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## Part One: "The Man Who Loved Cities"

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**PART ONE**

*“The Man Who Loved Cities”*

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**Among many tributes paid to William H. “Holly” Whyte after his death in 1999,** Norman Glazer (1999) characterized him in the *Wilson Quarterly* as “the man who loved cities . . . one of America’s most influential observers of the city and the space around it.” It is fitting to devote Part I of this book to personal recollections of this perceptive urbanist written by several people who knew him well in different capacities and at different periods in his career. Ann Louise Strong, emerita professor of law at the University of Pennsylvania, worked closely with Whyte on the pathbreaking open space plan for the Brandywine Valley in the mid-1960s. Another Penn colleague, the late landscape architect Ian McHarg, drew strongly on the Brandywine plan in his seminal 1968 book, *Design with Nature*. In his turn, Whyte touted McHarg’s ideas in his own 1968 classic, *The Last Landscape*.

Also in the mid-1960s, Charles E. Little had the good fortune to encounter Whyte as a board member of the New York Open Space Institute, of which Little was chief executive officer. Little eschewed being an “organization man” after reading Whyte’s 1956 book of that title and instead applied his talents to making metropolitan New York a more habitable and “humane” place in which to live and work.

At the Open Space Institute, Little authored two books on land conservation: *Stewardship* and *Challenge of the Land* (which in turn influenced this editor’s first effort, *Open Space in Urban Illinois*, Platt 1971). Subsequently, in the Washington, D.C., area and now in New Mexico, Little has contributed his literary and practical experience to many land-saving and regional planning efforts such as farmland preservation, “greenline parks,” and sacred Native American sites.

Eugenie L. Birch, while a Hunter College urban planning professor and member of the New York City Planning Commission, collaborated with Whyte in his “Street Life Project”—the basis for his book and film, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, and his capstone book, *City: Rediscovering the Center*—during the 1980s. Birch would build on Whyte’s passion for lively city centers in her own research on downtown revitalization.

Thomas Balsley, a practitioner of people-oriented urban design, has had many opportunities to apply lessons taught by Whyte. As a personal friend and sometime collaborator, Balsley helped realize Whyte’s visions as to what works or fails in terms of people interaction and enjoyment in shared urban spaces.

Albert LaFarge became a Holly Whyte fan toward the end of Whyte’s career. As a frequent visitor to the East Ninety-fourth Street brownstone where the

Whytes lived, LaFarge assumed the role of Boswell to Holly's Johnson. The result was *The Essential William H. Whyte* (LaFarge 2000), which draws from all Whyte's writings the very best of his wit and wisdom.

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## Whyte on Whyte

### A Walk in the City

Eugenie L. Birch

William H. Whyte (*The Observation Man*) left a remarkable body of writing that addressed three principal aspects of the United States after World War II:

1. The sociology of large organizations and their new suburban habitats (*The Organization Man*, 1956)
2. Suburban land use and sprawl (two essays in Editors of *Fortune*; *The Exploding Metropolis*, 1957; *Securing Open Space for Urban America: Conservation Easements*, 1959; *Cluster Development*, 1964; and *The Last Landscape*, 1968)
3. The functions and design of public spaces in urban settings (*The Social Life of Small Urban Places*, 1980; *City: Rediscovering the Center*, 1988).

Only today, as we are rebuilding lower Manhattan and other downtowns while confronting runaway suburban sprawl across the nation, are we realizing the prescience of this remarkable urbanist and his work. His understanding that economic concentration and population density at the center of a region is the key to conserving land at its periphery made him a pioneer of today's "smart growth" movement. Furthermore, he provided the theory and techniques for achieving model land use arrangements that contemporary city planners and metropolitan policy makers now vigorously promote.

A keen and sensitive observer of his surroundings, Whyte first approached an issue intuitively, but once he had a handle on it, he pursued it in depth, forging his own research methods. He read widely on the given subject, he talked to experts, but most important, he did field research, always questioning the so-called conventional wisdom. When he finally synthesized it all, he provided, in every instance, a new take on the selected topic that blended intelligence, wit, and common sense. This process was the source of his originality because, like Frederic Law Olmsted and other "enlightened amateurs," he was not trained in the field that he would help transform, namely urban planning and design. He picked up the basics as he went along: markets and economics from his experience as an editor at *Fortune* magazine; sociology from studying corporate life in Park Forest, Illinois; and land use planning from observing suburban development around his childhood home in Chester County, Pennsylvania, and from his consultancy on New York City's comprehensive plan.



**Figure 1** William H. Whyte in later life in his beloved midtown Manhattan. (Photo by permission of Enrico Ferorelli.)

Whyte was a modern Renaissance man, a practical humanist, who became an authority on the burning issues of his day through self-education and intelligent observation (figure 1). In addition, he took his knowledge beyond articles, chapters, and books; he translated it into legislation and principles of urban design practice. He trained a generation of influential scholars and civic leaders. His insights on the use and design of urban public space are still fresh today. A year after his death in 1999, Fordham University Press printed a compendium of some of his best writings in *The Essential William H. Whyte* (LaFarge 2000), and the University of Pennsylvania Press reprinted *The Last Landscape* in 2001 and *The Organization Man* in 2002 (it also plans to reissue *The City: Rediscovering the Center*). *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (1980) is marketed by the Project for Public Spaces, a design firm that Whyte helped found. (See Andrew G. Wiley-Schwartz's essay in this volume.)

In 1985, Whyte was elected an honorary member of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) for his "outstanding contribution . . . to the development of the planning profession." (Also honored at the time were Lewis Mumford, the distinguished urban historian, and James Rouse, the builder of Columbia, Maryland, and originator of the concept of "festival malls.") The AICP cited



Whyte's "constructive influence on understanding subdivision growth, conversion of open space, cluster development, urban beautification, revitalization of central cities and the social life of small urban places" (Singer 1985).

At this time I was invited to write the article (Birch 1986) about Whyte for *Planning* magazine that later appeared under the title "The Observation Man" (a title the *New York Times Magazine* borrowed in a short profile of Whyte in its "People of the Millennium" issue of January 2, 2000). On a crisp, clear autumn day in 1985, Holly Whyte invited me to his office high above midtown Manhattan in Rockefeller Center where at age sixty-nine he was actively consulting and writing under the sponsorship of his longtime friend Laurance S. Rockefeller. We spent a few intense hours discussing his life, ideas, and many projects while overlooking Whyte's world: the glittering buildings of midtown Manhattan, the shimmering Hudson River, the New Jersey waterfront, and the hazy hills of the Garden State beyond. He had spent a lifetime puzzling over the various elements that made up the regional landscape, and he was eager to share his accumulated insights.

Whyte recalled his postgraduate days, portraying a raw Princeton University English major turned traveling salesman, peddling Vicks VapoRub during the Depression. He admitted that World War II had rescued him from that life. As a Marine intelligence officer, he began to develop a lifelong interest in geographic data, as later recorded in his final memoir, *A Time of War: Remembering Guadalcanal, A Battle without Maps* (Whyte 2000). After the war, he secured an editorial job at *Fortune* magazine, which at that time allowed a very broad interpretation of business journalism. He relished the extended time spent in the new white-collar Chicago suburb of Park Forest, Illinois, researching the series on the modern corporate worker that would be a key element of *The Organization Man*, his most successful book.

In the early 1950s, Whyte and several colleagues, including Jane Jacobs, wrote a series of articles that were republished as *The Exploding Metropolis* (Editors of *Fortune* 1957). That small book would become required reading for many planning students; Charles Abrams, head of the Columbia University planning program, considered it the best work in the field.

In the next few years, Whyte's urban philosophy would broaden and mature. In the early 1960s, his role as consultant to the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission, chaired by Laurence S. Rockefeller, the philanthropic conservationist, stimulated his interest in techniques to retain open space in the process of suburban development, resulting in his professional reports on "conservation easements" and "cluster development."

In the mid-1960s, Whyte was retained by Donald H. Elliott, chair of the New York City Planning Commission, to overhaul editorially the city's draft Comprehensive Plan. Finding that the plan contained masses of data but lacked a clear message, Whyte rewrote much of it, producing a document that the *New York*

*Times* described as “probably the most clearly written plan ever published.” The plan’s “Critical Issues” section, which best reflects Whyte’s graceful writing style and enthusiasm for urban life, begins:

There is a great deal that is very right with New York City. As never before it is the national center of the United States . . . there is more of everything here that makes a city jump and hum with life—more of different kinds of people, more specialized services, more stores, more galleries, more restaurants, more possibilities of the unexpected. Here is the engine. And it is getting stronger. . . . Concentration is the genius of the City, its reason for being, the source of its vitality and its excitement. We believe the center should be strengthened, not weakened, and we are not afraid of the bogey of high density. (New York City Planning Commission 1969, vol. 1, p. 5)

In helping rewrite the 1969 Comprehensive Plan, Whyte encountered “incentive zoning,” a technique added to the New York City zoning ordinance in 1961 that gave developers extra floor space in exchange for providing an urban plaza or public arcade at their expense. Employed extensively along the rapidly developing Sixth Avenue, the results, according to Whyte (and many other critics) were mixed. Although the city had gained additional open space, the sites were, in general, disappointing. They were poorly designed, unattractive, and, as a consequence, underused. The discouraged planners, Whyte related, were ready to eliminate the incentives, but he cautioned them “not to throw the baby out with the bathwater.”

Convinced that the law could stand if improved, he set out to discover what was needed. Following his by now-proven research method of information gathering, observation, and synthesis, he established the Street Life Project, based at Hunter College and funded by the National Geographic Society, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and others. His eyes lit up as he described his techniques: the time-lapse photography, the miles of film footage to review, and the joy of finding behavioral patterns. He clearly loved “spying” on his urbanites. He was amused by their spontaneous street conversations and the variety of their interchanges on street corners and at building entrances.

Characteristically, he used the word *schmoozing* to typify street conversations. A stiff scholar would never have used such a term, but Whyte was not stiff. He was, however, systematic: he gathered empirical data and translated the information into an organized set of planning principles that New York City would incorporate into its 1975 zoning ordinance revision. Other cities would follow suit. This work was not guesswork; his greatest strength was his extreme attention to detail—exact measurements of the width of a sitting ledge, the amount of sitting space measured in linear feet related to the square footage of a plaza—to arrive at appropriate legislative formulas.

As of 1985, ten years after the zoning revisions, he felt strongly about the need to evaluate and refine these ideas. No one would take him up on his idea until the mid-1990s, when the New York Department of City Planning collaborated with

Harvard professor Jerold S. Kayden and the Municipal Art Society to inventory and assess the entire stock of incentive-based public space. (See Kayden's essay in this volume.)

What Holly Whyte wanted most was to craft the outdoor elements of downtown so that they could support and enhance the processes that make "the city jump and hum with life." His larger purpose was to create an environment that would support urban density, the engine powering the center and sustaining the surrounding region (figure 2). To a newspaper writer, he articulated his aims: "What makes the jostling, bustling, elbow-to-elbow belly dance of life in Manhattan bearable, are small amenities like open spaces with movable chairs and food kiosks, sidewalks wide enough to accommodate crowds, stairs that are easy to climb" (Croke 1989).

Having completed his basic open space analysis, Whyte now embarked on other refinements and causes. For example, he was concerned about new high-rise construction and its effect on preexisting urban plazas. Pouring over sunlight and shadow studies for a particularly offensive building, he succeeded in convincing the city government to reduce its height despite its already being under construction. Its shadow would have wrecked havoc with a nearby plaza. (See the essay by Mary V. Rickel Pelletier in this volume.) In addition, for all his progrowth talk, Whyte also appreciated how the mix and texture of buildings of different age and style enriched the urban environment, and thus he helped found the New York City Landmarks Conservancy. Finally, he was at that moment trying to figure out how to convince the federal Internal Revenue Service that scenic easements in urban areas should have favorable tax treatment.

In our 1985 interview, Whyte was impressive for his mental agility, practicality, and humor. He seemed to love unraveling knotty problems. He clearly enjoyed the complexities of urban life, especially the interplay between regulation, development, and human behavior. Reflecting his consulting excursions to cities very different from New York—such as Detroit, Dallas, Minneapolis, and Tokyo—he was sensitive to geography and climate, size of city, and internal location patterns. In this last phase of his career, Whyte was a tireless advocate of healthy, busy downtowns wherever they might be located.

To provide some photographs for the *Planning* article, Whyte suggested taking a tour of midtown Manhattan so that he could demonstrate why some urban places were successful and others not. On the appointed day, the photographer and I were to meet him at Rockefeller Center and from there we would visit half a dozen places. The day dawned bright and bitterly cold—the temperature was well below zero and the wind was whistling—but Whyte was undaunted. "The weather is perfect," he said. "Let's go."

The first stop, Paley Park in midtown, was deserted but still very beautiful. There he noted how the entry steps would draw people in and pointed out the composition of the trees, food concession, and movable chairs and how the waterfall



**Figure 2** (*Top*) Relaxing on Holly Whyte’s movable chairs in New York’s Bryant Park. (*Bottom*) Socializing in the sun, Bryant Park. (Photos by R. H. Platt.)



muffled the street noise. Walking farther, he demonstrated the correct ledge width by perching on the edge of a window frame and explained that it would be lined with sitting people on a nice sunny day. Then we moved on to the IBM Plaza, a large indoor public space that was well populated that day, although someone had removed some of the chairs, to Whyte's dismay. At Phillip Morris Plaza, another interior space, elements embodied perfection in Whyte's estimation: the Whitney Museum had lent a whimsical sculpture, and tables and chairs filled the area. While sipping a cappuccino, he playfully conversed with one of the dancing statues.

The best part of the whole morning had occurred a little earlier. While walking down Madison Avenue, Whyte pointed out a man who was walking rapidly down the west side of the street. "Just watch," Whyte whispered. "He's going to jaywalk to the other side on a diagonal." Well, within seconds, that is just what the man did. Whyte knew his city and its habits.

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## Holly Whyte's Journalism of Place

Charles E. Little

“So let us be on with it. . . . If there ever was a time to press for precipitate, hasty, premature action, this is it.” These words are from the penultimate paragraph of *The Last Landscape*, Holly Whyte's roundup of how, and why, we ought to preserve metropolitan open space. Not later, but now. Not after great long studies, but now.

One day in the deep, dark 1960s, Stanley Tankel, the estimable chief planner at the Regional Plan Association in New York, invited Holly Whyte and me to lunch at the Harvard Club. Holly was writing his landscape book at the time and expostulating about “action,” which was his favorite word. My role in this conversation, as the young executive director of the Open Space Action Committee, of which Stanley and Holly were board members, was to shut up and listen.

“Well,” says Stanley, who was feeling grouchy, “you know what planners think about *that*.”

“Okay, what?”

“We say: *Action drives out planning*.”

“Exactly,” says Holly, a grin splitting his great long face.

In those days, open space preservation was a very big deal. It was the means by which “the civics,” as Stanley called local activists, could mitigate the headlong rush to develop or pave over or redevelop (taller, uglier) every square inch of metropolitan land. The race for open space (including the inner-city space opened up courtesy of dynamite, wrecking balls, bulldozers, and cranes) was on, but there wasn't enough money in the world for conservationists to purchase and set aside threatened lands in behalf of nature, human and otherwise.

It was Holly's great contribution to get the civics to understand that the lack of money was immutable, and to give them the tools to save the land anyway. Today, open space preservation has a full kit of screwdrivers, levers, and wrenches, virtually all of them—cluster development, easements, land philanthropy, tax strategies, greenways, transfer of development rights, and a whole lot more—in use because of Holly Whyte.

Yet his was the work not of a professor of geography, but of a journalist: a *Fortune* magazine editor when the writers for the magazines of Time, Inc., of which *Fortune* was the classiest, set the standards for everyone else. And he was the author of *The Organization Man*, a best seller that had a profound influence, and still does, on people of a certain age, including me.

In the 1960s when I became the executive director of the Open Space Action

Committee (OSAC) (it was Holly who supplied not only the name of the organization but the intellectual foundation for our work), I was a refugee from Madison Avenue. I had retired from an advertising agency at the advanced age of thirty-two in substantial part because I had read *The Organization Man* and had concluded that I did not want to be one when I grew up. So by the time I arrived at OSAC in 1964, I was overjoyed to find that William H. Whyte was on the board. One time, over drinks at a bar somewhere, I told Holly that he had changed my life.

He turned his long-suffering face toward me. "Don't ever say that to me again, Little," he said. "I am not going to be responsible for whatever dumb choices you make." So we had another beer. I just kept my counsel and decided to adapt (steal?) Holly's open space-saving ideas for my own work, starting with a book called *Stewardship*, which was instrumental in saving thousands of acres of open space in the New York metropolitan region. (The story of that program is told in *The Last Landscape*.) Then I used his ideas in a book called *Challenge of the Land*, which stayed in print for seventeen years through several editions. More recently, I ripped him off again in my 1989 book *Greenways for America*, finding that in fact Holly was the first to popularize this idea.

The point is not that Holly invented all the land-saving gadgets of which he wrote, but that he knew how to contextualize them, how to furnish the handles so that nonspecialist readers would understand their importance. This brilliant foray into open space journalism began with conservation easements, an otherwise dry and recondite topic that Holly presented in, of all places, *Life* magazine, in those days (1959) the premier popular magazine when magazines were the at the top of the mass media heap.

Then came the dynamite government report in 1962. Nothing like it had been seen before; it was number 17 in the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission study series entitled Open Space Action, which read like, well, *Life*. (The commission was set up by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1958 and led by Laurance S. Rockefeller.) Then came *Cluster Development*. And then came the whole ball of open space wax in *The Last Landscape*. Without his skills as a journalist, I doubt that the techniques Whyte proposed in these and subsequent writings would have had anywhere near the effect, for they were aimed at a nonspecialist audience, over the shoulder as it were of those who make and influence land use decisions. When an idea is presented to 6,800,000 *Life* readers—or even lesser amounts in trade books and important government reports—the message sent cannot be ignored.

So today, the question is, Where are the new Hollies? Where are the land conservation writers to whom attention must be paid? We can name a few, but are they as influential as William H. Whyte? And if not, why not? Surely there ought to be a whole lot more who can carry on in the high-powered tradition of Holly Whyte, Jane Jacobs, Lewis Mumford—journalists all.

I am not talking about nature writing here: there's plenty of that, maybe too much. What Holly knew was reporting, and the importance of people and their stories so as to get ideas across and encourage others to take action.

Yet this kind of writing is not just of matter of interviewing or even rhetorical skill, as important as they may be. It also has to do with vision. Maybe I am getting old and cranky or have lived too long in the wrong place (not far from Albuquerque, whose leaders, almost to a person, would like it to become Los Angeles, smog and all). One thing that Holly had, and inspired in others, however, was a sense of democratic possibility in making the good place. I have a theory that the vision of the good place that came out of 1930s progressivism, the New Deal, and the Works Progress Administration cultural programs helped give the men in foxholes and on the beaches, like Holly, a reason not only to survive, but to prevail, and to come home, and to do good work.

One time, Holly made a notation in a manuscript on the egregious loss of metropolitan open space that I had sent him for review. "It is not necessary to be cynical," he wrote. I have never forgotten that and can picture the note in my mind even now.

I would submit that what's lacking today in the journalism of open space and urban place is vision, the visionary sense of progressive possibility. For the most part, the response to dehumanized metropolitan areas and urban cores these days is limited either to despairing jeremiads or to arcane discussions of the systems to curb the excesses of developers and intellectually challenged city officials who support them. The jeremiads don't work, and the corrective nostrums offered by planners may sound realistic—infill, adaptive reuse, intermodal transportation—but their expression, most often, is pinched and unimaginative. It fails to inspire. Surely we can do better than that. Holly's mind was infused with pictures of a humane city and a beautiful countryside. So let us not overlook the need for visioning the good place and then acting hastily, precipitately, and prematurely to make it happen.

In the end, we cannot succeed without vision, which was Holly's great gift as a writer and as a conservationist. For without vision, said Isaiah, another good writer, the people perish.



## **The Energizer**

*Ann Louise Strong*

My first acquaintance with Holly Whyte goes back to the early and mid-1960s. At that time, he was overseeing and editing the multivolume Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission report. I was writing a book for the Urban Renewal Administration (URA), *Open Space for Urban America* (Strong 1961), to publicize and promote the URA's newly enacted and funded program for preservation of urban open space. It was the time when open space arose to importance on the national agenda, with Lady Bird Johnson our cheerleader in the White House. Holly, then as always, was an articulate, informed, and vigorous proponent who energized a groundswell of enthusiasm.

Holly and I became good friends and compatriots in the battle to publicize the availability of tools short of fee simple acquisition in the growing struggle to manage sprawl. These tools could preserve open space in private hands and private use at a cost far below that of public purchase. Holly was promoting conservation easements, speaking vigorously and often to conservation groups across the United States. I was working at the University of Pennsylvania Law School, with Jan Krasnowiecki on development of an alternative approach: compensable regulations (Strong and Krasnowiecki 1963). Thanks to the Ford Foundation, and to Gordon Harrison in particular, we enjoyed the advice of Holly as our consultant.

Holly was a native of West Chester, Pennsylvania, and a committed advocate of efforts to preserve the rich farmland and scenic setting of Chester County's Brandywine River valley. My family and I were newcomers to Chester County, settling there only in 1959, but I soon became equally dedicated to the task of protecting the Brandywine's exceptional resources. I gathered a group of nationally renowned resource scientists, planners, and economists to develop a plan for the protection of the water resources of the Upper East Branch of Brandywine Creek through management of land use. We were committed to reliance on less than fee controls for the plan's implementation. We gained financial and policy support from, among others, the Ford Foundation, including the appointment of Holly as one of our consultants. We spent several years of technical study, while involving local leaders in the evolving plan. Holly was often amongst us, speaking at meetings and offering advice. My admiration of his keen mind and acute sense of public sentiments grew and grew. Although the plan (Strong et al. 1968; Strong 1971) did not receive sufficient municipal support to be carried out, it did serve as a model for many subsequent efforts in the Brandywine and elsewhere. For instance, the

Brandywine Conservancy now holds conservation easements on more than 35,000 acres and is a major force in the Philadelphia region for protection of urban open space.

Holly and I did not work together again, but we continued to see each other, many times when speaking at conferences. Such was our final, sad get-together. Holly was to be the keynote speaker in Chicago at Rutherford Platt's "Symposium on Sustainable Cities" in 1990. I also was on the program, and the morning of our presentations we enjoyed breakfast together. Holly had a bad cold but otherwise was, as ever, full of tales of achievements in preservation from around the country, many of which he had fostered. Then, shortly after the conference, he suffered a debilitating attack that marked the end of his wonderful, inspiring participation in a world that many of us shared.

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## Sowing the Seeds

*Thomas Balsley*

Holly Whyte's reach and influence were as diverse and unpredictable as the silent constituency he observed and championed. Some listened and were immediately persuaded; others nodded their heads approvingly but continued with their pre-conditioned behavior (only to be slowly converted after many observations and, in some cases, failures); and many others became disciples, joining the immediate family and sowing the seeds with actual practice.

My relationship with Holly fell into this last category, based mostly on my personal need to act, not talk. In many respects, Holly's simple, straightforward, and commonsense observations were the perfect formula and approach for me, and others like me, who were subconsciously searching for a counterbalance to the esoteric and theoretical preaching du jour. We could get our arms around these simple time-tested and approachable principles, as could our clients. Most important, they were conveyed to us in friendly constructive language—without judgment—in a structure that could be used in our collaborative pursuit of a better urban condition through the designed environment.

I can easily cite those facets that attracted me to landscape architecture: natural systems, architecture, planning, art, and their combined ability to improve the quality of our lives and environment. I can also vividly remember the nagging feeling that the human condition—particularly in the urban centers—was not high on the academic agenda in design schools. Our exposure to public spaces was European parks and plazas; Central Park and its offshoots; and barren, lifeless modernist plazas. A few of us in school had already committed our professional futures to the cities. The potential to touch millions of ordinary people was obvious to me and irresistible, but nowhere in my academic experience was there mention of humanism, human behavior, sociology, or psychology.

Fortunately, early years of practice in New York City introduced me to *The Social Life of Urban Spaces* and its author. Whyte's teachings provided the missing link between my artistic sensibilities and the principles of public open space design and management. Over time—and with the benefit of his direct consultations and critiques—I have been able to design, observe, learn, and improve my work in ways that have miraculously transformed neighborhoods and cities. Each new park or plaza design commission follows an evolutionary process that explores new ways in which we can artistically express our time and culture, guided by Holly's principles and gentle whispers from just over my shoulder.

## **The Wit and Wisdom of Holly Whyte**

*Gathered by Albert LaFarge*

- People sit most where there are places to sit.
- Good aesthetics is good economics.
- What attracts people most, it would seem, is other people.
- The street is the river of life of the city; and what is a river for if not to be swum in and drunk from?
- The human backside is a dimension architects seem to have forgotten.
- New York is a city of skilled pedestrians.
- Supply creates demand. A good new space builds its constituency—gets people into new habits, like eating outdoors; induces them to new paths.
- So-called undesirables are not the problem. It is the measures taken to combat them that is the problem. . . . The best way to handle the problem of undesirables is to make a place attractive to everyone else.
- Most ledges are inherently sittable, but with a little ingenuity and additional expense they can be made unsittable.
- It is difficult to design a space that will not attract people. What is remarkable is how often this has been accomplished.
- Walls are put up in the mistaken notion that they will make a space feel safer. Too often they make it feel isolated and gloomy.
- By default street vendors have become the caterers of the city's outdoor life. They flourish because they are servicing a demand the downtown establishment does not.
- When people start to fill up a space, they do not distribute themselves evenly across it. They go where the other people are. Dense areas get denser.
- Planners sometimes worry that a place might be made too attractive and thereby overcrowded. The worry should be in the opposite direction. The carrying capacity of most urban spaces is far above the use that is made of them.

- Simulated cities for people who don't like cities, it turns out, are not such a good idea after all.
- Blank walls proclaim the power of the institution and the inconsequence of the individual, whom they are clearly meant to intimidate. Stand by the new FBI headquarters in Washington. You feel guilty just looking at it.
- In the matter of zoning bonuses and incentives, what you do not specify you do not get.
- In some American cities so much of downtown has been cleared for parking that there is now more parking than there is city. . . . One of the greatest boons of mass transit is what it makes unnecessary: the leveling of downtown for parking.
- Food attracts people who attract more people.
- Big buildings cast big shadows. Bigger buildings cast bigger shadows.
- People in big cities walk faster than people in smaller cities.
- The waterwall in Greenacre Park makes fine music.
- In almost every U.S. city the bulk of the right of way is given to vehicles; the least, to people on foot. This is in inverse relationship to need.
- Ninety-fourth Street is the honkingest street in town. I love it. I live here.

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