

Outdoor Activities and Architectural Trends

life between buildings
– and urban planning
ideology

Having noted in the preceding chapters a number of positive qualities related to life between buildings and having demonstrated that the scope and character of outdoor activities are greatly influenced by the physical environment, it is natural for us to examine the extent to which urban planning principles and architectural trends of different historical periods have influenced outdoor activities and thus the social outdoor activities as well.

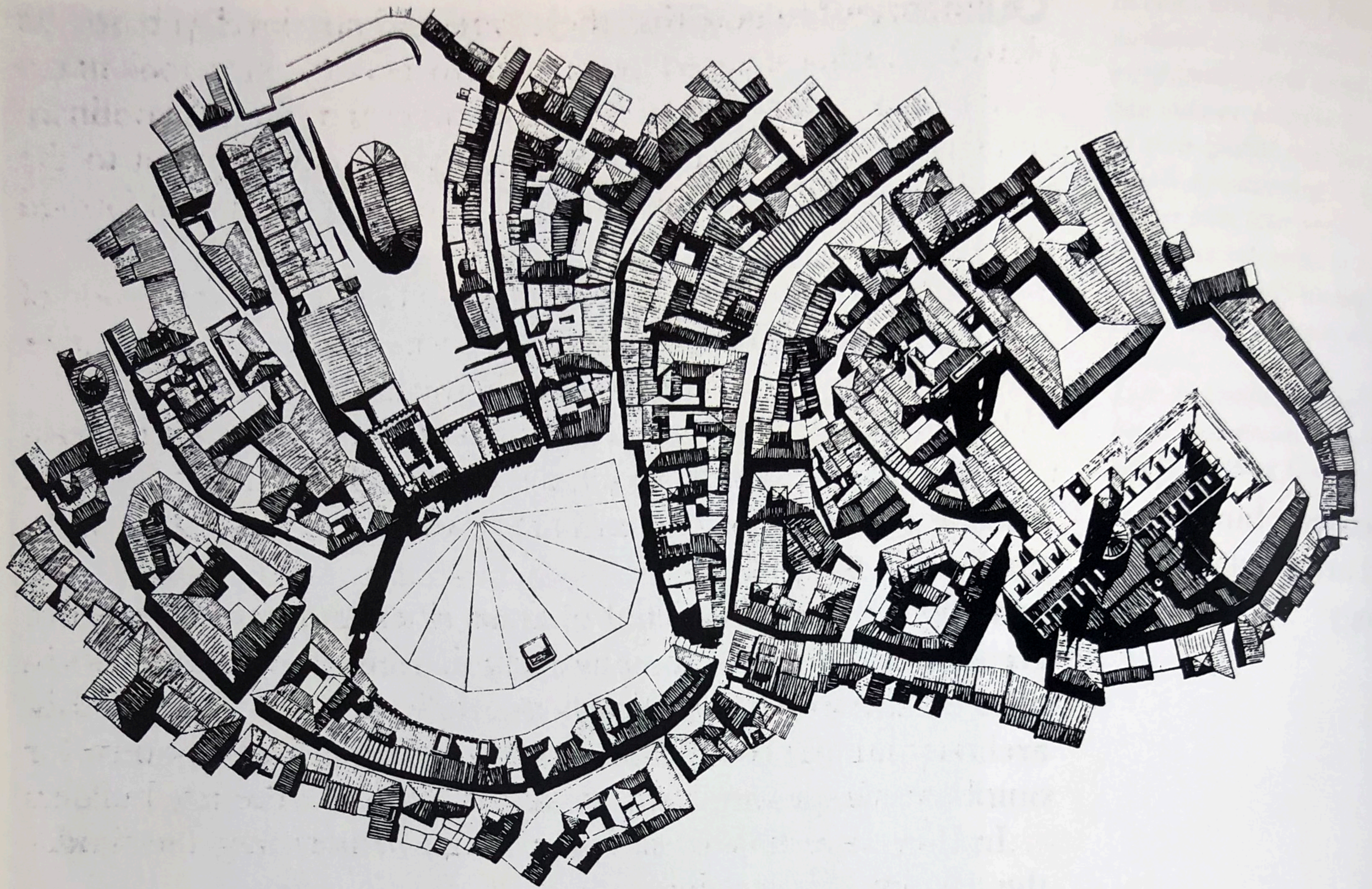
In Europe, well-preserved cities from nearly all periods within the last thousand years still exist. Freely evolved as well as planned medieval cities abound. Renaissance and baroque cities, cities from the early phases of industrialization, garden cities inspired by romanticism, and, not least, functionalistic, automobile-dominated cities of the past fifty years are manifold. Today it is possible to compare and evaluate these city layouts on a relatively uniform basis, because they are still in use.

With regard to form, seemingly great variations exist between the different city models, especially from an art-historical point of view, yet in reality only two noteworthy radical developments in connection with the present discussion of urban planning ideologies and outdoor activities have occurred: one in relation to the Renaissance, and one in relation to the functionalism movement.

The Middle Ages
– physical and social
aspects

Professional planning as it is known today, in which experts design the city on paper and in models, to build and deliver it later complete to the clients, has its historical origins in the Renaissance. Planning and planners did exist in some earlier periods, as evidenced by a number of Greek and Roman cities, but with the exception of a small group of planned late-medieval colonial cities, the cities that grew up in the period from around AD 500 to AD 1500 were not planned in the true sense. They developed where there was a need for them, shaped by the residents of the city in a direct city-building process.

Piazza del Campo, Siena, Italy



*Above: City center, Siena, Italy.
Plan: 1:4000.*

It is important to note that these cities did not develop based on plans but rather evolved through a process that often took many hundreds of years, because this slow process permitted continual adjustment and adaptation of the physical environment to the city functions. The city was not a goal in itself, but a tool formed by use.

The result of this process, which was based on a multitude of collected experiences, was urban spaces that even today offer extremely good conditions for life between buildings.

Many medieval cities and self-evolved small towns are increasingly popular as tourist attractions, objects of study, and desirable residential cities in contemporary times because they have precisely these qualities.

By virtue of their evolution, these cities and city spaces have built-in qualities that are found only in a few exceptional cases in cities from later periods. Nearly all medieval towns illustrate this. Not only are the streets and squares arranged with concern for people moving about and staying outdoors, but the city builders appear to have had remarkable insight concerning the fundamentals for this planning.

An unusually fine example is the Piazza del Campo in Siena. With its enclosed spatial design, its orientation with regard to sun and climate, its bowl-formed section, and its meticulously placed fountains and bollards, it is ideally arranged to function as a meeting place and public living room for its citizens, both then and now.

The Renaissance – the visual aspects

Twice since the Middle Ages has the basis for city planning been radically changed.

The first radical change took place during the Renaissance and has direct relation to the transition from freely evolved to planned cities. A special group of professional planners assumed the work of building cities and developed theories and ideas about how cities ought to be.

The city was no longer merely a tool but became to a greater degree a work of art, conceived, perceived, and executed as a whole. No longer were the areas between buildings and the functions to be contained in them the major points of interest, but rather the spatial effects, the buildings, and the artists who had shaped them took precedence.

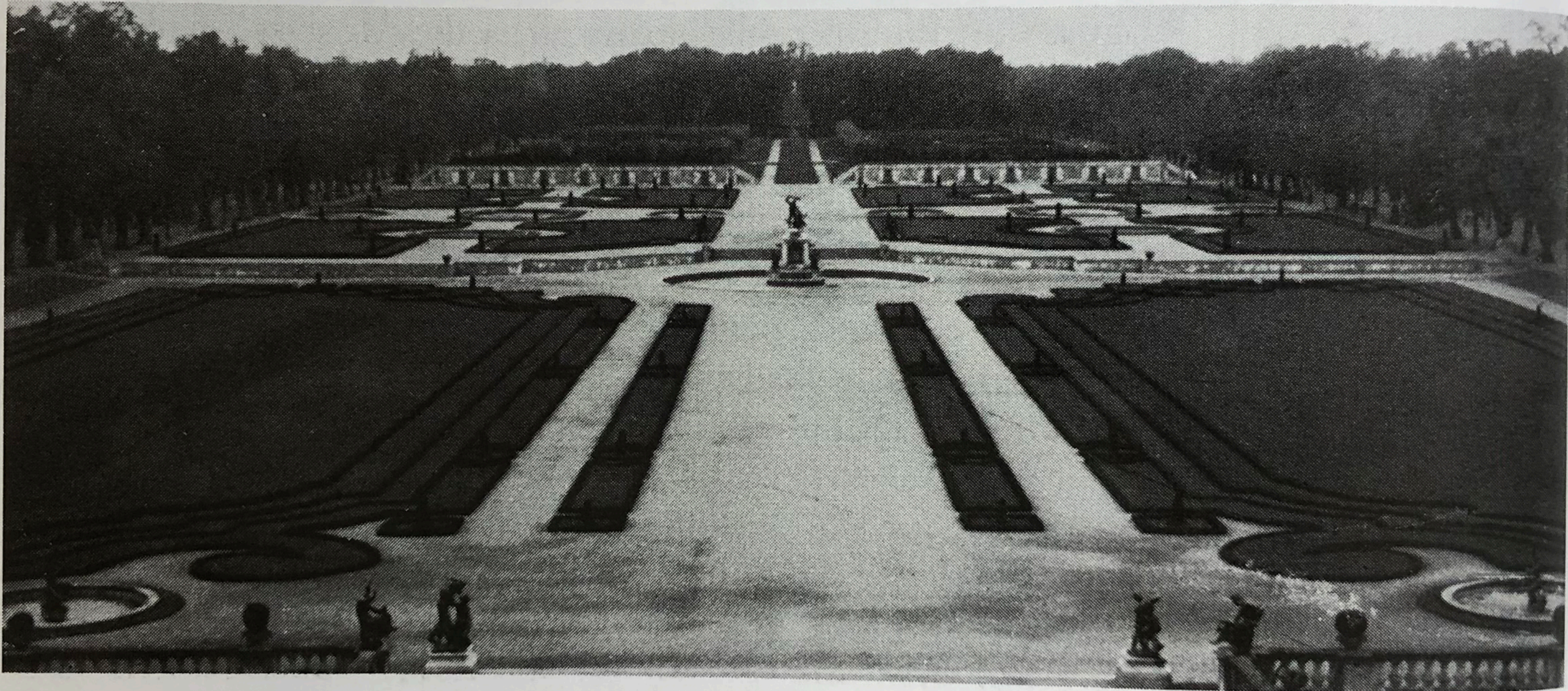
In this period it was primarily the appearance of the city and its buildings – the visual aspects – that were developed and transformed into criteria for good architecture and urban design. Concurrently, certain functional aspects were examined,

The Renaissance – the visual aspects



Left: Palmanova, Italy (1593). City plan in bird's-eye perspective.

Below: Eighteenth-century royal park in Drottningholm, Sweden, and central axis in a Danish public housing development (1965).



in particular the problems involved with defense, transportation, and formalized social functions such as parades and processions. The most important development in the basis for planning, however, concerned the visual expression of cities and buildings.

In Palmanova, the star-formed Renaissance city built by Scamozzi in 1593 north of Venice, all the streets have the same width – 14 meters (46 ft.) – regardless of purpose and placement in the city plan. In contrast with the medieval town, these dimensions are not determined primarily by use but by other, mostly formal considerations. This is also true of the city square, Piazza Grande, which, because of the geometry, is 30,000 square meters (325,000 sq.ft.) or more than twice as large as the Campo in Siena. For this reason it is quite unusable as a town square in this little town. On the other hand, the city plan is an interesting graphic work that, like so many other Renaissance-inspired plans, bears witness to being created on the drawing board.

The conscious awareness of the visual aspects of city planning during this period and the aesthetics formulated in this context decisively formed the basis for the architectural treatment of these problems in succeeding centuries.

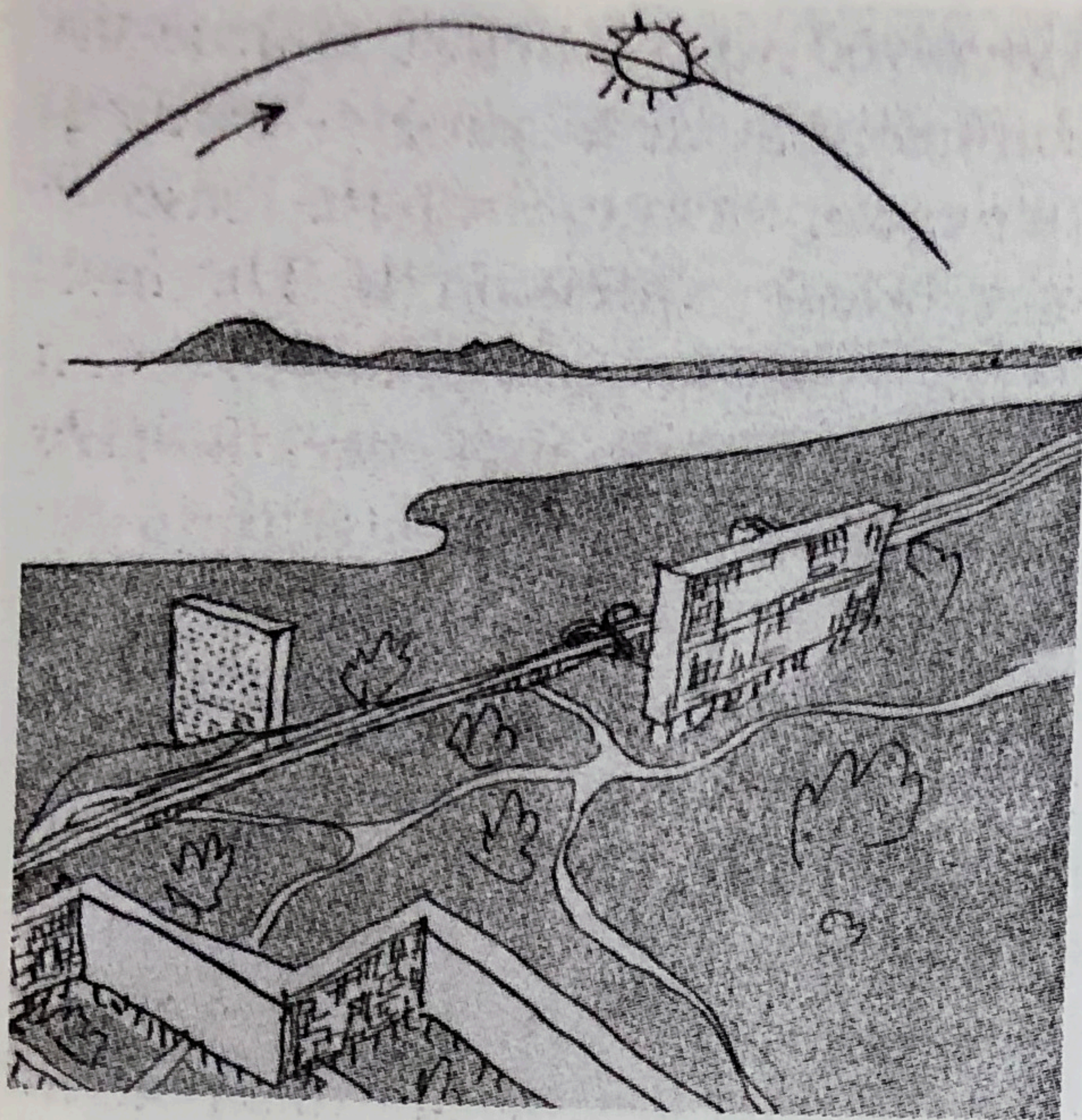
functionalism
– the physiological,
functional aspect

The second important development of the basis for planning took place around 1930 under the name of functionalism. During this period the physical-functional aspects of cities and buildings were developed as a planning dimension independent from and supplementary to aesthetics.

The basis for functionalism was primarily the medical knowledge that had been developed during the 1800s and the first decades of the 1900s. This new and extensive medical knowledge was the background for a number of criteria for healthy and physiologically suitable architecture around 1930. Dwellings were to have light, air, sun, and ventilation, and the residents were to be assured access to open spaces. The requirements for detached buildings oriented toward the sun and not, as they had been previously, toward the street, and the requirement for separation of residential and work areas were formulated during this period in order to assure the individual healthy living conditions and to distribute the physical benefits more fairly.

“If we will demand residences of equally high hygienic standard for all, then the requirement of direct access to sunlight for all dwellings will come to give the new residential

functionalism – the physiological functional aspects



Top: Emphasis on sun, light, and open spaces and the elimination of public urban spaces are clearly expressed in the illustrations accompanying the functionalistic manifesto of Le Corbusier. ("Concerning Town Planning" [36]).

*Center: Condominiums in Toronto, Canada.
Below: Public housing in Berlin.*



areas a completely new character. It is, therefore, a necessity to have an open building principle with parallel buildings positioned according to the sun: east-west in the case of through-going apartments, otherwise north-south. The first-named type of building has, however, the advantage in that it permits cross ventilation and gives the residences a truly effective sunny side [2].” G. Asplund in *Acceptera*, 1930.

the streets that disappeared

The functionalists made no mention of the psychological and social aspects of the design of buildings or public spaces. This lack of interest is also evident regarding the public spaces. That building design could influence play activities, contact patterns, and meeting possibilities, to name a few examples, was not considered. Functionalism was a distinctly physically and materially oriented planning ideology. One of the most noticeable effects of this ideology was that streets and squares disappeared from the new building projects and the new cities.

Throughout the entire history of human habitation, streets and squares had formed focal points and gathering places, but with the advent of functionalism, streets and squares were literally declared unwanted. Instead, they were replaced by roads, paths, and endless grass lawns.

the “late modern” planning basis

In simplified form, the aesthetics formulated in the Renaissance and further developed in the following centuries, and the functionalist teachings regarding the physiological aspects of planning are the ideologies on which cities and housing have been built in the years from 1930 and right up to the last decades of the twentieth century. These concepts have been thoroughly examined in past years and made specific in regulations and building codes. And it is these concepts around which an important part of the work of architects and planners has been centered during these most important decades when the majority of all construction in the industrial countries has taken place.

social possibilities in physically oriented planning

In the 1930s no one could visualize how it would be to live in the new cities when the architects’ aesthetics and the functionalistic ideas of healthy buildings became realities.

As an alternative to the existing dark, overpopulated, and unhealthy workers’ housing, the new, light multistory blocks offered many obvious advantages, and it was easy to argue in their favor.

In the functionalistic manifestos the “romantic languishing” in the old cities was energetically addressed.

The consequences for the social environment were not discussed, because it was not recognized that buildings also had great influence on outdoor activities and consequently on a number of social possibilities. No one wished to reduce or exclude valuable social activities. On the contrary, it was thought that the extensive grass areas between the buildings would be the obvious location for many recreational activities and a rich social life. Perspective drawings teemed with life and activities. The extent to which these visions of the function of green spaces as the uniting element in building projects were correct was not challenged or investigated.

Not until twenty to thirty years later, in the 1960s and 1970s, when the big functionalistic multistory residential cities had been built, was it possible to evaluate the consequences of a one-sided physical-functional planning basis.

A review of just a small selection of the most common planning principles from functionalistic building projects illustrates the effects of this type of planning in relation to life between buildings.

functionalistic
planning versus life
between buildings

The spreading and thinning out of dwellings assured light and air but also caused an excessive thinning of people and events. Differentiation in function among dwellings, factories, public buildings, and so on may have reduced the physiological disadvantages, but it has also reduced the possible advantages of closer contact.

Great distances between people, events, and functions characterize the new city areas. Transportation systems, based on the automobile, further contributed to reducing outdoor activities. In addition, the mechanical and insensitive spatial design of individual building projects has had a dramatic effect on outdoor activities.

The term "desert planning" introduced by Gordon Cullen in his book *Townscape* [10] most accurately describes the consequences of functionalistic planning.

single-family housing
areas – life around
but not between
buildings

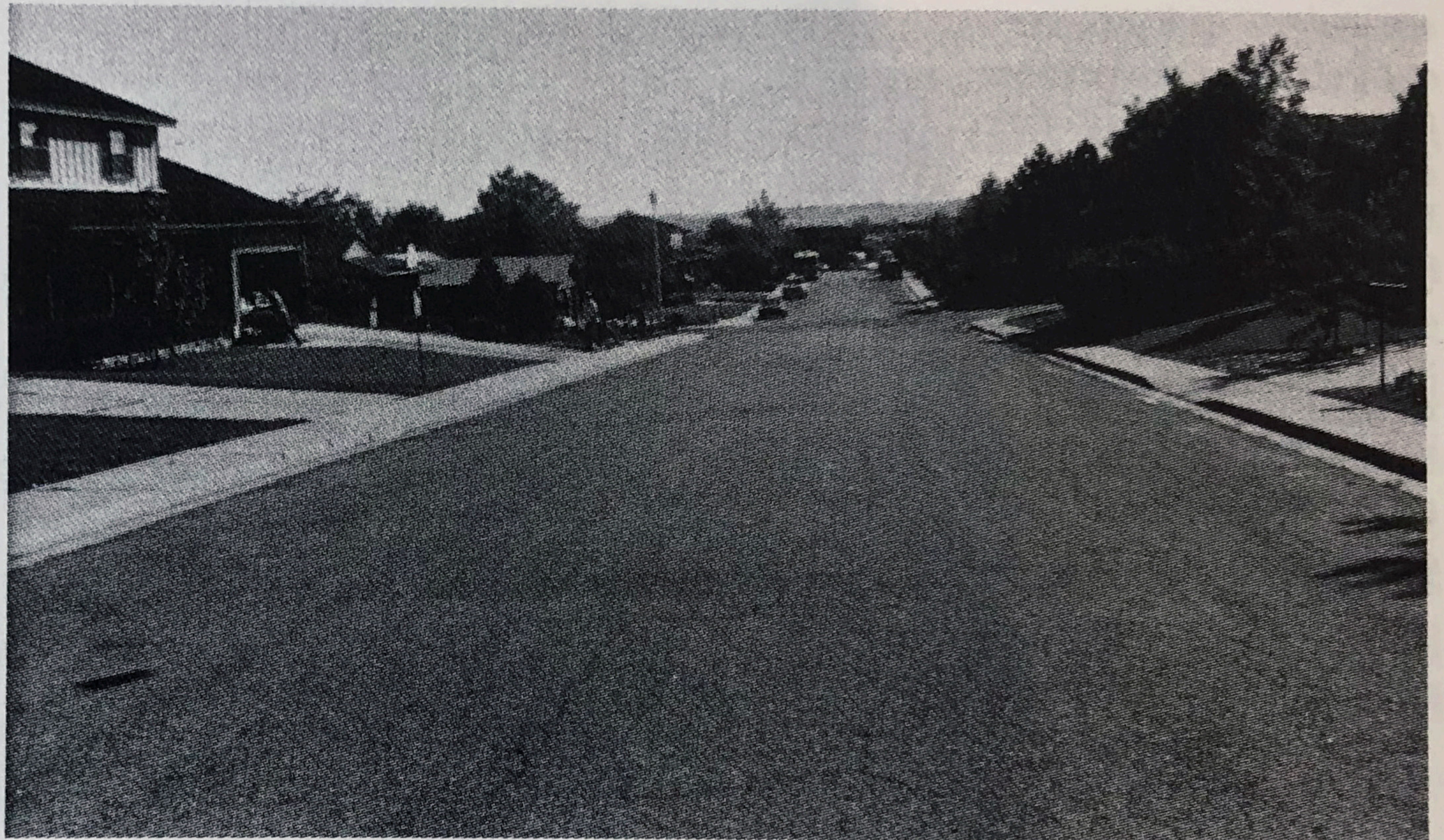
Parallel to the development of functionalistic multistory buildings, low, open, single-family housing areas, made possible by the increased use of automobiles, have been extensively developed in a number of countries, including Scandinavia, the United States, Canada, and Australia.

In these areas desirable conditions have been created in the form of gardens for private outdoor activities; at the same time communal outdoor activities have been reduced to a

*Suburban street,
Victoria, Australia.*



*Suburban street,
Colorado, U.S.A.*



bare minimum because of street design, automobile traffic, and especially the wide dispersal of people and events. In these areas the mass media and shopping centers have become virtually the only contact points with the outside world because life between buildings has been phased out.

life is built out of the
new city areas

These examples illustrate how postwar planning has significantly influenced life between buildings. Life has literally been built out of these new areas, not as a part of a well-thought-out planning concept but as a by-product of a long series of other considerations.

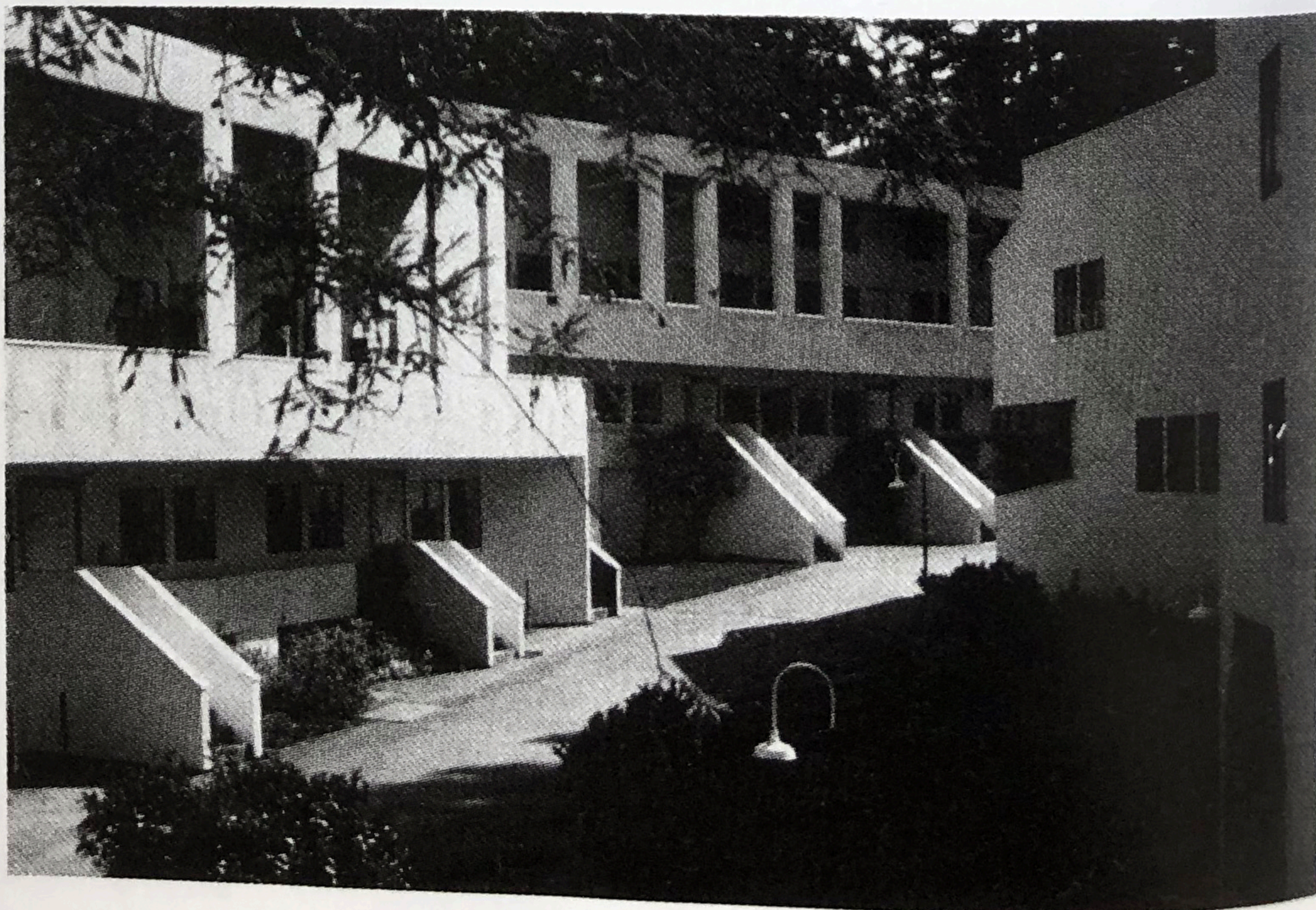
While the medieval city with its design and dimensions collected people and events in streets and squares and encouraged pedestrian traffic and outdoor stays, the functionalistic suburban areas and building projects do precisely the opposite.

These new areas reinforce the reduction and spreading of outdoor activities that over the same span of years resulted from changes in industrial production and from a number of other social conditions.

If a team of planners at any time had been given the task of doing what they could to reduce life between buildings, they hardly could have achieved more thoroughly what has inadvertently been done in the sprawling suburban areas, as well as in numerous functionalist redevelopment schemes.

The post modern revolt against the rigidity of modernism has produced a great number of strained and stilted buildings designed with a greater emphasis on artistic statement than on the usefulness to the inhabitants.

On the other hand it has been demonstrated in a number of cases that contemporary architecture can cater to and enhance the daily life in and between buildings. Care and consideration in the design process make all the difference.



*Above: New housing project.
Rotterdam, Holland.*

*Below: Kresge College, Santa
Cruz, California, built around
a carefully laid out street.
(Architects: Charles Moore and
W. Turnbull.)*