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# Tearing Down the “Imperial Façade”: Lewis Mumford’s Reclamation of the “True and Only America”

Heinz Tschachler

The broad topic of this paper is based on Lewis Mumford’s criticism of the architecture and urban development of turn-of-the century America. It is impossible to separate these from Chicago’s White City, which was doubtless the central cultural symbol of that period. In the popular imagination this model city figured as the fulfilment of “a vision of harmony and beauty” which marked the beginning of a new phase in human evolution (Ickstadt 224). More specifically, the White City symbolized “the march of humanity onward and upward” (Ickstadt 224) and, by extension, the march of American civilization progressing out of chaos – especially out of the chaos that had resulted from an out-of-control laissez-faire capitalism – into a sublimely modern order. I am deliberately saying “sublimely” here because the cultural norms expressed in the White City were essentially those of transformation, integration, and moral control.

Characteristically, in 1890 Daniel H. Burnham, the White City’s chief of construction, confidently told an audience of architects and builders that he was going to erect “a dream city” that would shape the future course of American architecture and thus would become a national, not just a Chicago, event (Miller, *City of the Century* 381). If the summer city that Burnham built on a bare, wind-torn beach in a mere two years was inspired by a deep faith in the transforming power of a sound environment, there were others who adopted this civic-minded creed for their fictional writings. For instance, in the hugely popular utopian writings of Edward Bellamy and Ignatius Donnelly the White City served as a model of what a great city should look like and, as is suggested by the image of the “industrial army,” of how it should be built. Henry Demarest Lloyd was equally impressed. In his utopian sketch “No Mean City” the White City serves as the reformist counter-image to the evils of the Black City. Last but not least, William Dean Howells credited the architects and artists with expressing a collective will through

rational planning, cooperation, and a new collective identity, to marshal economic egotisms and thus to bring about a new, modern social order. Writing in the spirit of an enlightened republicanism, Howells hailed the neoclassicist style in the White City's architecture as the perfect expression of a homogeneous society, both in a social and in a moral respect (Ickstadt 237; see also Thomas 135-63).

In actual fact, however, the grandiose architectural project of the White City – a truly impressive ensemble of palaces, colonnades, fountains, and plazas – was a colossal monument to the new quasi-aristocratic business elite, who in a short-lived alliance with the educated bourgeoisie of the time and in deliberate imitation of Renaissance patrons, were rather more interested in consolidating their power through the patronage of a national culture. Thus no matter how *progressive* the White City's proponents believed they were, the model city simultaneously served the interests of a new cultural and economic elite to use culture as a means of exerting social control. By extension, the cultural imperialism of which Chicago's White City is the perfect symbol coincides with and therefore cannot be separated from the emergence of the United States as an imperial world power. This development was visible in the Spanish-American War, in the annexation, in 1898, of Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines, as well as in the establishment of a near-colonial protectorate over Cuba. It was visible behind an official rhetoric that disguised all this as "benevolent assimilation," undertaken, in the words of President William McKinley, for the purpose of "securing the enduring foundations of liberty to others."<sup>1</sup>

Lewis Mumford himself was born only two years after the official opening of the Chicago Fair. By the time he began to write, the chorus which had hailed the White City as a harbinger of the new Golden Age which would finally see the fulfilment of America's manifest destiny, certainly sounded oddly off key. Although Mumford conceded, in 1919, that the model city's neo-classicist style perfectly expressed the idea of culture as a transcendent timeless order, ultimately for him the White City was "too much of a platonic concept, divorced from the grubby actualities of home and factory, street and store, family budget and the law of rent" ("Cities Movement" 349). In 1919 and on the pages of a prestigious mainstream architectural journal, Mumford was rather moderate in his criticism. Even so,

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<sup>1</sup> Ickstadt 228f., and Miller, *City of the Century* 378-93 and 488-505. On the cultural elites of the time see White; on the cultural imperialism underlying the White City project see Trachtenberg 208-34; reference to McKinley is to his Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1901, in Lott 207, 209.

his conclusion that "the reconstruction of American cities is a *political as well as a technical affair*" (354, my italics) anticipates the much keener evaluations of the following years, in which not only the White City but also the City Beautiful movement spawned by it appear as emblems of a new feudal order, expressing not so much the spirit of democracy as that of the liberal gentry and the representatives of high finance.

Mumford would become especially critical of Burnham, whom he ultimately saw less as an architect than as a businessman, a builder of neo-baroque spaces of power lined with neo-classicist edifices, of façades which were an invitation to recognize an ordered hierarchy, and, finally, as a self-proclaimed reformer who ignored the poor in favor of the civic-business nexus. In a 1922 review of Charles Moore's two-volume biography of Burnham Mumford wrote,

"Neither Burnham nor his fellow-Augustans seem to have had any clear notion of what the human scale signified. Their associates were in Big Business; their travels took them to Big Cities; for a generation they had designed Big Buildings; and when they came to consider the problem of making [in the plan of Chicago of 1909] a habitable place for human beings out of a welter of stockyards, mean dwelling houses, and congested streets, they turned the whole business of re-orienting a community into a Big Scheme." ("Ex Libris" 575)

Diagnosing the scale of civic reform in terms of bigness, Mumford characterized Burnham's projects as essentially "imperial," as informed by a "ruthlessness [which] indicates not so much a breadth of vision as downright superficiality: their coherence and order is the arbitrary discipline imposed by the soldier and the policeman, and not by an inner love of coherence and order pervading the community" ("Ex Libris" 575). This was as much a critique of Burnham and other architects of the time as it was a frontal attack on, as Mumford said in *Sticks and Stones*, "the conditions that gave [that architecture] a substantial base" (57). What were those conditions? From the beginning Mumford's burgeoning interest in housing and architecture coincided with a period of intense real estate speculation, especially in what were still semirural districts, and he was not oblivious to this dismal trend. In his notes, he pondered the evils of jerry-building, as he watched the new subdivisions overrun the landscape of the borough of Queens. This was in 1916, and later in *Sticks and Stones* Mumford wrote that the imperative of "the maximum exploitation of land" necessarily led to "jerry-building," which,



referring to the architect Douglas Robinson, he defined as building “the cheapest thing that will hold together for fifteen years”.<sup>2</sup>

Also in *Sticks and Stones*, subtitled, justly I think, “a study of American architecture and civilization,” Mumford very pointedly described the development in architecture and housing as the result of a shift “from industry to finance” and thus “from the producing towns to the spending towns” (55). Architecture, he continued, “came to dwell in the stock exchanges, the banks, the shops, and the clubs of the metropolis” (56). All this was done in a context of “opulence and magnitude” that recalled “the Rome of the first and second centuries after Christ” (56), i.e., the Rome which had shifted from republican rule to the imperial regime. Accordingly, Mumford dubbed the decades between 1890 and 1910 “The Imperial Age,” a phrase which to Ralph Adams Cram appeared as “a stroke of genius” (372).

Mumford’s understanding of imperialism reflects contemporary debates. His declaration that turn-of-the-century American architecture, from Chicago’s White City to New York’s Grand Central Station and the original Pennsylvania Station, from the Yale Bowl and the Harvard Stadium to the Lewisohn Stadium and their counterparts in the West, “reproduced in miniature the imperial order” (*Sticks and Stones* 61), clearly echoes William Jennings Bryan’s theory that the imperialist expansion of the United States would necessarily bring about an inevitable decline, similar to that experienced by the Roman Empire, in which overexpansion had resulted in eventual dissolution. Bryan, a Democrat who bitterly opposed the acquisitions of Cuba, Guam, and the Philippines, was denounced for his opinions by President McKinley as an obstructionist. Mumford, by contrast, warmed to the man who had lost the bid for the presidency against McKinley. “The unrelying policy of imperialism,” Mumford noted in *Sticks and Stones*, “is to exploit the life and resources of separate regions for the benefit of the holders of privilege in the capital city” (63).

Mumford’s use of the word “imperial” is cunning. On the one hand, “imperial” evokes the importance, prestige, status, and power, of Rome at the time of Augustus. But for Mumford, Augustanism no longer had the appeal it once had for the civic-minded leaders of the early republic, let alone for Burnham and his contemporaries who, through their architecture, wanted to return not to the Rome of the Caesars but to the chaste classicism of Thomas Jefferson, “a return to our better selves,” as Burnham’s biographer suggested (Moore I, 91). On the contrary, Mumford collocates “imperial” with the

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<sup>2</sup> *Sticks and Stones* 76, 77; reference to 1916 is to an unpublished “Random Note,” 21 August 1916, The Mumford Papers, Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania, f. 8027.

word "façade," and thus implies that the genuine article has been lost. He therefore remained unimpressed by the idea of a "democratic imperialism" espoused by Presidents McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt.<sup>3</sup> And he was equally unenthusiastic about attempts to restore the original plan of Washington, D.C., which, as Major Pierre Charles L'Enfant had divulged in a letter to George Washington, was to be designed as "the capital of this vast empire" (Maroon 24).

It is entirely characteristic that the largest part of Mumford's critique of Washington, D.C., in *Sticks and Stones* is in the chapter "The Imperial Façade." For instance, of the Lincoln Memorial Mumford says that "one feels not the living beauty of our American past, but the mortuary air of archaeology" (64). And, Mumford wonders, "who lives in that shrine, Lincoln, or the men who conceived it: the leader who beheld the mournful victory of the Civil War, or the generation that took pleasure in the mean triumph of the Spanish-American exploit, and placed the imperial standard in the Philippines and the Caribbean?" (65). Ideally, American architecture, and especially the architecture of the nation's capital city, should reflect and reaffirm an American identity predicated on the idea of democracy, of liberty and justice for all, of the country "that Lincoln was bred in, the homespun and humane and humorous America" (64). Given this conviction, the architecture of grandiose designs and vistas, the sedulously classic monuments that were erected to the memory of America's heroes, were entirely inappropriate to Mumford. He argued that architectural elements such as the portico and the colonnade represent not democracy but authority, the elevation of something onto the superior scale of the majestic. Finally, he criticized that L'Enfant's plan was too coherent in its formality, too abstract, as if cities "could live by government alone" (28).

In *Sticks and Stones* Mumford also asked whether anyone could "contemplate this scene [of the imperial spectacle for the leisure classes] and still fancy that imperialism was nothing more than a move for foreign markets and territories of exploitation" (61). Thus Mumford's diagnosis of the period in question (the "imperial age") can be usefully summarized as the production of "'values' rather than goods"; accordingly, the age's buildings were "only the simulacra of a living architecture . . . an architecture of compensation: it provides grandiloquent stones for people who have been deprived of bread and sunlight and all that keeps man from becoming vile" (61, 67f.) Through the image of the "imperial façade," therefore, Mumford

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<sup>3</sup> See Walter Grünzweig, in this volume.

came to articulate, in truly Veblenesque fashion,<sup>4</sup> his opposition not only to the move for foreign markets and territories for the purpose of exploitation but especially and immediately to the speculative development driven by land rent maximization at home, as well as to the mindless ostentatiousness of turn-of-the-century American society.

Mumford's response to the failures of the genteel tradition was to attempt to change the course of American architecture and housing – to make it abandon its singular adherence to the “money purpose” in order to pursue the more important “social purpose,” as he wrote in an unpublished housing essay for *The Journal of the American Institute of Architects* in 1918 (The Lewis Mumford Papers, f. 6969). But Mumford was also convinced, in characteristically American fashion, that this false course had been shaped by the Old World. Charging Europe, in his review of the Burnham biography, with effecting the “*imperialization of American architecture and city planning*” (“Ex Libris” 574, my italics), Mumford reminded his audience of the fact that an American or “Yankee” form of “communism” had existed once but had vanished under the onslaught of industrial capitalism. But he also wrote, in *Sticks and Stones*, that already in the “villages of the New World there flickered up [merely] the last dying embers of the medieval order” and that the “forces that undermined the medieval civilization of Europe sapped the vitality from the little centers it had deposited in America” (1, 11). This development of historic decline, Mumford argued in direct contradiction to the nationalistic historiography current at the time, led not so much to progress as to a general malaise and widespread “unsettlement,” so that in the end, everyone behaved “as if at any moment they might be called to the colors and sent westward” (34). Thus in spite of the “vivid promises of Mechanical Progress and Manifest Destiny the realities of an ordered society thinned into a pale vapor” (34).

Borrowing from Matthew Arnold, Mumford also believed in “civilization” as an “ongoing project of the humanization of humankind” (epigraph to *Sticks and Stones*). This conviction led him to pontificate, in 1922, that the United States had a civilization but no culture to go with its achievements. As he wrote in a contribution to a symposium called *Civilization in the United States*, the “highest achievements of our material

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<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, the following passage from *The Theory of the Leisure Class*: “The endless variety of fronts presented by the better class of tenements and apartment houses in our cities is an endless variety of distress and of suggestions of expensive discomfort” (Veblen 110). According to his biographer, Mumford read with enthusiasm all of Veblen's books, he took a course from him at the New School for Social Research in 1919, got on closer terms with him while on the staff of *The Dial*, and also worked with him on *The Freeman* (Miller, *Lewis Mumford* 108-10, 151, 218).

civilization count as so many symptoms of its spiritual failure" ("The City" 9-10). All was not lost, though. "In that part of architecture which lies outside the purlieus of our commercial system," he wrote in *Sticks and Stones*, "a tradition of good building and tactful design has been established" (72). In "the prosperous country homes and college buildings and churches and municipal institutions" Mumford saw manifestations of those "prospects of architecture [which] are not divorced from the prospects of the community" (72, 88). These "prospects" cannot be separated from Mumford's conviction, laid down with unmistakable nostalgia in his autobiography, that at least in the early part of the new century "the Jeffersonian hopes . . . in the beneficent freedoms of the New World had been chastened though not extinguished by the rapacities of financial monopoly and political corruption" (*Sketches* 100).

Such a critique of capitalism, I would like to claim, is quintessentially American, and thus closer to Leo Marx than to Karl Marx. It exhibits the conviction that through capitalism the self-evident course of American history had become deformed, had been thrown off the right path, or the path of the righteous (since not only was it possible to see it, it was also possible to become instrumental in bringing it about). Mumford was therefore quite correct in construing Burnham's White City as the product of an industrializing society, as a manifestation of its modernity as well as of the wish to heighten modernity through culture. With the White City's "ordered layout," Mumford had written in 1919, "the rebirth of American cities began" ("Cities Movement" 349). This rebirth of American cities could not have been more timely since, as he wrote in *Sticks and Stones*, behind "the monumental façades of our metropolis trudges a landless proletariat [under] conditions [which] created an admirable milieu for the propagation of vice and disease" (67, 48).

Rhetoric of this kind is telling. It reflects the deep faith in the transforming power of a sound environment which had inspired the White City itself as much as other civic ventures of the time, such as Pullman, Illinois, located just south of the White City. As George Pullman, who was responsible for the building of this model town, said, "Take the roughest man [and] bring him into a room elegantly carpeted and furnished and the effect upon his bearing is immediate."<sup>5</sup> The rhetoric of civic idealism also cannot be overlooked in Mumford's writing, in a letter to his close friend Van Wyck Brooks of November 1925, that the difference between the socialists of the early century and "those of us who have survived and kept our wits" was that

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<sup>5</sup> Miller, *City of the Century* 492; see also Boyer, and Fried.



the socialists “essentially, were contented with an uprising, which would transfer power from one class to another, whereas we want [. . .] a revolutionary social change which will displace a mean and inferior kind of life with a completely different kind” (Miller, *Lewis Mumford* 254).

Note Mumford’s use of the pronoun in the first person plural. It is not quite the universalizing gesture which Cornel West has claimed is typical of bourgeois, male, Eurocentric critics insofar as it excludes (by guarding and putting a silence around) or explicitly degrades workers, women, and people of color (3-32). Mumford at least in part acknowledges who constitutes the “we.” Yet “we” explicitly does not mean “mass movements” so much as it means “individuals and small groups who are sufficiently alert to intervene at the right time and the right place for the right purpose,” and whose ideas, on the strength of their transforming power, will exert “the direct impact of the human personality in history” (Mumford, *Art and Technics* 159-60).

In *Sticks and Stones* Mumford suggested that before “we can build well on any scale we shall [. . .] have to develop an art of regional planning, an art which will relate city and countryside in a new pattern from that which was the blind creation of the industrial and the territorial pioneer” (98, my italics). This time, the use of the “we” is part of a reference to the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA), which Mumford and a group of architects and developers (Clarence Stein, Henry Wright, and Benton MacKaye) had formed in 1923, and whose concern, we learn, was “to provide a new framework for *our* communities which will redistribute population and industry, and recultivate the environment” (*Sticks and Stones* 99, my italics). These efforts led to the development of Sunnyside Gardens, Queens, where the Mumfords lived until 1936, and the partial building of Radburn, near Fair Lawn, New Jersey, the first American town which was deliberately designed to cope intelligently with the automobile (Miller, *Lewis Mumford* 85-88, 193-201; Wojtowicz 11-16).

The intention of Radburn was to create a family-centered environment, an orderly, convenient, and peaceful alternative to the city that would be affordable for a large cross-section of the urban population. The reality was quite different. Some of Radburn’s problems were attributable to the Depression, which caused construction to be suspended (only two neighborhoods were completed by 1931) and the town’s population to hover at fifteen-hundred through the Thirties. (It did not grow past three thousand residents.) Other problems stem from the RPAA members’ tepid political engagement as well as from the cost of housing and monthly maintenance fees, which were high enough to exclude the vast majority of families in the

New York metropolitan region. Added to the financial barrier were restrictive covenants that excluded Jews and African Americans. Radburn quickly became a commuter suburb that was visually homogenous in ways Mumford did not wish: 77 percent of the population were Protestants; over 80 percent had attended college; 70 percent of its employed residents worked in New York; 88 percent of them were professionals or business owners, and there were no blue-collar workers among them (McNamara 130-36).

In any case, Radburn (whose housing stock was to consist of 430 Georgian style single-family houses, sixty townhouses, fifty-four duplexes, and ninety-two apartment units located near the planned commercial sector) was designed to preserve that quality of small-town life that Mumford loved so about Emerson's Concord, where, Mumford was convinced, people would be "naturally united by a common feeling for their landscape, their literature and language, their local ways" ("Survey and Plan" 110). But these were not the times of Emerson, and the safe streets and quiet neighborhoods of the garden city are also phrases that contain veiled references to race, or indeed, to any difference that threatens one's identity and one's expectation of seeing it reflected and reaffirmed in the built landscape and its institutions. In short, the Garden City, the RPAA's pact with the Devil, was an attempt to turn the tide by providing a smaller, "manageable" community with institutions of culture and self-culture built into it to the extent the planners could imagine and provide. Is it, then, any surprise that it wound up as white and Protestant as it did?

Invested with the rhetoric of safety and predictability, the garden-city (or, green city) utopias were also easily coopted as ideological showpieces at the 1939 New York World's Fair, to which Mumford contributed. Mumford had his platform in the Science and Education Building where, under the auspices of the American Institute of Planners, a film was shown, *The City*. Scripted by Mumford, the film attacks the evils both of the industrial city and of the modern metropolis: it portrays a dirty, smoky Pittsburgh full of people who are alienated, drunk, despondent, and unhealthy from environmental causes (some of them are ignorant foreign workers); and it portrays a New York where all this and much more appears on a larger scale and at a faster pace. Thus in New York, there is crime, violence, and indifference on an unprecedented scale (in one scene a man gets hurt in an automobile accident but pedestrians just pass him by, apparently unconcerned); overcrowding, bad living conditions, and one sees streets hopelessly congested with automobile traffic. As is unmistakably expressed through visual conceits such as a fast-food restaurant equipped with an automated kitchen or offices



controlled by punch-card machines, life has become utterly fragmented and mechanized. Opposing all these evils are two good communities: a village from America's agrarian past (the pastor on the church porch, a wheelwright, apple pickers whose white shorts are spotless), and a garden city of the future that is the reclamation of that past. Secured by science, "once more the people work to find a balance." And, the narrator promises, in these new cities, "Safe streets and quiet neighborhoods are not just matters of good luck, they are built into the pattern and built to stay there." This, we are told, "works as well for modern living as once it did in old New England's towns" because "the people who laid out this did not forget that air and sun [are] what we need for growing."

For growing what, one wonders? In the film there is talk of the "balanced personality" living the "decent kind of life," the product, it appears, of "sun, air and cleanliness" and of a controlled size that makes these model cities "fit for living in." But in the manuscript of Mumford's autobiography there is an even more revealing passage, later omitted but preserved in *The Lewis Mumford Papers*, in which Mumford fondly remembers, from a trip to Europe he had taken in 1932, "the new socialist Karl Marx Hof and the Vienna nursery schools where the proletarian children were now being trained to be '*Kulturmenschen*'" (f. 3923). Over and above the reference to the "Red Vienna,"<sup>6</sup> there is an unmistakable echo here of the rhetoric of American civic idealism, for instance in Charles Hutchinson's express desire to save souls, to build a new moral order "not for the few [but for] the people of Chicago." Hutchinson said this in 1887, in his capacity as president of Chicago's Art Institute. And Hutchinson, who was as democratic as his patrician background and upbringing would permit him to be, saw himself as a cultural missionary. What was good for the enlightened few would be even better for the masses. Art museums such as the Institute would raise the level of public taste and, with it, public behavior. Of course this was to be achieved not through the everyday workings of political democracy but under the safe control of the better classes. "The real work of this world," Hutchinson noted when he was still Sunday School Superintendent, "is done by the minority" (Miller, *City of the Century* 387, 389).

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<sup>6</sup> The phrase "Red Vienna" refers to a gigantic social project undertaken by the City of Vienna in post-World War I Austria. Led by Mayor Karl Seitz and Commissioners Hugo Breitner and Julius Tandler, some 65,000 housing units were built between 1923-1933; in addition, Vienna received community facilities such as kindergartens, schools, meeting halls, reading rooms, communal laundries, markets, movie theaters, public swimming pools, and health care facilities (as a result of which the infant mortality rate dropped from 15 per 100 babies born to 8 during this time). In this connection, see Bauböck; Hautmann and Hautmann; Maimann 68-79.

The parallels to Mumford are obvious. And while Mumford is truly concerned about "the millions who fill the pavements and shuttle back and forth in tubes" (*Sticks and Stones* 81), this is nevertheless overwritten if not obliterated by what he wrote only two years later in *The Golden Day* (1926). There, with penetrating self-analysis, Mumford declared that "Emerson wrote about Man the Reformer; but he never belonged to any political sect or cult [. . .]. He was an original, in the sense that he was a source [. . .]. Strong or weak, Emerson was complete: in his thought the potentialities of New England were finally expressed" (48, 45, 46). And, even more tellingly, Mumford wrote that "Whitman was not a democrat, in the sense of being a popular mediocrity; he was a man of genius" (64). Most significant in this connection is Mumford's pronouncement, in *Sticks and Stones*, that it was "not sufficient [. . .] to say that we must accept and enthrone the virtues of democracy" (94). Indeed Mumford had little sympathy for the proposed search for a "rule so broad as to admit of no exception" (84). These pronouncements were especially directed against Louis Sullivan, the self-proclaimed Emersonian poet of Democratic Architecture, who had stood up (in his autobiography) against Burnham and the City Beautiful. For Sullivan, the neoclassicism of the White City exhibited a quasi-feudal social order and was therefore inimical to the authentically American "democratic order" which was ideally based on the premise that it "shall recognize that every child is the seat of genius" (317).

Mumford cites Sullivan elsewhere in *Sticks and Stones*, but I found especially interesting Mumford's review of the man's *Autobiography* in the June 25, 1924, issue of *The New Republic*. For one thing, Mumford entirely agrees with Claude Bragdon, who had written, in the introduction, that Sullivan was not so much the Emerson as "the Walt Whitman of American architecture" ("Autobiography of an Idea" 132). Both Sullivan and Whitman, Mumford asserts, "were so far children of the Declaration of Independence" that they could not or would not see that the first settlers, "in leaving behind most of Europe's miseries, left behind its sanities and beauties as well" (133). The primary task of geniuses or, as Mumford also called them, "men of culture," was, therefore, to "resume the search for unity," i.e., to reclaim the vernacular tradition of the New World, Jeffersonian democracy as much as the New England village democracy or "Yankee communism" (*Sticks and Stones* 102).

Although in *Sticks and Stones* Mumford toned down somewhat the bleak outlook on America's future – "Had only the old America survived the Civil War," he had written in the book review (133) – the idea of a "unified

culture" which would transcend the cultural schism of America necessarily brings with it a profound ambiguity toward the modern. By extension, the idea of a unified culture, of "the true and only America," also accounts for the failure of Mumford's thought to secularize its transcendental ideals and promises. As long as the success of the modern is seen as depending rather exclusively upon an educated elite to whose civic virtues the conscious tending of a society's natural growth can be entrusted, it will at best be difficult for this brand of transcendentalist idealism to contribute toward the democratic transformation and reform of the present. At worst, it links culture to safety, the safety of the "we" against the barbaric threat of "them," i.e., of those who are viewed as different in some debased manner.<sup>7</sup>

In sum, then, Mumford's conception of the modern, no matter how "democratic" he thought it was, remained forever circumscribed by the paternalism of the nineteenth-century cultural elites. These elites had believed in the betterment of society through reformist measures. To be sure, for Mumford these measures were to be effected not so much in the art museum as in the area of architecture, housing, and comprehensive planning on the regional level. Mumford also differed from people such as Hutchinson in rejecting the idea that leadership, in organized efforts, was to come from "hard-headed businessmen." Yet if undertaken by others, such as artists and intellectuals, the idea of cultural leadership had plenty of appeal for Mumford. It was the prime task of the artist, he said in a lecture held at the University of Pennsylvania in 1950, "to transpose life, in all its dimensions, into a significant and realizable whole" and thus to reconcile "the two constant aspects of all organic activity, stability and change, continuity and novelty, tradition and innovation" ("From Revolt to Renewal" 25, 16).

It is in this more general ideological sense, I would like to claim by way of conclusion, that there is a continuation, in Mumford's cultural reactions to North American imperialism, of the contradictions and tensions of the progressives, manifest as they were in their urge to modernize at the same time as they professed a strong need for stability and continuity. This means that ultimately Mumford's modernism was just as paradoxical as the modernism of his predecessors. It also means, finally, that his orientation as much as theirs was at one and the same time backward and forward.

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<sup>7</sup> In this connection see Blake; Livingston; McNamara, and Noble.

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