buildings, public baths, firehouses, police stations, settlement houses, libraries, public and parochial schools, and parks

and playgrounds. Conspicuously absent, according to Adelman, were "monumental buildings"--a feature worth noting, because the absence of such grand gestures may be one reason why the St. Louis plan has proved less memorable than the Burnham Plan. Still, it is crucial to observe that all of these institutions Adelman mentions are public and civic institutions. If they do not, perhaps cannot, warrant the monumental scale of Burnham's Civic Center, they may yet warrant a degree of *local* monumentality--one that is, but need not have been, entirely absent from the *Plan of Chicago*.

At issue here is something akin to the phenomenon of "scaling" or "self similarity" in the branch of contemporary science known as "chaos studies." Self similarity is likeness across scale, patterns recurring within patterns, whether in astronomy, biology, meteorology, art, or economic indicators. In the context of urban design, it has to do with the notion of hierarchies within hierarchies. University of Notre Dame architectural historian John Stamper, in an unpublished paper delivered at the "Learning from Burnham" conference held at the Graham Foundation in Chicago in November 1987, has contended that although Burnham found the "homelike feeling" and "pleasing variety" of Sittesque urban design attractive, he (Burnham) preferred the French model for its monumental effects and its capacity to provide greater unity to the city. But why are the notions of home and variety seen as urbanistically antithetical to the notions of monumentality and unity? They may well be antithetical if conceived at the same scale. But perhaps, at least in some respects, the traditional urbanism advanced by Burnham is not incompatible with the traditional urbanism advanced by Sitte, if each is viewed in the light of the scale at which they were proposed.

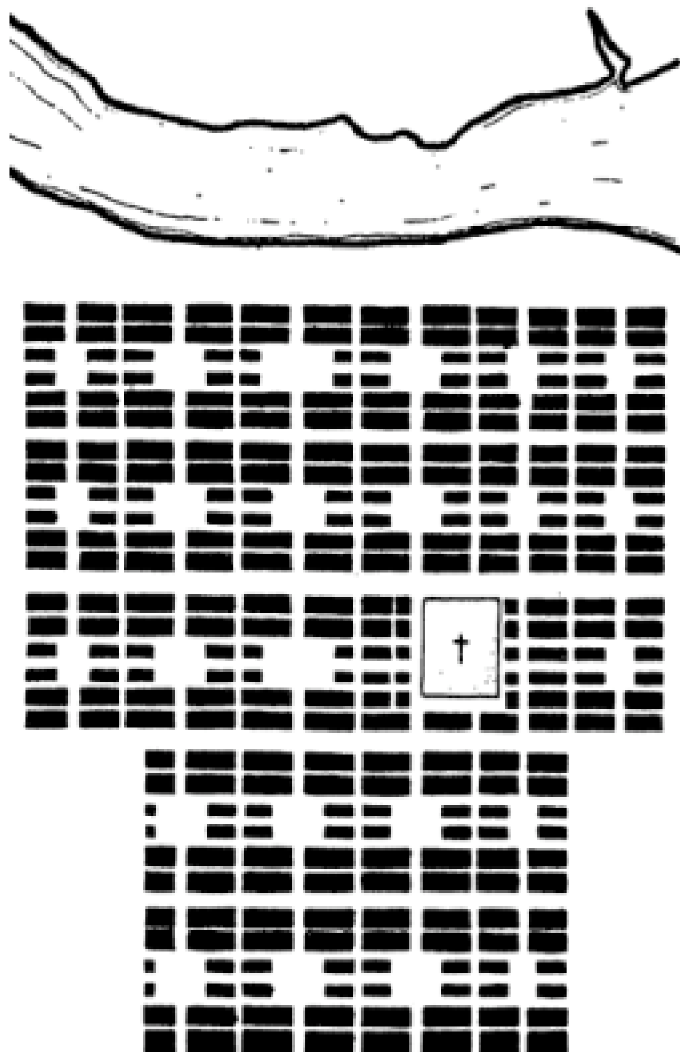

Figure 5

Plan diagram illustrates the grid plan wards of Savannah, Georgia, circa 1856. Each 14 acre ward consists of a central green square and twelve blocks; primary thoroughfares occur along the edges of the wards. The overall area shown in the plan is approximately 350 acres.

It is good to remember that the Burnham Plan is urban design at the scale of a region, focusing upon that peculiarly American phenomenon, a "downtown civic center." Though it would have been nice if it had, we shouldn't be particularly surprised that it didn't deal with what might be called "neighborhood issues." Sitte, on the other hand (as well as his contemporary disciples, most notably Leon Krier), was speaking and writing on behalf of historic European urban centers. But however monumental the European city, if

it was of any significant population at all it was characterized not by a single centralized "downtown" (where is "downtown" Rome? "downtown" London?), but rather by *multiple centers*, of relatively small area. When Sitte, and now Krier, argue for the reconstruction and revival of traditional urban centers--the walking city, the quarter; and for the larger city as a *federation* of quarters--they are talking in terms of an area about the size of the Loop, i.e. approximately 100-160 acres. More significantly, they are talking about something at the scale of and socially (though not formally) similar to a typical Chicago neighborhood.

I say *not* formally, because Sitte's "urban centers," his tightly controlled and defined spatial models, are derived from old world cities bearing little physical resemblance to American grid cities such as Chicago. But if the medieval formal model may be inappropriate for neighborhood design in Burnham's Chicago, other formal models illustrate possibilities for creating traditional architectural hierarchies in a grid plan, at the scale and density of the American urban neighborhood and its institutions [FIGURES 5-7]. These models even now suggest alternate approaches for Chicago architects, planners, politicians, and members of the business community currently thinking about the programmatic and symbolic significance of both downtown and the neighborhoods, and of their right relationship to one another.

Figure 6

"Savannah Ga., 1855": 1856 aerial perspective by J.W. Hill shows public buildings fronting the squares, demonstrating a peculiarly American multi-centered monumentality in a repetitive grid plan.

The Loop as Civic Center

Needless to say, we are a long way from 1909. Nevertheless Chicago, in both her downtown and her neighborhoods, would benefit from a creative reappropriation of Burnham's traditional city planning concerns. Several practical lessons can be learned from the Burnham Plan, foremost of which should be a reconsideration of traditional architectural and urban design hierarchies, within the context of our contemporary institutional realities. What are some of these realities? And what can be done to create and / or restore such hierarchies--assuming for the moment that architects and politicians can be persuaded that such a course of action is desirable, and that public spirited corporate executives and developers can recover some portion of that appreciation of the relationship between civic sensibility and formal order so remarkable in their 1909 forbears?

The foremost reality is that over the past eighty years we have become habituated to the architectural monumentalization first of commerce, and more recently of speculation; and that this has resulted in the accumulation of a large number of big buildings that are likely to be with us for some time. In Chicago, of course, this has resulted in something rather interesting: the *de facto* "civic center" of Chicago is not Burnham's proposed complex of public buildings, or any other such complex; it's the Loop. Being fond of the Loop, I'm tempted to view its grandeur as one more reminder of the surprising character of Divine Providence, here working its will through the

mechanisms of the market economy. My fondness, however, relates directly to this sense that the Loop transcends its origins: when I see the collection of buildings that make up the Loop skyline, I don't think "commerce;" I think "Chicago."

Even this symbol of Chicago seems endangered, however, by our misplacement of that formal / civic sensibility bequeathed to us from Burnham. The danger is twofold, and stems from the absence of any common and well articulated vision of what the larger formal order of Chicago ought to be, and from the virtual absence of constraints upon high rise development in the downtown area. The growing number of super tall buildings being planned and built in and, more ominously, *around* the Loop--the prospect and increasing reality of a so called "Super Loop"—presents problems both pragmatic and symbolic. The pragmatic problems are well documented:[11] such buildings increase local working and living populations to a point that sidewalks and streets become nearly impassable; they expand super dense development beyond the physical area that pedestrians can comfortably walk; they demand intense infrastructural support; they escalate land costs wildly, so that the only street front mercantile activity that can survive must cater to the most elite clientele; they both create a demand for historic preservation, and make the whole preservation process necessarily difficult, politically acrimonious--and, some Chicagoans suspect, ultimately futile. Beyond these practical problems, however, they create a symbolic problem as well. The Loop is the civic center and premiere symbol of Chicago; but the singular quality of the Loop as a symbol is precisely its singularity. That symbolic singularity gradually diminishes as buildings of equal height or taller than those in the Loop arise on north Michigan Avenue, and the near north, west, and south sides.

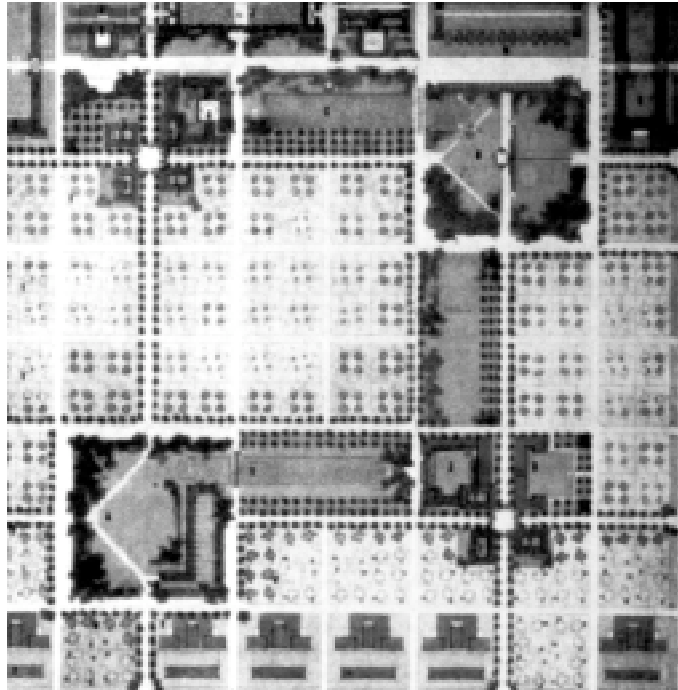

Figure 7

Plan by Frank Lloyd Wright for a prototype mixed-use neighborhood development on a quarter section (160 acres) in Chicago, from Alfred B. Yeomans (editor), *City Residential Land Dvelopment: Studies in Planning* (Chicago: The City Club of Chicago and University of Chicago Press, 1913). The dominant housing model is unnecessarily suburban, and in reality the prototypical quarter section is liable to be interrupted by any number of topographical anomalies. Nevertheless, in its retention of the street grid, the inclusiveness of its mixed use neighborhood program, and its allocation of open space fronted (albeit casually) by public buildings, Wright's project invites further exploration into the formal qualities and development of distinctive Chicago neighborhoods integrated into the larger order of the city.

It should be self-evident why City Hall should care that the Loop not be choked to death by a population expanding on all sides. But why should City Hall care about preserving the *symbolic* integrity of the Loop? It should care because municipal governments and other embodiments of legitimate civic authority have a proper interest in creating and preserving symbols of that authority. The most prominent of these symbols are typically architectural. How might the

symbolic integrity of the Loop be preserved and (perhaps literally) heightened? One scenario might be to permit virtual *laissez-faire* downtown commercial development, but restrict it to the area bordered by Congress Street to the south, the Chicago River to the west and north, and the eastern half of Wabash to the east (thereby saving the Michigan Avenue/Grant Park "wall"). Within this area, let the city allocate open space, perhaps retain its existing government buildings, and provide bonus provisions (something other than floor area ratio (FAR) increases, since there would be no maximum FAR) to subsidize a mix of street front retail activities. These constraints excepted, kiss traditional civic institutional presence and historic preservation goodbye, and just let the Loop be the Loop--parking garages on top of churches and all (as in a recent development proposal for Old St. Mary's Church). In conjunction with this, however, dramatically down zone everything south of Congress Street, west and north of the Chicago River, and east of Michigan Avenue, thereby relieving both the Loop and the rest of the city of the problems attendant to unregulated high rise development. The second part of this proposal (i.e., the down zoning) might not even require a drastic re-write of the Zoning Ordinance. It might be accomplished by something as simple as a restructuring of the Ordinance's bonus provisions, so that it would hold development close to the already established FAR; require that parking garages be included in floor area calculations; favor bulk over height; and reward street front development rather than the creation of open space, the allocation of which is properly a function of the public sector rather than the private.

Neighborhoods as Small Cities

What about the Burnham Plan relative to the formal qualities of neighborhood development in Chicago? It was the great virtue of the City Beautiful Movement generally to focus attention upon the aesthetics of the downtown areas of modern cities; its great flaw was that in doing so it diverted attention from other parts, in fact the great bulk, of the city. Since Burnham and to the present day, Chicago's business and political leaders have been big boosters of what has come to be known as the "Central Area;" similar energies and attention are rarely devoted to the Peripheral Area.

Burnham himself, as has been noted, did not devote much attention to the formal and social order of the neighborhood. But unlike subsequent grand plans for development in Chicago (e.g., the Chicago 21 plan of 1973, and the Chicago Central Area Plan of 1983, both by the Chicago Central Area Committee), the Burnham Plan proposes a grand hierarchy and formal order in the city that simultaneously allows for a smaller scale hierarchy in and a formal ordering of the neighborhoods. The natural vehicle for this (which antedates Burnham) is already in place: the quarter-section (160 acre) parcels created by Chicago's street grid pattern that locates major streets in half-mile increments. In both the Burnham Plan, and in Chicago as it exists today, these "ideal" parcels are interrupted by circumstance: a diagonal street; a topographical peculiarity such as a river or railroad tracks; and, today, expressways. On such parcels can be found scores of Chicago neighborhoods today, just so defined by the city's existing street grid system.

If you traverse the best of these neighborhoods on foot from major commercial street "border" to major commercial street "border" (such streets, of course, function as centers as often as they do edges), you will find within them most of the things that their residents require for daily life in the city: housing, retail stores, office space, parks, recreational facilities, schools, religious institutions, branch libraries, public works buildings, fire stations, movie theaters, etc. However, except for the fact that all of these activities can typically be found within the area bordered by the main commercial streets, there is little consistent or pronounced evidence of any particular formal order or architectural hierarchy. This, it seems to me, should be of concern to both

architects and City Hall--not so much because its absence is catastrophic (it's clearly not), but because its presence would give neighborhoods additional character, identity, and pride: things first good in themselves, that also work to the economic advantage of neighborhoods and cities.

Neighborhood scaled public institutions properly planned and located create economic value. For that matter, institutions serving a clientele larger than the local neighborhood add character (and dollars) to the particular neighborhood in which they reside. Perhaps Chicagoans are overdue therefore to question our current pre-disposition to concentrate all of our major public buildings and spaces downtown. There are several instructive local precedents that suggest ways to do otherwise: Chicago's boulevard system, now happily undergoing restoration; Chicago's neighborhood parks; the relatively remote locations of Chicago icons such as Wrigley Field and Comiskey Park; and the location of institutions ranging in size from the University of Chicago in Hyde Park to Sulzer Regional Library in Lakeview. Each and all of these add vitality, variety, and economic value to the neighborhoods in which they reside. Institutions like them, strategically sited, can be important components in both the revival of moribund neighborhoods and the creation of healthy new ones.

However important such institutions are, they are only one component of a thriving neighborhood. Unfortunately, the other essential components---housing, jobs, and retail activities---tend today to be brought into being not only in isolation from civilizing institutions and amenities, but also in isolation from one another. In Chicago this is resulting in nothing less than the suburbanization of the neighborhoods. I mean this in a fairly precise formal sense. The physical fabric of Chicago's neighborhoods is wearing out from the proliferation of suburban commercial building types created for the convenience of automobiles: the gas station, the convenience store, the fast food franchise, the supermarket, the shopping strip, the regional shopping area, and the industrial park. Each of these building types is land use intensive. They devote as much or more square footage to surface parking as to the building itself, thereby eroding the continuity of the urban street and making themselves intrinsically hostile to pedestrians. They do not merely accommodate the automobile, they make it a necessity.

Why are these particular building types problematic? Aren't they what "the market" wants? Perhaps. But city life is by definition dense; the question is, should it be dense with cars or with people? Population density in cities is not only tolerable, but desirable, particularly if the population has easy pedestrian access to the necessities and amenities of daily life. Traditional urban neighborhoods, traditional Chicago neighborhoods, provide this; suburbanization diminishes it. Furthermore, speaking simply in terms of symbolism and aesthetics, what was said earlier about the Loop is equally true of open space in city neighborhoods: its singular drama and power depends upon contrast. Open space in the city is symbolically heightened primarily in two ways: by fronting it with important public buildings; and, more fundamentally, by its sharp contrast with the density of the built environment. Suburban building types in city neighborhoods--because of the extended open space they necessarily create with their surface parking requirements--are in this way like an excess of high rises outside the Loop: they not only create practical problems, but also undermine the formal and symbolic order of the city.

What are the prospects for reversing the suburbanization of Chicago's neighborhoods? "Mixed use development with residential" is unquestionably in vogue near the downtown lakefront, as the Cityfront Center project, and even the preliminary guidelines for the Central Station parcel demonstrate. This should rightly please design professionals and other urbophiles; but it is hard to avoid noticing that this fashion has not become normative for development in the rest of

Chicago. Local newspapers have recently run stories about planned new parks and new branch libraries in the neighborhoods. Are there any plans for fronting these new libraries on these new public parks? Or for fronting new libraries on old parks? Or placing new parks in front of old libraries? The newspapers are full of features about planned new shopping malls and industrial parks, and of stories underscoring the need for new or refurbished housing stock. Is any thought being given to physical models that integrate these new retail and employment opportunities with housing? Perhaps even with public parks and libraries? If so, these ideas aren't evident on the streets of Chicago, let alone making the local papers.

City Hall is aggressively pursuing jobs and economic development for Chicago, and rightly so. But formal models have social consequences, and the formal development models currently being promoted are a recipe for making most of Chicago unlovely and unlovable. Daniel Burnham's *Plan of Chicago* demonstrates, albeit imperfectly, how to integrate both economic and moral concerns (i.e. "social concerns") with aesthetic concerns. To this day it retains its magic to stir the blood. It might even now serve as a corrective to much current planning and development policy; and it is small wonder that local architects, planners, and developers persist in trying to wrap themselves in it. In view, however, of the direction in which physical development in Chicago now appears to be headed, let those responsible for such development who invoke like some Shakespearean ghost the spirit of Daniel Burnham take care. Seeking and expecting authoritative blessing, they might well do better preparing themselves for a rebuke.

A 1993 POSTSCRIPT

Daniel Burnham is not God, but in the history of Chicago architecture and urbanism he is unquestionably an Authority Figure. Like God, however, it is Daniel Burnham's misfortune to have things done in his name of which he would probably not approve. This may be the fate of any person with a gift for aphorism; but Burnham surely could not have intended "Make no little plans" to justify *every* megalomaniacal scheme that blows out of the Windy City's architectural offices and centers of political power.

I am here today, therefore, to praise Daniel Burnham (with qualifications); but perhaps to distance myself from his usual supporters, and in some ways to align myself with his usual critics. For while there is much to criticize about the Burnham Plan, there nevertheless remains much that is praiseworthy, and many features that--were they adopted even today--would make both Chicago and Schaumberg better places than they are. For instance:

> --it was, and remains, both physically convenient and socially and economically prudent to parcel land into networks of blocks, major and minor through streets, and public parks and squares;
>
> --it was both public spirited and environmentally prescient to conserve the lakefront and forests as open land, and to call for public parks and forest preserves to be distributed throughout the region;
>
> --it was wise to put a height limitation upon commercial structures and housing that effectively makes them background buildings that define the city's public spaces and defer to its public buildings;
>
> --the regional scope of the Burnham Plan's land use proposals was splendidly ambitious in seeking a harmonious relationship of the parts to the whole.

Now, these may not be the most prominent features of the Burnham Plan, but they are all there; and it is worth noting that these aspects of the Plan represent a protection of "quality of life" interests *not only* for the downtown patrician business class with which Burnham is so quickly and often identified (the better to dismiss him), but *even more* for the working classes, neighborhoods and outlying areas for which his critics allege he and his commercial patrons had little but disdain.

However good or malevolent or mixed Daniel Burnham's personal intentions, the Burnham Plan represents a *parti* for the physical development of Chicago, one which official Chicago adopted at a crucial point in its history. Much, perhaps most, of the detailed development of this *parti* has gone badly; but this is something for which Burnham is less blameworthy than his successors. Moreover, although it is possible to imagine a better urban design *parti* for the Chicago region, so far no one (and certainly not Frank Lloyd Wright or Ludwig Hilberseimer) has done it.

Burnham sought a grand formal unity for Chicago, in which commerce would thrive but would serve civic ends. In an era that aggressively (and too often mindlessly) celebrates diversity, persons promoting monumental formal strategies for purposes of civic unity must expect to find themselves called unflattering names. But unity and diversity are not antithetical, merely difficult to reconcile--and perhaps therefore all the more worth the attempt. Agreement among persons is arguably as fundamental a pleasure as orgasm or successful aggression, and in any case more distinctively human; but agreement implies culture, and culture implies limitations upon our appetites for the sake of our ultimate happiness. Unlike most twentieth century urban planning, I think there is at least some evidence of this sensibility in the Burnham Plan. It would be a worthwhile project for late twentieth century planners in both Chicago and Schaumberg to try to tease this sensibility out and bring it to bear upon our common life.

An earlier version of this essay appeared in the March 1990 issue of Inland Architect. *The "1993 Postscript" remarks were originally given in Chicago in June of 1993 at the National Convention of the American Institute of Architects, at a forum entitled "If Burnham Came to Schaumberg;" and are a response to an invitation to consider the relevance of Daniel Burnham's ideas about city planning to the phenomenon of late twentieth century suburban sprawl as epitomized by that Chicago suburb.*

NOTES

1. Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pages 2-3.

2. Just how close in time the traditional urbanism of the Burnham Plan was to the utilitarian modern city of mono-functional zoning and monumentalized commerce and housing is evidenced in Chapter XI, pages 72-73, of Walter D. Moody's *Wacker's Manual of the Plan of Chicago*, published in 1916 to promote the Burnham Plan in Chicago's public schools. Citing as one of the duties of the Chicago Plan Commission the implementation of the Burnham Plan, Moody also notes that

> Two other questions of large public import are closely allied to the work of the Chicago Plan Commission. One is the question of proper houses for the people living in the congested districts. The Chicago Plan Commission felt that the question of housing was of such great importance to the city that it deserved the exclusive attention of a special organization. It therefore suggested the creation of the Chicago Housing Board. . . .

> The other question is that of dividing the city into districts. In one kind of district only residences would be allowed, in another only factories and industries, and in a third only commerce and business. This is known as "zoning" or "districting" the city.

In the subsequent history of social and urban form in Chicago (and not only Chicago), both of these urban "questions" were to be given modernist rather than traditionalist answers, with less than happy consequences.

3. Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett, *Plan of Chicago* (Chicago: The Commercial Club of Chicago, 1909), page 4.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Richard Guy Wilson, "Renaissance in the prairie," *Inland Architect*, April 1980, page 8.

6. See for example the Introduction to Walter Moody, *Wacker's Manual, op. cit.*, pages v-vi:

> Love of country, the feeling of which is inherent in every normal boy or girl. . .[is] being given a companion sentiment--devotion and passionate interest in the safety and welfare of our cities. This new feeling of community patriotism. . .takes the form generally of a high and controlling pride in one's native city, or in the city in which one abides and has adopted as his home.
>
> Modern educators and leaders in public affairs, noting the birth and rise of this patriotic impulse in our cities, see in it a great factor for future good for the country. They see in it the approach of good government in the cities and the end of evil administration of our communities. They see, too, that development and cultivation of this impulse means good effects of the most stable and lasting character upon our national institutions by a deepening, broadening, and intensifying of national patriotism. . . .
>
> Observers of this new and growing feeling of civic patriotism are finding that it finds expression among the [population] as freely as does that based on the broader foundation of love of native land. *In some ways this devotional impulse comes more quickly and freely, even, than that pertaining to our national life. . . . This is because one's city is so much more closely and intimately known than the great entity of the nation* [emphasis added]. . . .
>
> [This is] a revival, under modern conditions, of a patriotism as old as civilization itself. It is a restoration to the world, in modified form, of the devotional impulse and effort by which the peoples of all the great cities of the past built up, beautified, and extended the fame of their cities. . . . Conditions, then, demand that this new impulse of love for this city shall be fostered, and that our children shall be taught that they are the coming responsible heads of their various communities. . . . [They] must be led to recognize their duty of looking to the future, knowing that to be unmindful of the needs of days to come is to be unfaithful of obligations to themselves, their communities, and their Creator.

7. Quoted in Peter Berger and Richard Neuhaus, *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy* (Washington, D.C.: The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1977), page 4. I have lost the original source of the quotation; perhaps *Reflections on the Revolution in France*?

8. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), Volume II, Second Book, Chapter V, page 110. Of the variety of free associations and their activities observed by Tocqueville in the United States, he writes on page 106 of the same chapter:

> Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations. They have not only commercial and manufacturing companies. . .but associations of a thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive. The Americans make associations to give entertainments, to found seminaries, to build inns, to construct churches, to diffuse books, to send missionaries to the antipodes; in this manner they found hospitals, prisons, and schools [and, he might have added, promote visionary city plans]. If it is proposed to inculcate some truth or to foster some feeling by the encouragement of a great example, they form [an association]. Wherever at the head of some new undertaking you see the government in France, or a man of rank in England, in the United States you will be sure to find an association.

9. Carroll William Westfall, "Manners Matter" *Inland Architect*, April 1980, page 19.

10. William J. Adelman, "Robber Barons and Social Reformers," *Inland Architect*, May 1980, pages 12-15.

11. On the negative effects of tall buildings and how they might be mitigated, Howard Decker and I rehearsed several of the observations that follow in the "Chicago Architecture Police" column in the January 1986 issue of *Inland Architect*. About the few new observations and suggestions appearing here, we may or may not be in agreement.