

AMST 334  
Urban America  
ROGER WILLIAMS UNIVERSITY  
GHH 105  
T, TH 12:30 - 1:50  
Fall, 2009

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## Week of October 27

This week we finish Jane Jacobs. If you're good at "cherry-picking," or identifying the parts which are important for our particular tasks, and separating them from the parts which are important for other tasks, but not ours, you'll not have too much difficulty. Focus on the subjects reflected in the chapter notes below. There are pages which you can safely skim. There are other places you'll need to apply the brakes. You should be getting good at deciding which are which. Now that we're finishing up Jacobs it is probably time for me to ask you to reflect on her book a little. Do I mean an exam? Yup, I guess I do. Sorry about that. I'm posting it now. Don't be afraid. It won't be due until after Halloween.

For Tuesday, October 27,  
Read, in *Jacobs*

Chapter 18, *Erosion of Cities or Attrition of Automobiles*, pp. 338 - 371  
(ML 440 - 484)

Chapter 19, *Visual Order: Its Limitations and Possibilities*, pp. 372 - 391  
(ML 485 - 510)

Chapter 20, *Salvaging Projects*, pp. 392 - 404 (ML 511 - 526)

*Chapter 18* Don't let this chapter bog you down. The principal point is that cities and automobiles are natural enemies of each other. The sub point is that attempts to accommodate more cars does not lead to less traffic: it leads to more. See if you can explain the argument here. You might prowl around for areas in your city (I'm assuming we'll all have cities picked out in time to do this) where wide sidewalks which Jane Jacobs likes are prominent.

*Chapter 19* Make sure you understand Jacobs' analysis of the city as a three dimensional object. Understand, too, her distinction between foreground and background, and why, for those who want to make cities interesting and liveable places the foreground is the more important. How does one create an emphasis on interest "up close"? Here again, you can look for instances where visual interruptions are pluses in your several cities. (Hint: prowl around the intersections of streets in Google Maps. See if you can find some which present interesting visual interruptions on them, and compare them with ones with longer vistas).

Chapter 20 is a shorty, so I included it over the weekend. It's going to rain all day Saturday anyhow, so you might as well read about something depressing like failed public housing. Some Projects, such as Pruitt- Igoe in St. Louis may not be salvageable. You'll see it on the web syllabus for today. Built in 1956, it was demolished in 1972, not twenty years after its completion. But maybe some projects can be saved short of completely tearing them down and starting over. Use Google Earth to locate public housing in your cities and see if there is any indication of some of the techniques Jacobs suggests might work. You might find something useful on the official website of your city, as well.

For Thursday, October 29

Read, in *Jacobs*,

Chapter 21, *Governing and Planning Districts*, pp. 405 - 427 (ML 527 - 558)

Chapter 22, *The Kind of Problem a City Is*, pp. 428 - 448 (ML 558 - 586)

Chapter 21. One of the ongoing debates in American Cultural generally is whether top down or bottom up planning and management work best. Another way of thinking of this is the distinction between the role of the "expert" and the role of the "ordinary citizen"...whose voice should be primary? What does Jacobs think about this, and, once you've determined that, what is the role of each in the city you're investigating? The City Website might give you a clue. What kinds of public meetings are held, where, how often, and who sets the agenda? You may want to think a little about the role of "grass roots" organizations, as well.

Chapter 22. You may need more time to read this chapter than the others on this week's assignment, so budget accordingly. However, so

many of you are taking a research methods course this may actually be a piece of cake for you. The central theme for this chapter concerns which analytical tools are best used for understanding cities and how they function. Jacobs describes three different types of intellectual problems which science has investigated. The distinctions will seem foreign to those of you who haven't "done" a lot of science. The important thing to understand is that problem type two is the type which statistical analysis was developed to solve, and that problem type three, typified by modern life sciences, cannot be understood statistically. Jacobs wants us to use a life science (organic) model for understanding how cities work, not statistical models. Yet much of what underlies proposals for reforming cities is based upon the use of statistical data. See if you can figure out why. Look too, at why she thinks the key lies in understanding what we might call micro-environments. We've actually been looking at these micro-environments all semester, though we haven't been calling them that. Can you recognize some micro-environments prowling around in your city?