

# 3 BOOKS ON PLANNING

BY JOE BERRIDGE

## WHAT WERE THE PRIMARY BOOKS

that influenced me as a planner? Let me pick one for each stage of a planner's life. Mine started with Jane Jacobs, and how could it not? I was of the age, and *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* was the book of the times. It was a righteous critique of another generation's planners: how clear were their errors, how misguided their intentions, how craven their methods. It was a call to arms to end a generation of urban maltreatment, a book right up there on the front shelf with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, which started the contemporary environmental movement, and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, which opened a whole new way women were to live in the world. All three were published within a couple of years at the start of the 1960s; all became part of the collective text for a generation with an influence that carries to this day. All by utterly original American women, which is probably why I married one, despite being raised a million miles from a great American city. Even in the heart of the English countryside it was clear that something was happening and I had to find out what it was.

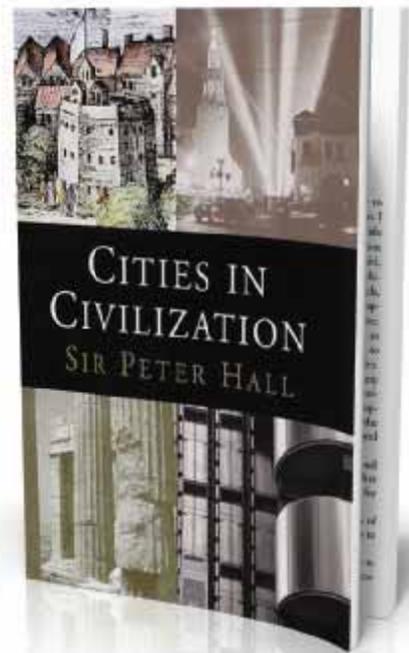
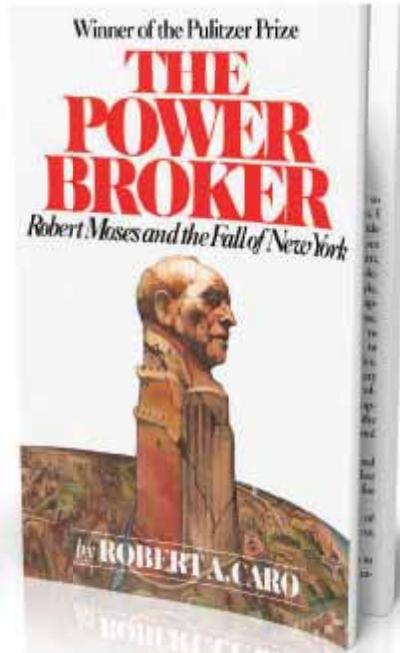
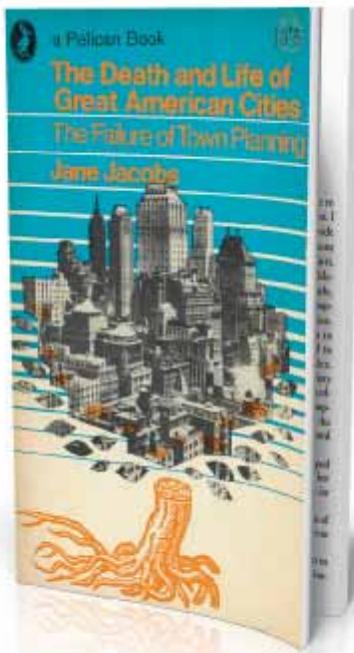
What did Jacobs tell planners to do? Ensure a mix of uses, pump up the density, keep blocks short, blend the new with the old, foster local business, promote life on the street, forget about the car, leave good things alone: a simple and enduring cat-

echism for an urban passion. *Death and Life* became, perhaps still is, the closest thing we have to a bible of contemporary planning. Though an odd bible for a profession to choose, because Jane Jacobs was profoundly suspicious of expertise, contemptuous of professionals. She relied on observation and anecdote, not theory; a book trusting in street wisdom rather than the sophistication of academics and civil servants. Most of all she told planners to get out of the way, a view that sat easily within the dominant world view of all of us then at university, adding to the suspicion of elites, disdain for the governing class and distrust of top-down structures that formed the post-Vietnam baby boom consensus.

Using it as a guide for city planning in real time was another matter, though initially all went well. In my first years as a planner Jane Jacobs ruled in Toronto: successive mayors paid her court, an intrusive expressway was stopped, and a great housing development, St. Lawrence, was built with her guidance. The book was much quoted: subsequent books came, and went, with increasing speed. And then a perhaps inevitable estrangement grew between her and City Hall, along with the strange transformation of her text into a justification of hostility to any major urban initiative. The radical transmuted to the reactionary as the local concern always trumped the larger view. Jacobs' urban vision was

inherently grounded in the neighbourhood; it provided no basis for larger-scale intervention. And even at that neighbourhood scale it seemed to support an impossible circularity. If what exists is good, why would you change it? Who needed planners?

So not surprisingly as my generation of planners and city builders moved into the stage of life where we wanted, and were able, to do something about our cities we found another guide: Robert Caro's *The Power Broker*. This biography of Jacobs' arch nemesis, Robert Moses, was published in 1974 as a gang of us in Toronto City Hall were beginning to understand just what it took to get something actually built. What was extraordinary about Caro's account of the master city builder of post-war New York was the fine detailing of the ways Robert Moses manipulated political power and public finance, the prerequisites for any major urban undertaking. The book is a remarkable achievement since Caro was barely sympathetic to his subject. For good reason; Moses was a monomaniac and a bully whose many great parks, regeneration schemes and transportation projects only barely tilt the balance against the urban renewal and expressway manias that blighted his later years. The debate carries on to this day and the lines are still drawn—there have been at least three exhibitions of his life and work in the past few years. Caro's book became a kind of



devil's bible, an intensely practical manual to working the levers of urban power. Many of us from the 1970s' City Hall went on in various ways to help the developer Olympia and York build their great city-changing projects in New York, London and elsewhere, and then watch chagrined as the Reichmann's over-extension let all that financial power and political positioning drain away.

The book for the later years is harder to find. For the past 20 years I have worked on cities, mostly in North America and Europe, helping them with the problems of growth or decline. I've watched great waves of economic and social change sweep through Detroit and Manchester, St Louis and Liverpool; witnessed the explosion of Canada's cities into the farmland; and seen tides of globalization raise up Singapore and leave the mill towns of northern England and Ohio stranded. I've been helping cities develop their downtowns, their waterfronts, their cultural attractions, their quality of life, their public realm, their educational assets, their heritage districts, their transit systems, their destination attractions—helping advance all that hopeful architecture of the contemporary, competitive, creative city. Directing their growth, managing their change, enhancing their environment - applying the careful constructions of planning to the complex chaos of urban life. With a nagging sense, perhaps the inevitable

sense for any planner who has been around, a sense that what we do may not have that great an effect, that there are other, more powerful forces at work. What book can give direction for such doubts?

I am a sailor, mostly in the placid waters of Lake Ontario. But this summer I ventured far out into the Atlantic off the coasts of England and France. When you leave those shores behind, with their confused patterns of concatenating waves, you notice you are in the grip of much longer, slower swells. Huge waves, mountainous crests a hundred metres apart, generated by some violent storm on the other side of the ocean. Peter Hall's *Cities in Civilization* is quite simply the best guide to understanding how cities work, why they thrive and fail, over those long waves of history. Published in 1998, it is a compendious volume that analyzes every leading world city from classical Athens to contemporary San Jose in Silicon Valley, attempting to explain what chemistry, what combination of technological breakthrough, immigrant arrival, geopolitics and good government led to their success. To presumptuously summarize Hall's thousand and more pages of almost addictive detail: cities flourish as new immigrants prosper when their host city enables them to take advantage of some new technological or economic opportunity. Or as Confucius put it 1,500 years ago: the key to good urban planning is to make citizens happy and

attract others from afar.

It is a profoundly important and educational book for any planner, since it places planning in its proper role in the life of a city, as a valuable, useful, contributory but not causative foundation for city building. Cities make their own history, but not entirely as they please. Just as we discover in our own lives.

Peter Hall is not only an inspired urban observer and omniscient academic but also someone who has been a practicing planner at the highest levels in the UK. He wrote this masterpiece at the end of his career, knowing that very little comes from telling people what to do but that much is possible for those who grasp just how a city really works. Yet as a planner he sees cities with the same eyes we do and with the same marvel at just what extraordinary human creations they are—and why there is no end to the pleasure and fascination of working in and on them. ■

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