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THE NEW TOWNS:

ORGANIZATION AND SPONTANEITY

I. The Idea of the New Town

The New Towns Movement began in England and later spread
world-wide in response to the increasing concern felt at the
deterioration of the quality of life in the large cities under the
impact of industrialization. The New Towns, it was felt, would
combine the advantages of life in the country with that of life
in the city. They would be small communities of between 30.000
and 60.000 inhabitants. Their principal characteristics were to
be a balanced economy and a well-defined pattern of industrial,
commercial and residential zones.

A green belt of real country, agricultural land and forest,
would separate the towns from each other and from other
urban agglomerations. The green belt, as well as ensuring the
balance between town and country, would also be a guarantee
against the continued growth of the town beyond the size
originally planned and thereby ensure that the advantages of
smallness were not lost to the community in the future.

A town centre, which included a main town square, a main
shopping centre and a pedestrian precinct, was incorporated in

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the plans of all the New Towns built after the Second World War in England.

II. WHY THE NEW TOWN?

In advanced industrial societies in this century it came to be increasingly realized that the advantages and conveniences, the higher standard of living and greater amount of leisure, which industrial development has brought to the population at large, risked being nullified by the unhealthy and crowded living conditions within the cities. Whatever relief the suburban way of life may have had to offer was limited by the necessity of the journey to work. The time which became available through the reduction of working hours and the higher income which the rise in productivity was making possible could normally be expected to be spent on entertainment, leisure and culture. However, these advantages could not be made use of fully when the necessity of living in the suburbs was reducing the leisure time available, because of the greater time needed for the daily journey to work and back.

The founders of the New Towns Movement, Ebenezer Howard and Frederick Osborn, were convinced that a New Town must not be a suburb nor a company town. In other words, its inhabitants should not have to travel every day to a nearby city to work, nor should they have to depend on one single industry for jobs.

The idea, very close to the hearts of the founders of this movement, was to avoid the necessity, which exists in large cities, that the greater part of the population commute daily to work. The continued growth of cities and the increasing number of suburbs had made the daily journey to work more and more time-consuming and irksome for the individual and also expensive to the community in terms of the capital it had to invest in transport facilities, and the costs of running them. The answer to this, proposed by the founders of the New Towns Movement, was to provide employment in each town, thanks to its small size, within a short distance from a worker's home.

The founders of this movement were not hostile to city life—

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indeed, they reorganized the cultural advantages which a large city offers its inhabitants—but they were also aware of the disadvantages of living in large cities. The advantages and drawbacks of a purely rural existence were also recognized. The New Town as the founders envisaged it was not a substitute either for the large city or for country life. It was an alternative to these other two modes of existence. Hence it would widen the choice of life styles available to the individual. Instead of having only two choices open to him, living in the city or the country, the individual would have a third choice—that of living in a town of moderate size, enjoying most of the amenities of urban existence yet remaining close to the country and nature. The individual could, therefore, enjoy the healthy atmosphere and beauty of the countryside, denied to a modern urban city dweller, without sacrificing the essential comforts and amenities of the urban way of life.

The New Towns Movement was a quest for balance in the rational use of space for human settlements which, under the impact of industrialization, was being destroyed through the uncontrolled growth of large cities. It was a quest to save the countryside which was being eaten up by the encroachment of the ever-expanding city suburbs. It was also a quest to save the large city whose life and organization ran the risk of breaking down under the strains and stresses of its own expansion.

The New Towns Movement did not seek to abolish the suburbs through the development of the New Towns, but simply to check their growth beyond tolerable limits. The continuing growth of the suburbs was creating the danger of the expansion of conurbations into a megalopolis; a situation in which there would be nothing but suburbs between cities; a situation where the suburbs of one city end and the next begin and where real countryside for the most part would disappear.

The idea of a balanced economy for the New Town did not mean that it should be an economic autarchy. The idea was to decongest and achieve lower population densities in the large cities by attracting both population and a variety of industries to New Towns where, as a matter of policy, population densities would be kept low. This process was to achieve lower densities in all urban areas thereby creating healthy and more agreeable

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living and working conditions in the country as a whole.

The policy pursued in many of the New Towns in the south of England was to attract industrial firms from London. The firms very often offered their employees the chance to move with their jobs; and many of them took advantage of the offer.

The move to the New Towns offered young married workers with small children a real improvement in the quality of their working and living environment. The move meant leaving a flat, or a smaller and older suburban house for a larger house with a garden, where the neighbourhood would be strictly residential and separated from the industrial zone, since strict zoning was one of the corner-stones in the planning of these towns. Thus freedom from noise and unhealthy surroundings combined with greenery, proximity to the real countryside and a larger sense of space is what the young married couples moving to the New Towns achieved for themselves and their children.

In the matter of leisure activities, recreation and culture, the small New Town was to provide all that the suburb of a large city could provide and more. However, it was realistically recognized that the New Town could not rival the rich cultural life which a capital city like London could provide for its inhabitants.

As far as the New Towns in the south of England were concerned, they were close enough to London to be able to take advantage of the rich cultural life which only the capital could afford. Indeed, Ebenezer Howard, the founder of the New Towns Movement, had recognized that not only the capital, but regional or provincial cities, too, should have a role as regional centres which would provide a richer cultural life for the regional population than the New Towns themselves could be expected to.

The New Towns themselves were expected to provide a richer cultural life than a country village could, being larger in population and having all the characteristics of an urban community. They would also be culturally in a better position than a suburb, which lacks many of the characteristics of an organic urban community, being merely an appendage to the city where more than half of the daily activities of its population take place.

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Considering that the larger part of the population in some of the New Towns in southern England was drawn from London, the fact that few of their inhabitants returned to London shows that there was less of a feeling of deprivation of opportunities for entertainment and cultural activities than might have been expected.

III. The Virtues of Smallness. Intellectual History of an Idea.

Although the New Towns Movement was not hostile to the large city, there was a certain bias against size. Implicit in the whole thinking on the problem of the New Towns was the assumption that satisfying living conditions could not be found in a large city and that the lack of satisfactory conditions in many instances was directly attributable to the factor of size.

This thinking is not new. Indeed in classical Greek thought it was emphasized that the size of the city state—the *polis*—must be limited to make the good life possible for its inhabitants. Plato and Aristotle both taught that only in a city state was the good life possible and the city state by definition was of limited size. To the thinking Greek, used to the idea that the *polis* must be governed by a system of direct democracy, which meant that all its citizens must participate directly in its government and take political decisions of the maximum importance for the life of the community, a large state where the citizens could not come together in one place for public purposes was unthinkable.

When the population grew too large, the Greek city states founded colonies on the model of the parent city state so that the virtues of the small state might be preserved and the peculiar quality of Greek life, direct democracy, remain the characteristic framework for society. There is an analogy in this with the idea of the founding of New Towns to decongest London and to check its further growth in population and area.

The characteristic life of the Greek city state included cultural and intellectual activities which defined and gave substance to the conception of the good life. The Athenian market place did

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not only have the economic role which the word market indicates, namely the exchange of goods and commodities, it also had an important cultural role, that of the exchange of ideas. Perhaps the phrase "intellectual market place" has gained currency in our own day on account of the Greek experience which it embodies of a place where all ideas can be expressed and their validity or acceptability tested. The Greek philosophers taught and discussed all political and philosophical ideas in the market place. They discussed the nature of truth and beauty, of different forms of government and the ends that the state should pursue.

These ideas remain today the most cherished legacy of Greece to civilized mankind. The free market place of ideas was an essential component of the free democratic political life and this could not be attained at that time without the possibility of the citizens being in daily contact, face to face with each other, not only to go about the ordinary business of life but also to discuss public and political issues of concern to the citizens as well as abstract ideas and values which should guide the life of the community of citizens.

The conviction that smallness was a virtue which could not be sacrificed without sacrificing the quality of life, understood in the widest sense of the word, was to some extent shared by some thinkers in the Renaissance, possibly and quite understandably under the influence of the Greeks, in that age of the revival of classical thought. Leonardo da Vinci thought of dividing up Milan into smaller cities of 30.000 inhabitants.[1] The capital of Sir Thomas Moore's Utopia was also small with 30.000 inhabitants.

Romanticism places considerable emphasis on the necessity for communities of a human dimension, where personal contact is not lost as is the case in larger urban societies where impersonal anonymity and alienation prevails. In eighteenth century political thought Rousseau emphasized the importance of keeping the size of the state small.

In the nineteenth century, Alexis de Tocqueville considered

[1] See the introduction by Lewis Mumford to *The New Towns: The Answer to Megalopolis* by Frederick J. Osborn and Arnold Whittick, London, Leonard Hill, 1963.

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the vigour and strength of American democracy to reside in the considerable pride of the citizen for, and commitment to, his small local community whose origins could be found in the New England town meeting.

The virtues of a small community, whose humaneness is in some way guaranteed by its smallness, reappears close to our own times in socialist and anarchist thought.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Russian populist thinkers debated the question of the steps for achieving socialism. Was it necessary to pass through the stage of capitalism as was then claimed by orthodox Russian Marxists or could Russia arrive at the stage of socialism without the suffering, sacrifice and exploitation (an idea which they shared with Marxists) which the development of capitalism implied? The populists put their hope in the small Russian peasant community, the "*Mir*," to carry out the transition from feudalism to Socialism, thus avoiding the suffering for the masses of the age of capitalism.

Still more recently, Mahatma Gandhi, much influenced by the ideas of Tolstoy and to whom Russian social thought was familiar, put his faith in the Indian "Village Republic." In his thinking, the future hope of social progress in India depended on the development of the self-governing village community.

The leaders of the New Towns Movement did not set out to create communities which would rival Athens in its period of glory. Their aim was much more modest. Still they seem to have felt that smaller communities could have desirable features which larger communities did not have, and in this, as we have seen, they had some very eminent predecessors. That smallness did not necessarily mean cultural impoverishment was a valuable idea. The singular example of ancient Athens was there to remind them of it. But smallness by itself does not guarantee cultural greatness. Small communities in human history have been innumerable; Athens in its cultural achievement is unique.

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IV. THE SQUARES IN THE TOWN CENTRE AND THE NEIGHBOUR-
HOOD CENTRES.

Some description of the town centres and of neighbourhood
centres such as they were planned for Stevenage, Harlow, Craw-
ley and other New Towns in England, is necessary to appreciate
their common features and the idea which is embodied in them
and to see whether a social or cultural role of the square emerges
from it.

In Stevenage, the town centre is a rectangular area consisting
of a pedestrian way called Queensway to the west of which is
a small town square leading to a bus station and to the east
two other pedestrian ways. The pedestrian ways are lined with
shops in two- or three-storey buildings. The square itself has
a pool with fountain, a clock tower and a sculpture of a mother
and child on a terrace which connects the square with the bus
station. To the north of the square, sites for municipal offices
and a town hall were provided. To the east of the square there
were sites for a cinema, a swimming pool and a parish church.
To the west, a youth centre, a dance hall and a restaurant were
planned and to the south the site was reserved for a further
education college.

In Stevenage, the idea of a complete pedestrian precinct was
also realized, where shoppers could do their shopping at leisure
without the bustle and noise of traffic or danger of accident.

In Crawley, the town centre is an area to the north of which
is a boulevard and to the south a road called Three Bridges
Road. The central square is Queen's Square which has a decorated
fountain, trees, benches and a bandstand. Leading from the
square is Queensway, a pedestrian area lined with shops. A
complete pedestrian precinct was not achieved at Crawley since
streets intersect in the centre and through traffic can use them.
However, at one time, the idea of closing Queen's Square to
traffic and reserving it for pedestrians was being urged.

The town centre at Harlow is called The High. It comprises
a market square around which are shops and stores, Broad Walk,
which is a shop-lined pedestrian way, and two other pedestrian
ways, Little Walk and East Walk. South of Broad Walk are
shops, a library, and a civic square around which are grouped

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various offices and public buildings: town hall, museum and a restaurant, a church. A little further on there is a college for further education and a cinema. Four public houses or bars and a hotel were planned. The bus station is near the Broad Walk. Harlow's town centre is considered one of the most satisfactory and successful examples of what a New Town centre should be.

In Basildon, the town centre consists of a large square 400 feet long and 130 feet wide reserved for pedestrians and from which traffic is excluded. The square is approached by pedestrian ways. There is another smaller square to the south-east of the town square which again is approached by a pedestrian way. On one side of this square is an hotel and on the other side a department store building four storeys high. To the east of the town square is another small square, on somewhat lower ground, which is approached by steps and a ramp from the main square. All this area has been reserved as a pedestrian precinct. A circular road runs around the area and behind the buildings situated on the town square and in the pedestrian precinct is parking space for cars and other vehicles. The Basildon town centre, the space enclosed by the circular road, contains various public buildings such as a court house, a post office, a health clinic, an ambulance station, a police station. At the southern end of the centre is the bus station; in the western part of the centre is a church and sites were reserved for a college of further education and some civic buildings—a town hall and a library. A site to the east was reserved for a cinema.

A voluminous literature exists on the New Towns but little or hardly anything has been written on the cultural or social role of the square. What way of life, what form of activity, what attitude to work and leisure is implicit in the presence of squares in the New Town? The physical layout of the town centres, and of the neighbourhood centres too, is to some extent a system of squares and pedestrian areas. The pedestrian areas are in the shopping zone and lead out from the town centre. These features are common to almost all of the New Towns.

Nearly all the town centres have been designed as a system of squares and pedestrian ways where the population can walk and shop in a leisurely way with no traffic to bother them. Each

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town centre has a bus station bringing in people from the neighbourhoods to the town centre after which they go about shopping on foot. The squares in the town centre have fountains, sculpture, benches, trees. Their social and cultural role seems to be to provide a resting place and to create a whole atmosphere of a leisurely and quiet life away from the tumult of the big cities.

The squares are prominent features in neighbourhood centres and sub-centres too. Most neighbourhood centres are built on the same lines as the New Towns themselves. Crawley, Stevenage and Harlow neighbourhood centres show the same conception: a triangle with shops on two sides or a square with shops on two or three sides, with a church at one end and a public house or bar at the other. All shops are built on the same side of a thoroughfare so that shoppers do not have to cross a busy road while doing their shopping. This is a distinctive feature of all New Towns. In the middle is a green space with lawns or trees or a paved area. The idea of a pedestrian precinct, too, is preserved in the neighbourhood centres with a wide space in the middle of the square available for pedestrians. The primary school is often placed near the neighbourhood centre. A community hall is also an important feature. It provides a building where volontary societies can organize a variety of cultural activities and entertainment.

If we consider the features of a neighbourhood centre in the New Towns, they are similar to those which may be found in any traditional village or small town. Villages or small towns generally have a church built on a square which provides an open space where the congregation can disperse with ease after worship.

The square can also serve, and often does, as a place for informal sociability and contacts. In a traditional village or town square one finds shops and cafés or bars where shoppers can rest and have refreshments but concurrently one also finds a parallel role of informal contacts and sociability. To some extent the neighbourhood centres in the New Towns fulfill the roles of a traditional square in a small town or village.

If we look at the pattern of activity for which the neighbourhood centre is created, it shows the pattern of existence and

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life-style of an average young family. It provides shopping for the housewife, and a primary school nearby where she can pick up her children after shopping; a church where the family can worship and a public house or bar where those living in the neighbourhood can have a leisurely drink and talk. This is the average pattern of life of a young married couple with small children, whose preoccupations are of building a home, bringing up children, and work combined with quiet relaxation. Life is mainly concentrated on the house and family. The neighbourhood centres provide for the needs of the population groups for which in a sense the New Towns were built—the young adults.

Indeed, the neighbourhood and the neighbourhood centres preserve some of the essential characteristics of a suburban way of life and also combine to some extent, as noted above, the traditional features of a town or village square: sociability and informal contact with neighbours engaged in the same, almost uneventful, activities of shopping, going to church, or having a drink at the bar with friends.

It is for the aggregate of the neighbourhood populations such as this, and which constitute the town population, that the town centre exists. It is similar in function and conception to the neighbourhood centre but on a larger scale. As we have noticed, the pedestrian shopping precinct is an important feature of the town centre. The town square is very near to the pedestrian shopping ways which lead into and out of it. Grouped around the shopping area are other squares with facilities for other cultural and recreational activities which neighbourhoods cannot provide, such as cinema, restaurant, dance hall, hotel, museum, library and town hall. These facilities can only be provided on a town-wide scale both for the town's population and for visitors.

From the physical layout of the town centres some inferences can be drawn: a system of squares and footways is a means of concentrating and connecting various cultural activities which different groups of the population pursue simultaneously in accordance with their own choice or taste. All those activities which take place around the squares are somehow, even if indirectly, connected by the squares through the coming and going of those who engage in them; the squares therefore have a connecting role in the overall pattern of cultural activities of

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the town. All those who participate in these activities, or pass from one activity to another, pass through the squares. The informal contacts which result—with friends, neighbours, colleagues at work, or shoppers one has met on other occasions, going about their various affairs—create an overall feeling of the general pattern of the town's leisure and cultural activity, a sense of what there is to do in one's leisure hours and what life in the town is like and what it offers. This quiet pattern of activity and informality of personal contact is possible when the flow to and fro between different activities is on foot; the square then becomes the link or the pulse to what is going on in and around the town centre. This aspect or function of the square in creating informal contacts would be much diminished, and understandably so, if the access to such activities was not on foot.

The square is necessary for aesthetic and psychological reasons as a change and a rest from the linear pattern of streets of footways with shops on both sides. It provides a greater sense of space and openness, alternating with the closer built-in area of the linear street, with a wider view of the earth and the sky and the buildings in between which a street does not usually permit. This visual restfulness of the square seems to invite other features of restful ease and contemplation, such as sculpture, a fountain and benches on which to rest and to enjoy the overall patterns and shapes and the agreeable sensations they stimulate: in other words, their beauty. The square may even be necessary to appreciate the aesthetic aspects of what a linear street may offer, since in a closely built-up area, which all urban areas are, it is from the square at the end of the street that the view of the street as a whole, or a large part of it, is possible.

These psychological aspects are implicit in the layout of the town centres and the placing of the square in relation to the streets or footways. It seems that they were taken for granted in the planning of the New Towns and in the thinking of the planners, so much so that not much noticeable discussion on the subject has appeared in the literature on the New Towns. Perhaps it is considered too obvious to be mentioned? However, the aesthetic aspects of the square are used and its possibilities exploited.

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Apart from the function of the squares to enable those going about their various activities to do so with convenience and ease, the squares in the New Towns seem to be developing activities which take place in the square itself rather than around it. An interesting photograph of folk dancers in the square in Stevenage appears in Sir Frederick Osborn's work.[2] Yet in the literature on the New Towns one hardly sees any mention of the town square being used for such activities. Perhaps the books and articles have been written too much from the point of view of what the planners provided or failed to provide for much attention to be devoted by observers to what the population is beginning to provide spontaneously for itself; and which is not necessarily the same as what the planners had foreseen. Perhaps the New Towns are too new for their own authentic pattern of life to have yet firmly established itself, a pattern which is quite autonomous, independent from the intention of the planners and perceptible as such by outside observers whether urbanists or sociologists. Perhaps the function—social or cultural—of the square has yet to emerge so as to be easily perceptible in the singular environment of the New Town.

Certain questions however can still legitimately be raised, although they will have to be by nature somewhat speculative.

V. Reflections on the Role of the Square in the City and its Potential Role in the New Towns.

Since the population of the New Towns is to a large extent made up of Londoners who have moved, it is reasonable to raise the question of the social role of the square in London and to ask oneself whether, and to what extent, some such role may have emerged or be emerging for the square in the New Towns. If we take the two well known "squares" in London—Trafalgar Square and Piccadilly Circus—we have some idea of the place they occupy in London's life. Apart from the cinemas, theatres, restaurants, bars, open space, art gallery and fountains which

[2] Frederick Osborn, *op. cit.*, plate 9 (a), Stevenage.

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are a feature of one or the other of these two squares and which afford an outlet for entertainment and cultural activities for Londoners, there are other features which have become traditional.

Trafalgar Square is the traditional place for public meetings, political rallies or demonstrations. As the largest square in the city, it is large enough to gather together the vast mass of people on a public or political issue which the population of London is capable of providing. A meeting on an issue which can fill Trafalgar Square is a symbol of its great importance as an issue and the recognition of the great public concern which it arouses. A major demonstration may start at Hyde Park Corner or elsewhere but it nearly always ends, if it is important, with a meeting in Trafalgar Square. One wonders what those who planned Trafalgar Square and named it after Nelson's victory would have thought of its present traditional role as a place for mass political meetings on controversial issues; sometimes against war, as in 1956 against the military action taken by the British government in Egypt, or in favour of some pacifist cause as, during the mid-fifties, when the annual demonstrations against nuclear weapons, starting from the Aldermaston weapons establishment, ended with a rally in Trafalgar Square. One wonders whether in the New Towns some square or other has spontaneously acquired a traditional political role, such as that of Trafalgar Square in London, where public concern on some national or local issue finds expression and is symbolized by a meeting of the politically conscious part of the population. Naturally, of course, such a function differs considerably in a small town from what it would be in a capital city.

The square has also acquired a role of some importance as the place where the population gathers after some dramatic or unusual event such as the news of the outbreak of a war, or to celebrate a victory, or some other event in which the population as a whole feels involved. The population of London, mainly of younger people, crowds into Trafalgar Square and Piccadilly Circus to follow national election results. The atmosphere is a combination of seriousness and good humour consistent with the character of an election itself which decides serious issues but is also a symbolic recognition of a well-

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established institution whose outcome should inspire relaxed and quiet elation or good humoured tolerance.

What is the symbolic participatory event which gives expression to this feeling in the New Towns? Do the New Towns' inhabitants only participate in the election news, as an event, in their homes or in pubs and bars watching a television set, and not in a town square as many Londoners do; and what is the significance of this difference, if it exists, in relation to their commitment to public issues?

Londoners, particularly young people, also crowd into Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square every Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, in an atmosphere, on these two festive occasions, which combines aspects of a carnival in the behaviour pattern of individuals. What, if anything, replaces it in the New Towns and what change in public attitudes and conduct does it signify? And what does all this activity in London's squares mean to the life of the city itself and what does its presence or absence signify in the New Towns?

Il we take the word "square" in its wider meaning as a central open space in a town or city, at a crossroads or not, where activities of a social or cultural character can or do take place, then one can certainly speak of Hyde Park's Speakers' Corner near Marble Arch as illustrating one of the possible cultural roles of a "square" in a town. Here every evening speakers of every type of political, religious or social outlook gather together an audience. It is a social and cultural activity very particular to London, a distinctive feature of the city, attractive to both visitors and Londoners. One wonders whether public speakers on the pattern of a Hyde Park orator or others who attract an audience of passers-by on London street corners also exist in the New Towns. This is a feature which is absent from the suburbs, but it is something which Londoners could be expected to miss and for which a town square may become a spontaneous setting.

There is much that is culturally attractive in the lives of inhabitants of a large city such as London and which need not be absent from a smaller community. If we still use the broader definition of a "square" as space available for open-air cultural activities of a town, then some of the activities of a cultural

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nature which are found in London may still find a place in a New Town. The open-air exhibitions of paintings, during the summer, on the Thames embankment or at Hampstead, where young artists exhibit and sell their work, are an attractive feature of London life, and there is no *a priori* reason why such an event for local artists may not find a place in a New Town "square." Another example of open-air cultural activity in London is the open-air theatre in Regent's Park, which is one of the most attractive features of London's cultural life in the summer. Some of these cultural activities of a large city, or any one of them, can find a place in a small town square depending on the taste and demand of the local population. What actually exists and what is coming into being as the cultural life of the New Towns acquires its own momentum still remains largely unreported to interested outsiders. These activities are such, whether performed by amateurs or professionals, that there is no intrinsic reason why they should not acquire a place in the life of a small town with a population of between 30.000 and 80.000. It is even possible that a small town possesses some advantages which not all large cities have for such activities to flourish.

VI. Social Policy, Social Change and the New Towns.

There are some other aspects of the social role of a square in a large city which need to be mentioned. These aspects have existed ever since large urban centres came into existence, and they still exist today. They relate to what is called the problem of marginality of the "bohemian," "rootless" or "free floating" groups.

Piccadilly Circus in the sixties became a place where the hippies congregated and brought their "alternative culture" and life-style which flowed largely in the "square" itself, as in other open spaces of London and other cities, in contrast and in opposition to the cultural life surrounding the "square"—informal, unorganized, more spontaneous and claiming to be more free.

This aspect of marginality and the reflection of marginal groups and their lives in a city "square" is described by Henri Moulierac

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in his article in Diogenes.[3] Here the description is of the Place de Grève in Paris which once occupied the site where the Place de l'Hotel de Ville is today. The French word for an industrial or labour strike is derived from the name of the square which was once a place where the city's idle gathered and dawdled away their hours in different ways. The singers, the jugglers, the hawkers and unemployed were there to look for work or to find relief from boredom. All those who had little to do gathered together to do something or to kill time. Strike as a social phenomenon evokes the name, the atmosphere and social conditions of the population of the Place de Grève in old Paris.

The conception of the New Town was to change living and working conditions, bring about a solution to these very same problems—the problems of unemployment, of slums and unhealthy sub-standard housing and stunted social lives. Indeed, the original title of Ebenezer Howard's book outlining the New Towns or Garden Cities conception was *Tomorrow. A Peaceful Path to Real Social Reform*, first published in 1898 and later published under the title *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*.[4]

It was only after the war, with the Labour Party's victory in the first post-war General Election of 1945, that all the New Towns, except the first two, Letchworth and Welwyn Garden City, were built. The post-1945 years in Britain was an era of social reform and the aim was, if not to abolish mass unemployment of the kind which had plagued the industrial countries in the inter-war period, at least to avoid its worst social consequences. This fundamental aim was by and large achieved through a variety of economic and social policies and legislation which included comprehensive social security, unemployment and medical insurance, subsidized public housing at low rents, and a system of material assistance to cushion the rigours and severity of adverse economic conditions. It was in this atmosphere that the New Towns policy was implemented under the New Towns Act and integrated in a larger policy of subsidized public housing. Particular care was taken to provide employment by attracting

[3] See Henri Moulierac, "Strike. War or Festival?," in *Diogenes* No. 98, (Summer) 1977, p. 55.
[4] Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, London, Faber and Faber, 1946.

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firms and providing sites on industrial estates for factories at the same time as providing housing for workers.

In other words, the aim was to provide for the industrial working class living conditions and a way of life patterned on that of the suburban middle class. The way of life planned for the working class shows middle class values—life on a small scale with comfort, job security, house, garden and leisure for sports and orderly entertainment. Space and fresh air, shops, pubs, church and cinema. A leisurely pace of life altogether without anything grandiose or hectic to spoil its quiet character.

Bohemian intellectuals may not find in such a conception of life anything laudable or even desirable for the working class. They may see in it the further development and extension of suburban philistinism and complacency. Yet the ideal of a quiet small-scale life has a long and respectable history and has been expressed by a great variety of thinkers since antiquity. There is a great deal to it and its potential for cultural development and growth cannot be underestimated *a priori*, let alone disdained. The New Towns idea was one specific social manifestation of it and shares certain traits in an overall conception of life which has a most respectable intellectual pedigree. It is an idea which has run parallel to and in opposition to the idea of bigness for its own sake, of power and of glory, which also has a long history. The New Town conception may be said to be the application of the current phrase "small is beautiful" to the contemporary urban situation.

CONCLUSION

Although some of the worst aspects of the social problems of the inter-war period have been resolved, nevertheless the problem of adverse economic conditions, of marginality, of personal autonomy, of freedom of cultural expression remain. It must be remembered that all reforms are temporary and further reforms always necessary. The belief in planning, in middle-class values and the middle-class way of life of middle-class reformers is no longer as firm, in any social class including the middle-class itself, as it was in the immediate post-war period when the New

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Towns were built. The middle-class solutions to the social problems of two or three generations ago are questioned today. The presence of the hippies in the sixties was there to prove it. Yet progress was achieved in the post-war era, the New Towns are one evidence of it. Still problems remain for the cities, for the New Towns, for society as a whole, both cultural and social, which each generation and each individual must face up to and to which there are no ready-made solutions for all times. Times change, conditions change, problems arise to which new and responsible solutions have to be found. What will be the role of the square in the future in the "cities" and in the "New Towns" as a result of these changes?

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Rahat Nabi Khan
(*India*)

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