

ecture, for that matter—has led to the single grave weakness in his otherwise admirable book. He repeatedly overpraises Moses and his planners and designers, who at times included gifted men, but who—with the exception of the great bridge engineer O. H. Ammann—could not possibly be ranked as “giants of their profession.” Moses responded viscerally to actual giants such as Frank Lloyd Wright or Walter Gropius, as Caro shows, when he called them subversive or un-American.

Thus Moses’ numerous, but largely undistinguished designers produced buildings that were usually mediocre, and often much worse. Apart from pure works of engineering (even though some of these, such as Triborough Bridge, were ungainly), and the exceptionally sensitive landscaping of his best parks and roads, most of his architecture was marred by heavy traditionalism, more Teutonic than Venetian. In contrast to his fastidious early work at Jones Beach, it was coarsely detailed from the 1930s onward. In the case of asphalted, inner-city playgrounds, it could be brutal. His colossal housing projects, as Caro realizes, are of course among the most stultifying ever erected in so-called “advanced” countries. Basically, they are all as bad as the recently dynamited Pruitt-Igoe complex in St. Louis.

It is true that Jones Beach stands as a *chef-d’oeuvre* of social architecture on the grand scale that overrides its eclectic associations (as do the suave Gothic parodies at Princeton and Yale); but Moses never again brought the same elegance, wit, and social conviction to architecture, even though his engineering remained, on the whole, at a high level. His taste was pitilessly revealed in the fiasco at Flushing Meadows, architecturally the most vulgar World’s Fair on record.

Caro makes much of this clear, and he also modifies his praise of Moses’ park designs by noting that they are cut by massive traffic facilities which, in Riverside Park and elsewhere, in turn cut off the public from access to the water.

Berman, on the other hand, does not trouble even to make these distinctions. The result is an absurd panegyric

of Moses the Master Builder, larded with irrelevant literary allusions culled from *Heart of Darkness*, and *The Great Gatsby*. There is a garbled reference to *Gilgamesh*, and *Faust II* portentously dragged in. But Berman characteristically does not cite an episode such as the instant destruction of the cottage of aged couple Baucis and Philemon, which would have been directly applicable to Moses’ wanton clearance program.

Nor does it serve much purpose to say that Moses drove “some of his best architects and engineers in the country . . . harder than anyone had ever driven them, to do work that would be bigger, faster, cheaper, and more beautiful than anything they (or anyone else) has ever done—and they loved him for it, and gave him their best.” More than *anyone* else? This kind of hyperbole is simply embarrassing to the informed reader, who might recall D. H. Burnham’s transformation of Chicago lakefront from a swamp into the most magnificent series of waterside parks in any American city, far more extensive—as well as easily accessible to beaches—than Moses’ Riverside Park.

Unfortunately, Berman is innocent of environmental awareness on this order. He does not see that to create “an elegant variation on the Venice Campanile” does not reveal a sure command of “cultural history” in Moses, but rather fear of the richest cultural possibilities of the present, not only in architecture but in modern art, which Moses loathes. Nor does Berman seem aware of any but the most obvious texts of Marxism, else he might have referred to Engels’ powerful castigation of Manchester, where, a century before Moses’ highways, he discerned the upper classes swiftly passing the half-hidden quarters of the poor as they traveled main thoroughfares from the suburbs to the core of the city.

None of this, I suppose, is surprising in Berman, who, instead of grappling with real problems of environmental criticism, is very free with words such as “beautiful” and “brilliant,” forgetting that the great bridges spanning San Francisco Bay may be as beautiful as any of Moses’ bridges in New York. Would New York have turned out much differently without

Moses? Probably as much as Rome without Sixtus V, possibly more than Athens without Pericles, perhaps less than Paris without Haussmann and Napoleon III. Cities are shaped by tremendous impersonal forces which transcend personal design, but it is precisely these forces which Berman has yet to comprehend.

Alan Temko is the author of Notre Dame of Paris and Eero Saarinen, and architecture critic of the San Francisco Chronicle.

Marshall Berman

“Moses poses problems that every industrial society, capitalist and socialist, must face. What kind of cities do we want to live in? What kinds of building really *can* make our lives better? In my work on Robert Moses, I have been trying to reach a point from which this kind of thinking can begin.”

Rather than answer point for point, or return abuse for abuse, I want to explore again some of the larger cultural issues that underly this whole discussion. The respondents emphasize two central themes that are essential to Caro’s account of Robert Moses’ “bad character” (Goodman), his characteristic style of personal malice and meanness, the gratuitous spite and petty vindictiveness that poisoned so many of his works; second, his brilliantly corrupt methods of wheeling and dealing, “the intricate alliances between Moses and banks and other financial institutions, the construction industry and its contemptible unions, real estate sharks and insurance finaglers, with eventual connections to the underworld itself.” (Temko)

I certainly didn’t mean to deny these aspects of Moses, and I am glad to see them spelled out. But I did make a strategic decision to deemphasize them, in favor of other qualities, both good and evil, which I considered more essential to his overall achieve-

ment. Had Moses possessed a “good” character, first of all, he would have refrained from a number of sordid and dispicable private and public acts; yet the basic contours of the New York metropolitan area, as Moses shaped that area, would have been pretty much the same. Second, I believe that Moses’ genius for manipulation, as Caro and Temko describe it, could easily be transplanted to a socialist society — he would have made a great Soviet commissar! — without essentially changing either the ultimate vision or the material results. The potentialities and pitfalls of his works transcend the framework of capitalist democracy: they belong to *modernity*, modernity as a whole. Moses poses problems that every industrial society, capitalist and socialist, must sooner or later face.

Some of what I call problems of “modernity” can be seen in Moses’ paradoxical relation to the great “modernist” movement in architecture and design. On one hand, as Temko points out, Moses reacted to modernist masters like Gropius, and Wright with a philistine fear and loathing. (Actually the archetype here might not be the *Daily News* but Bernard Berenson, another brilliant cultured and acculturated Jew who, like Moses, believed that culture more or less came to an end with Michaelangelo’s *David*.) On the other hand, Moses may actually have done more than any of the great masters to transform the modernist ideal vision into concrete reality.

Moses occupies a place of honor in the book that is generally understood to be the bible of the modernist movement in design, Siegfried Giedeon’s *Space, Time and Architecture*. Giedeon first presented this work in lecture form in 1939, when Moses’ creativity was at its height. Giedeon speaks lyrically of Moses’ New York parkways — his book reproduces large photos of the Randall’s Island cloverleaf, the “pretzel” intersection of the Grand Central Parkway in Queens, and the Westside Highway — which, he said, “proved that possibilities of a great scale were inherent in our period.” He elaborates: “As with many of the creations born out of the spirit of this age, the meaning and beauty of the parkway cannot

be grasped from a single point of observation, as was possible from the windows of the chateau at Versailles. It can be revealed only by movement, by going along in a steady flow . . .” Giedeon compares these parkways to cubist paintings, to abstract sculpture, and to the movies, all archetypically modern products and experiences. “The space-time feeling of our period can seldom be felt so keenly as when driving.”

Writing in 1939, Giedeon saw Moses’ belt parkways on the peripheries of the city as precursors of the central city “urban highway” to come. This sort of highway, properly designed, could “weld the automobile and the lines of traffic into the actual organism of the city, so that they become a constituent element of the whole.”

Moses’ parkways of the 1930s were the “forerunner of a first necessity in the development of the future city: abolition of the *rue corridor*.” The parkway “is not an isolated traffic lane independent of the organism of the city. It simply has a different scale from the existing city within its *rues corridors* and its rigid division into small blocks.” While some critics had felt that these roads were much too big for everything around them, Giedeon stood this observation on its head. It was the streets and buildings that were too small! It was “the actual structure of the city that must be changed.” New York’s street system was “completely inappropriate in scale”; it “cuts off the organic development of the city like iron rings around a tree. The tree grows larger and larger, but the ring remains rigid and inflexible.” Organic harmony would be possible “only when the whole city has adopted the new scale of its bridges and parkways.” This was the only scale that was compatible with the “space-time conception of our period”, the only road to “the city of the future.”

Giedeon went on to unfold the great modernist breakthroughs of the 1930s: “the high-rise apartment slab,” arranged in “zig-zag blocks,” with a “clear separation of traffic from pedestrians, and of residential areas from the center of the city, which was [to be] composed of business offices and . . . skyscrapers”; the ideals of the “ver-

tical village” and of “the tower in the park.” Le Corbusier’s 1937 plan for Paris “eliminated . . . the old street system, replacing it with free-standing moving groups of skyscrapers.” These buildings were to be “disposed freely in green spaces, their long wings turned at angles . . .”

The great slabs must “never grow along the borders of narrow city streets, but always stand as sculptural entities surrounded by free space.” These first slabs and parkways look ahead, finally, to “a time when, after all the necessary surgery has been performed, the artificially swollen city will be reduced to its normal size.”

After analyzing and synthesizing these ideas, Giedeon laments the fact that as of 1939 so few of them have been realized. He mourns the failure of “Le Corbusier’s 1937 dream of an elevated express highway from east to west through Paris.” The dream failed because, in spite of the abundance of modern architects of genius, Paris had “no directing officials equal, as Haussman [a century earlier] was equal to the opportunities and needs of the period.” However what no one had been able to do in Paris, Robert Moses, “who has the energy and enthusiasm of a Haussman,” has been able to bring to life in New York.

Why have I gone through all this? To show how many of the modernists’ most extravagant ideas have been realized in the city that Robert Moses built, the city we are living in today. Now we are no longer talking about the seedy schemes of a bunch of hacks and crooks: we are talking about the profoundest esthetic and social visions of Corbusier, Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright, some of the most creative spirits of modern times.

How are we to respond to these visions today? In some ways we have to recoil. In their dreams of high-rise slabs, elevated highways, the destruction of streets, we can recognize many of the realities that make our cities sterile today. (In this sense, New York is probably less sterile than most newer cities: the “rigidity” of its reactionary old grid system, which not even Moses could destroy, has helped keep its small-scale griddy street life alive.

And yet, there is an authentic in-

tellectual and emotional power there as well. The modernists, and Moses with them, have made some disastrous mistakes, yet there was much that was heroic and creative in their responses to the technological and social responsibilities of modern life. Do we really want to throw out the modernists' vision entirely? If we do, what sort of vision are we going to put in its place? If we don't, how can we separate what is living from what is deadening in modernism? What kind of cities do we want to live in — or even to visit — anyway? What kinds of building really *can* make our lives better? And once we figure all that out, how can we bring it about? There is an urgent need for social and political thought here. In my work on Robert Moses, I have been trying to reach a point from which this kind of thinking can begin.

Marshall Berman, author of The Politics of Authenticity (Atheneum), teaches political theory at City University of New York.

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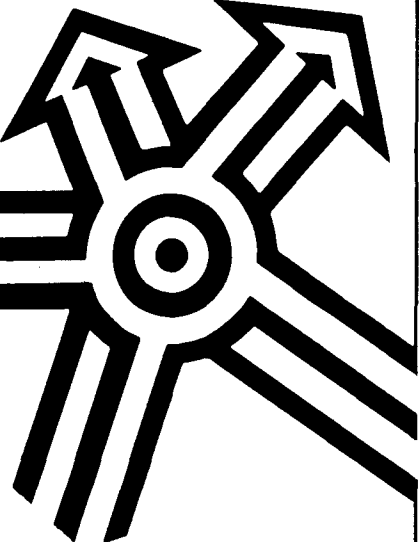
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Hollywood . . .



Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore. Directed by Martin Scorsese. Written by Robert Getchell. With Ellen Burstyn, Alfred Lutter, Diane Ladd, Harvey Keitel and Kris Kristofferson.

A Woman Under the Influence. Written and directed by John Cassavetes. With Gena Rowlands and Peter Falk.

Perhaps in response to the criticisms and the demands of the women's movement, or perhaps out of boredom with basic macho fantasies, American moviemakers have at last turned to the New Woman for inspiration and subject matter. It is

not, of course, yet time to celebrate the Year of the Heroic Film Woman. The female imagination is not liberated in the works of male directors any more than it is in the world behind the projector. But some of the old stereotypes—of bitches, vamps, ingenues and madonnas—are breaking in Hollywood, and if new ones are being formulated, they at least contain elements of contemporary consciousness.

The vanguard roles of pre-heroic women this year are those of Alice (Ellen Burstyn) in *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, and Mabel (Gena Rowlands) in *A Woman Under the Influence*. Apart from everything else,

“Alice doesn't live *anywhere* anymore. — misfortune has cast her adrift. In her loaded station wagon and with her 12-year-old son in the jump seat, she is permanently on the road: optimistic, expectant, and desperate.”

both are extraordinarily juicy parts and the actresses (who received all the best movieland nominations and awards) who play them turn in exceptionally fine performances. And although it would be a mistake to attribute revolutionary content to either film, both of them allow their leading ladies to convey a female presence that in its range and depth is traditionally denied to women in the cinema. Men are complex and contradictory on the screen; women are monochromatic and one-dimensional. The fact that Alice is more real, and Mabel is more interesting, than the men in their lives is an important advance in the process of destroying cultural clichés.

Martin Scorsese's title is not exactly accurate: Alice doesn't live *anywhere* anymore. Gratuitous misfortune and the vicissitudes of middle-American low-life have cast her adrift from all the old moorings in the world of her childhood. In her loaded station wagon and with her 12-year-old son in the jump seat, she is permanently on the road: optimistic, expectant, and desperate.

“Things always happened quickly to Alice,” Robert Getchell explained in the “novel,” which seems to have

by Andrew Kopkind