

Dear Members of the Selection Committee,

**The Origins of This Project:** In September 2013, Robert Lockhart, acquisitions editor for the University of Pennsylvania Press, contacted me about authoring a book in their series, *The Arts and Intellectual Life in Modern America*. At the time I had already been working on a book manuscript entitled, *Modernism and the Archaic City: The Pre-Industrial Past in the Imagination of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Urban Design*, but was finding that the scope was too broad and ambitious, given the time and resources available to me to write the manuscript. I had tentatively already decided to publish certain individual chapters as articles instead of pursuing the book further. However, at our meeting in early October, Lockhart persuaded me that a portion of that manuscript, now much more narrowly focused on the United States in the immediate postwar period would make a compelling book project for their series. He then asked me to submit for them three sample chapters and a formal book proposal for preliminary review. The scope of this project now involves a much more detailed intellectual biography of leading figures in postwar American urban design, requiring some additional archival research. I plan to complete the formal proposal by early spring but would then require the rest of the spring and the early summer to complete the sample chapters and finish the research. The RSCA grant would allow me to complete this research during the summer and to submit the formal proposal and chapters by September.

**Scope of Project and Contribution to the Field:** While the intellectual history of urban design during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century is now well established, that for the post-1945 period is just now being understood and contextualized. This project proposes a significant contribution to the historical understanding of urban design in the postwar period, concentrating especially on the tumultuous years of the postwar boom in the United States. During this period, leading American urban designers began to grapple with what they called the ‘crisis of urban scale’ as cities rapidly expanded through highway building while also being torn apart at their centers through deindustrialization and urban renewal. The psychological but also humanistic and sociological question for urban designers became: what happens to the individual inhabitant’s perceptual frame of reference under such conditions? Traditional urban design theory, based largely on an art historical, perspectival understanding of groupings of buildings at the pedestrian scale, seemed grossly inadequate to the task of understanding the seemingly chaotic forces and expanded scale of the postwar metropolis. At the same time perception itself was increasingly understood to vary from one social group to another within a pluralistic society. Under these conditions, urban design theorists who were working and teaching at American universities in the 1940s and 50s began to formulate a radically new understanding perception, scale and experience, transforming earlier art historical theories, often based on preindustrial urban forms, into a modern understanding of environmental design. At the same time, they criticized the often-dogmatic assumptions of an earlier generation of modernist architects who had often sought to unify the form of the metropolis at the expense of perceptual scale and social complexity.

This project focuses specifically on three influential figures in this period, Lewis Mumford, Christopher Tunnard, and Kevin Lynch, each of whom will form the basis of a

book chapter to be submitted for review to the University of Pennsylvania Press by September 2014. These three chapters will ultimately be combined with two other chapters on those European urban design theorists who specifically influenced the American debate, Siegfried Giedion and Steen Eiler Rasmussen. Employing the methodology of overlapping intellectual biography, this project fills a gap in the historical understanding of urban design theory between 1945 and 1960, casting doubt on earlier narratives of a sudden rupture between modernist urban design and the later experiments in so-called postmodern urbanism.

Although the specific shape of this project is new, I have already laid many of its intellectual foundations in my previous research and publications. For the past five years, I have been presenting and publishing on related themes, including my 2011 article on Kevin Lynch, "Civic Art in an Age of Cultural Relativism." I am, therefore, confident that this project is feasible, given the work I have already done and from what I already know of the archival sources. This project would give me an opportunity consolidate research already done while also synthesizing this work within a larger project. I believe that this project would raise the profile, both of the Art History Program and of the College of Humanities and the Arts.

**Likely Educational Impact on Students:** The initial impact on student will mainly be indirect as these ideas gradually enter my own teaching. Should this material be published in book form, however, the impact might be considerable as portions of the book are assigned in classes, not only here, but at other institutions as well.

### **Preliminary Chapter Outline:**

Introduction: Urban Design Discourse and the Perceptual Crisis of the Postwar City

Chapter 1: The Medieval Town as 'Neighborhood Unit': Lewis Mumford

One of the best known American writers on architecture and cities in the twentieth century, Lewis Mumford provides a link between an earlier generation of utopian modernists and the emerging postwar revisionists. This chapter specifically investigates the ways in which Mumford attempted to break up what he considered the over-scaled metropolis into a series of town-like entities, an idea that he pursued into the early 1960s even as it became increasingly clear that this project was doomed by a variety of social and economic forces. Mumford's idea of a human-scaled city, rooted as it was in a particular idealization of medieval towns and New England villages, would nevertheless become an important stepping-stone for later critiques of the postwar metropolis.

Chapter 2: The Art Historical Teleology of the Modernist City: Siegfried Giedion

In contrast to Mumford, Giedion represented the transplantation of European modernist ideals in the United States during the late 1930s and early 1940's. As a Swiss art historian, Giedion had become a leading spokesman and apologist for the types of Bauhaus-inspired urban design that were increasingly informing American urban renewal schemes in the late 1940s. At the same time, together with an influential group of modernists at Harvard's Graduate School of Design, Giedion had begun an attempt to resolve the perceptual crisis of the American metropolis by focusing his efforts on the designs of pedestrian-friendly 'civic cores' that they hoped would fill the apparent void in recognizable public space even as it also used modernist aesthetic principles to carve out a new cultural unity for the postwar period. This art historical and ultimately elitist understanding of cultural unity and aesthetic perception would again prove quixotic even as a number of such civic centers materialized in American downtowns.

Chapter 3: The Thingness of Cities, an Everyday Phenomenology: Steen Eiler Rasmussen

This chapter focuses on the role of Danish architect Steen Eiler Rasmussen in American urban design pedagogy, both through his extensive lectures in the United States and classic books, such as *Experiencing Architecture*. Although sharing some of the modernist assumptions of Mumford and Giedion, Rasmussen developed a radically different understanding of subjective experience in relation to urban form. No longer tied to teleological notions of social or cultural unity, Rasmussen connected urban aesthetics to the material culture of everyday life and to practices connected to the ways in which inhabitants embed themselves into the urban environment through walking, play, or manipulating physical materials. In this sense, Rasmussen pioneered a more relativized and situated understanding of urban scale, perception and experience.

Chapter 4: Reinventing the Classical City in the Era of Urban Renewal: Christopher Tunnard

From a slightly younger generation of urban design theorists, Christopher Tunnard represents, in many ways, a conservative reaction against modernism as he sought to rehabilitate aspects of Renaissance humanism and classical urban design within the postwar city. As director of Yale's Program in City Planning in the 1950s, Tunnard attempted to synthesize an essentially pre-industrial understanding of architectural form and optical scale with the aesthetics of suburban highways and the unprecedented extension of urban boundaries, merging at their boundaries in what was dubbed 'megapolis.' At the same time, Tunnard's ideas remained rooted in an archaic and elitist understanding of the architect-planner as a unifying form maker.

Chapter 5: The Renaissance City from Street Picture to Cognitive Map: Kevin Lynch

Tunnard's contemporary at MIT, by contrast, represented a new synthesis between traditional understandings of perceptual experience and modern notions of psychological pluralism. Most famous for his 1960 book, *The Image of the City*, Lynch would revolutionize the understanding of the city in terms of subjective 'mental maps' developed by individuals through experience over time. This chapter investigates Lynch's use of the Italian city of Florence, with its historical, especially Renaissance associations with perceptual scale, as model for a flexible, pluralistic model for the postwar American city, in which perceptions and meanings are allowed to rise 'from below,' that is from individual experience rather than being theorized and imposed from above. In this sense, Lynch provides the final bridge to contemporary models of urban design although the problems and issues raised in that period still have not been resolved.

**Work to be undertaken in summer 2014:** Although I will already have drafted the three chapters in question by June 2014, there will still be numerous gaps in specific information on collaborators, the exact sequence of events, and the initial development of key ideas. Therefore, I propose to travel to the four relevant archives to fill in the remaining facts and double-check evidence. The four archives are: University of Pennsylvania Library Special Collections (Lewis Mumford papers); Yale University Archive (Christopher Tunnard papers); Avery Library, Columbia University (Henry Hope Reed papers); and the MIT Institute Archive (Kevin Lynch papers). The work will be assimilated into the chapters by August and submitted to the University of Pennsylvania press by September.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this application.

Sincerely,

  
Anthony Raynsford

Assistant Professor, Department of Art and Art History