

Mumford Gutkind Bookchin: The Emergence of Eco-decentralism

by Janet Biehl

In the 1950s the aging Rose Bookchin still lived in the old apartment in East Tremont, the Bronx neighborhood where she and her family had lived since 1920 and where her son Murray had grown up. Rose had been a diabetic for two decades and was nearly blind. She was incapable of giving herself daily insulin injections, so every day Murray took the Third Avenue El to East Tremont to administer them.

He would step onto the platform, and if he looked to the south, he could see over the tops of the buildings the trees of Crotona Park. Then down the stairs and onto the sidewalk, and he strode briskly past his old street-side haunts: the kosher butcher, the deli with pickles and whitefish and knishes, the old candy store, the dairy with its slabs of butter—the old familiar shops were still there. Most of the kids he'd known in YCL had moved away too, but their parents still lived here—the buildings were rent controlled, after all, and it suited them fine. The vacancy rate in East Tremont was less than one percent. Snatches of Yiddish in the streets came to his ears, as in the old days, a comforting sound as always. One difference: the farmers from New Jersey who'd brought their produce over the bridge into the Bronx—they didn't come here anymore. Their farmlands were paved over. No one was farming there or in Yonkers now.

It was early December 1952, and he headed to the four-story brick building on 175th Street, where he'd lived too back in the 1940s, before he got married. When he got to the apartment, his mother seemed upset. Earlier that week, she told him, one of her elderly neighbors, in a building nearby, had gone downstairs to get her mail and found a terrifying letter, on official New York City letterhead: one of the city authorities, it said, was planning to build a highway through East Tremont. The Cross Bronx Expressway. It was to have six lanes. The neighbor's apartment building was in the way, said the letter. The city was going to condemn it and tear it down. The neighbor had ninety days to leave. Signed Robert Moses.¹

And she wasn't the only one, Rose told Murray—others have been getting the letter too, Would she be next? Robert Moses was the city's unelected power broker, a veritable dictator of public works. For about fifteen years now, he had ripped up working-class neighborhoods to build highways, tunnels, and bridges—and now he had East Tremont in his cross-hairs, where the elderly residents could not put up a fight.

Thankfully Rose's own building was never threatened. But in the next years thousands of her neighbors lost their homes, irreplaceable to them. And every time Murray visited his mother, he could look eastward and see it coming closer, now a few blocks away, now a block: earth-moving machines and bulldozers.

¹ Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), p. 859. The description of the destruction of East Tremont is taken from Chapters 37 and 38, which reproduce the letter from Robert Moses. Murray did give his mother her insulin shot every day, but the details of his visit are my reconstruction.

But first came the blasting. East Tremont stood on solid rock hills, the same rolling topography that made Crotona Park so lovely; but a road has to be level, so now the construction crews were using dynamite to blow up the rock. The blasts shook the buildings. “Mortar and brick were jarred loose from one end of the neighborhood to the other,” wrote Moses’s biographer, Robert Caro. “As apartment houses settled or were pushed up as the earth beneath them heaved, huge gaping fissures began to appear in their walls and ceilings.” Then huge wrecking balls smashed into the walls, sending them crashing down into heaps of rubble.

Although Rose couldn’t see what was happening, she could hear the staccato jackhammers and the exploding dynamite. Over the ruins mammoth cranes lumbered, and then the bulldozers and trucks and earth-movers. Rock dust and grit from the blasting hung in the air and got in your pores; the windows couldn’t keep it out. “East Tremonters called it ‘fallout,’” says Caro. More neighbors fled. In the buildings they left behind, windows were boarded up, vandals grabbed whatever wasn’t nailed down and much that was, smashed mirrors and scattered shards of broken glass on the wooden floors. Then came rats and urine and vomit—and the wrecking ball.²

“Urban Renewal”

Welcome to the modern city. In 1945-46, once their soldiers returned home from Europe and the Pacific, Americans had turned their attention to domestic matters, and urban planners had turned theirs to the major cities. Mostly they found them to be crowded, unhealthy places, congested with tenements. That wasn’t suited to the American Century, the planners thought; modern times demanded modern cities. They were beguiled by the ideas of Le Corbusier, a Swiss architect of the International style, who made stripped-down buildings of glass and steel and concrete, and streamlined plazas. An archetypal example is the UN building, which Bookchin called a “faceless matchbox on its edge.”³ They were modern buildings for a modern America.

In 1949 Congress passed the Housing Act, which began a notorious “urban renewal” effort. The basic idea was to get rid of the old neighborhoods, by designating them blighted slums, then erecting modern buildings in their stead. Never mind that the old neighborhoods were actually densely settled havens for immigrants and working-class communities. Under urban renewal, these places were “renewed”—destroyed—and replaced them with functional, sterile towers. In the next years, where once-vital neighborhoods had been, monolithic high rises were built, separated by soulless, wide-open plazas. Working-class people, their homes gone, their community ties ruptured, were pushed into the towers and forced to make do.⁴

And now that people were getting around in automobiles, New York had to be remade on their behalf of the automobile. Robert Moses saw to it that it was.

² Caro, *Power Broker*, pp. 887, 860.

³ Bookchin interviewed by Mark Saunders in *Murray Bookchin Video Biography*, part 21, recorded May 1995, Burlington, online at <http://www.spectacle.co.uk>.

⁴ See Anthony Flint, *Wrestling with Moses: How Jane Jacobs Took On New York’s Master Builder and Transformed the American City* (New York: Random House, 2009).

The Medieval City

Bookchin's mentor and friend Josef Weber, a German expatriate who led a political group that Murray belonged to in the 1950s, never let anyone forget how much he hated New York. The cockroaches! The noise! Bookchin had always been able to say, *But look at East Tremont, with its neighborhood shops and its beautiful park and its tight-knit community. That's part of New York too.* And now it had been sacrificed. He must have been devastated. What was happening to cities anyway?

Contemplating the problem, he turned to a book by Lewis Mumford, written in 1938, called *The Culture of Cities*.⁵ It opened with a lyrical description of the small medieval European city. Mumford admired its urban form: it was the product of long, slow settlement, yet it was still small scale, with everything in walking distance. Its streets were irregular, its houses low-slung, its church spire soared—it was a delight to the eye. It had a central open space where people could meet, gossip, trade, pray, and politick—that is, its layout encouraged face-to-face encounters. Medieval life was communal and associational, its residents sharing common values that endowed their lives with significance. It was unexpectedly rural in character: it had lots of open green spaces. A wall constrained further growth, but just beyond was the open countryside.

Over the centuries, however, a new kind of city had grown up: the baroque, imperial city, a city of discipline and power. Instead of low-slung irregularities, this city's layout consisted of straight lines and visual axes, rigorous and geometric, inspired by the great mathematical and mechanical conquests of early modernity. It expressed the age of exploration and the rise of the nation-state. The baroque city was a creature of the national state, as strong kings centralized authority and created bureaucracies and standing armies.

History pushed "from medieval localism to baroque centralism."⁶ Obsessed with power and money, the baroque city submerged the small-scale, humane, medieval city. Thereafter urban history continued to fall, as civilization, corrupted by capitalism and authority, sank into chaos and moral confusion. Today's city, in Mumford's view, was an extension of the baroque city, the brutalizing metropolis.

The Athenian Polis

All Bookchin had to do was listen to the jackhammers to recognize the truth of this account. If the medieval city reminded him of East Tremont, the imperial city reminded him of Moses's New York. Mumford's narrative of decline fascinated him—why, it almost seemed dialectical, describing a past phenomenon and then the development of its opposite. On the subject of historical decline, Mumford invoked the Scottish biologist and urban planner Patrick Geddes, who had outlined a six-stage outline of city development, starting with Polis. The city of 1938, Mumford thought to his horror, was in the fourth stage, Megalopolis, and was poised to devolve into Tyrannopolis, then into Nekropolis, the city of the dead.

⁵ Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1938).

⁶ Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 77.

Another, more philosophical influence was Oswald Spengler, whose magnum opus, *The Decline of the West*, compared historical processes to a cycle of organic growth and decay.

A dialectician like Bookchin could not be satisfied with Mumford's Spenglerian framework, so he turned as well to the teachers he most trusted. What had Marx and Engels thought about cities? He was no longer a Marxist, but they had been his intellectual masters for two decades. He pored over their writings on agriculture, on food production, on rural life—and several passages leaped off the pages. In *Capital*, Marx had said that “the whole economic history of society can be summed up” in the development of “the antithesis between town and country.”⁷ A startling remark, but one Bookchin pondered. And Engels had written that the town-country antithesis had become “a direct necessity” for industrial and agricultural production.⁸ It was tied to capitalism.

Inspired both by Mumford and by Marx and Engels, Bookchin set out develop his own narrative of urban history, which he called “The Limits of the City.” His narrative made the town-country dynamic central and described a decline from a benign past to a miserable. Unlike Mumford, he first showed a time when, in effect, the countryside had dominated the city: the ancient Aztec civilization of Tenochtitlan. After all, rural had long proceeded urban. Tenochtitlan had been merely an extension of the surrounding agricultural society, as were ancient cities in Egypt and Mesopotamia.

Then after the first millennium BC a new town-country balance—with a new agrarian system and a new mode of urban life—emerged. “All cities constitute an antithesis to the land,” he noted dialectically. “They are ... a germ of negation in the agrarian community.” That is, the change was immanent: “rural life summons forth the city from its own inner development.” With the cities of ancient Attica, the urban is no longer a mere supplement to the countryside: “Urban life now exists as an end in itself” and is balanced with the countryside.⁹

The ancient Athenian polis was as central for Bookchin as the medieval city had been to Mumford, and holds a comparable place in his narrative. Bookchin too celebrates a moment in the distant past, in which town and country were integrated. He too lingers over the description. The urban-rural balance, he wrote, was responsible for the remarkable character of the Athenians, “men of strong character who ... had firm ties to the soil and were independent in their economic position. Labor and land, town and country, men and society, were joined in a common destiny.” That balance made possible the city's astounding political culture, which was of supreme interest to Bookchin: in Athens,

⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1906), Vol. 1, p. 387.

⁸ See Frederick Engels, *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science (Anti-Dühring)* (New York: International Publishers, 1939), p. 323.

⁹ Murray Bookchin, *The Limits of the City* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 20, 6, 23. Bookchin's original long manuscript “The Limits of the City,” written in 1959-60, is no longer available. A truncated version was published in *Contemporary Issues* in 1960, but only with the book *The Limits of the City* was the full article published, as the first chapters of the book. It's unclear which material there dates from 1960 and which from 1974, and how much the old material was revised. I take Murray at his word that the first chapters of the 1974 book are more or less what he wrote in 1959-60.

he exulted, “civic activity involves and exceptionally high degree of public participation. All the policy decisions of the polis are formulated directly by a popular assembly.”¹⁰

Certain aspects of the ancient polis continued into the medieval commune, notably its spirit of independence, its focus on handcrafts, and its “self-containment.” Bookchin admired the medieval city too, although less than Mumford, likely because of its religiously sanctioned hierarchical class structure. But it did exist, as Mumford had pointed out, in balance with the countryside. People fashioned objects with their hands and traded them locally for objects that they needed. The commune, as Bookchin called the medieval city, provided a deep sense of community, the comfort of sociality and human scale.¹¹

If the villain of Mumford’s piece was the baroque city, the villain of Bookchin’s was the bourgeois city, the city of capitalist society. That society is out of balance with nature; the city, far from being an extension of the rural, now dominates the rural. At the same time the polis’s associational life is gone. “In bourgeois society the community dissolves into competing monads and is pervaded by spiritual mediocrity as the material being of man is rendered enslaved, insecure, and one-sided.”¹²

What caused the change in town-country balance? The driving force was the “commodity relationship,” a concept derived from Marx.

The medieval city had not been much concerned with commodities: it had produced simple goods to meet basic needs, allocating some on the side for trade. The guilds regulated economic activity. Individuals were concerned not with profit but with subsistence and pride of workmanship. But the growth of international trade undermined this situation: the products of workmanship became objects of exchange. Commodity relations thereafter subverted the fabric of European feudalism, undermining traditional social relations in town and country alike. Eventually almost every aspect of the productive process, including labor power, became a commodity. Trade and capital accumulation became ends in themselves. “Once the exchange process became widespread enough, it simply engulfed the older order of relationships,” Bookchin wrote. “Exchange ... demolished the self-contained domestic economy of the manor. From a marginal source of goods and services, the market moved to the center of economic life.”¹³

The bourgeois city was steeped in capitalism—in industry, finance and manufacturing. Here the commodity “mediates all human relations, ... ‘unites’ society in a cash nexus and minute division of labor.” At the same time it “separates man from the instruments of production, labor from creativity, object, from subject, and eventually man from man.”¹⁴ Midtown Manhattan was the workplace of millions, a staggering workforce in a few square miles of stone, glass, and concrete. The bourgeois city was a mere workplace, “its structural form and its social purpose” modeled on the factory. The factory takes over the city, negating its personal and cultural sides and transforming it “into a commercial and industrial enterprise.” It exaggerates the city’s economic functions “to the point of urban

¹⁰ Bookchin, *Limits of the City*, pp. 27-28, 24.

¹¹ Bookchin, *Limits of the City*, p. 39.

¹² Bookchin, *Limits of the City*, pp. 27-28.

¹³ Bookchin, *Limits of the City*, pp. 41-43.

¹⁴ Bookchin, *Limits of the City*, pp. 27-28.

pathology." In the megalopolis, "it matters little whether the city is ugly, whether it debases men, whether it is aesthetically, spiritually, or even physically habitable. What counts is whether economic operations in the city are profitable."¹⁵

Pathologies of the Metropolis

In *The Culture of Cities* Mumford described the pathologies of the megalopolis in some detail. It has grown fantastically—so much so that it has become too congested to carry out civic functions. The city of 1938 had swallowed up nearby towns and spread uncontrollably into the countryside, replacing fields and forests with buildings and streets, yet it could not be more cut off from nature. It had a centralized administration, like the baroque city, but no plan or purpose other than to enhance the profits of wealth-seeking capitalists. Bureaucracy reigned. The overcrowded subways were so dehumanizing that Mumford actually welcomed the automobile as a way to escape.

Twenty-two years later Bookchin thought Mumford's diagnosis was valid—it had to be deepened and brought up to date. He tried to do that in "The Limits of the City" (1959-60) and in a book he started writing in 1960, tentatively titled *The Rational Society*. The megalopolis of 1960 was even larger than that of 1938 and its relentless growth now congested the city to the point of dysfunction. Housing was in short supply and shoddily constructed; education was "at the point of moral and administrative breakdown."¹⁶ Mainstream commentators were even writing about it all now. And the subways were still overcrowded and unreliable.

The city-induced psychological ills had become much worse. Office work consisted of overspecialized, repetitive tasks; those who performed them best were those who suppressed their own resourcefulness, removing "all the spiritual well-springs of imagination and thought." They relied on habit, turning themselves in effect into machines. The monotony and tedium caused psychological and even physical strain—or *stress*, a word that had recently entered the sociological vocabulary.¹⁷

Outside the workplace, civic and social life had deteriorated. The urban environment eroded "mutual aid, simple human hospitality and decency." It isolated urban dwellers, leaving them "more isolated" than their "ancestors were in the countryside." In subways and buses, at jobs or in diners, people had become mutually indifferent. Lost in the asphalt jungle, they were apathetic toward civic issues, political creatures "without a polis." Domestic life suffered too, as family members were too exhausted to nourish one another; lacking individuality and sympathy, they had "nothing to give or take." The megalopolis had become "a mere aggregate" of dispirited people "scattered among cold, featureless structures."¹⁸

¹⁵ Lewis Herber (pseud. for Murray Bookchin), "The Limits of the City," *Contemporary Issues* 39 (Aug.-Sept. 1960), pp. 205, 198.

¹⁶ Bookchin, *Limits of the City*, p. 67.

¹⁷ Herber, "Limits of the City," p. 210

¹⁸ Herber, "Limits of the City," pp. 208-210, 197; Murray Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment* (1962; reprint New York: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 75, 244.

Other psychological assaults had worsened too. The urban environment had become nerve-wracking. Noise invaded sleep. A constant barrage of advertising assailed the senses, with crude and elemental messages designed to shock the viewer into a response. Nerves become overly sensitive and raw. The city dweller could find no relief or ease in parks, which were congested and crime-ridden.

The automobile had indeed become a useful tool for escaping the city—it allowed many to vacation elsewhere or move to the new suburbs. But as Mumford had not foreseen, the automobile had become an enormous problem. Within the city limits, it was ubiquitous, as traffic glutted the streets. The car's needs were becoming dominant over human needs. When an expressway (like the Cross Bronx) crossed a community, he wrote, pedestrians, homes, and shops "shrink to mere byproducts of the highway and motor car," New Yorkers had to yield "residential space, parks, avenues, and air to a steel vehicle that looks more like a missile than a means of human transportation."¹⁹

The stress was harmful not only to people's mental health but their physical health. "If stress is too severe, the resistance and life span of the organism are drastically reduced."²⁰ Chronic illness could result.

Back in the 1870s Engels had warned that the separation of town and country threatened "public health" and was "poisoning . . . the air, water and land."²¹ Almost a century later environmental damage finally became an issue, and Bookchin raised the alarm. The modern city was toxic, physically dangerous because of concentrated air and water pollution, which he documented in detail in the *Rational Society* manuscript. Even more innovatively, he pointed to the disorders caused by town-country separation. Separated from the town, agriculture becomes industrialized and a profit-making enterprise. In the name of efficiency and cost cutting, industrialized agriculture becomes large scale, and instead of cultivating a diversity of crops to meet local needs, it cultivates a single crop that it can put on the market. That is, it prefers—and in the name of competition even demands—a monoculture. But monocultures (as opposed to crop diversity) are less resistant to insect infestations: all it takes is one bug to destroy a whole field. So agricultural capitalists use chemicals to ward off pests. And monocultures (as opposed to crop rotation) degrades and erodes soil, so agricultural capitalists introduce more chemicals to replenish it: fertilizers. And since the crops are raised far from where people will consume them as food, agricultural capitalists have to ship them over long distances, then store them. To keep them from deteriorating, still another set of chemicals is introduced: chemical preservatives. And if the food does deteriorate over time, still more chemicals can restore their appearance: food colorings. All these chemicals could potentially show up in food.²²

¹⁹ Herber, "Limits of the City," pp. 204-5.

²⁰ Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment*, p. 75.

²¹ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 323.

²² Lewis Herber (pseud. for Murray Bookchin), "The Problem of Chemicals in Food," *Contemporary Issues* 12 (Jun.-Aug. 1952), pp. 206-41; and Lewis Herber (pseud. for Murray Bookchin), "A Follow-up on the Problem of Chemicals in Food," *Contemporary Issues* 6, no. 21 (Jan-Feb. 1955), p. 51-57; and Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment*, pp. 211-16.

Here Bookchin's critique of the use of chemicals in food converged with his urban critique: the use of pesticides, fertilizers, preservatives, and coloring agents could all be traced back to a specific pattern of settlement. "As long as cities are separated from the countryside," he wrote, food "will necessarily include deleterious chemicals to meet problems of storage, transportation, and mass manufacture—not to mention profit." Moreover, as Bookchin had documented in 1952, these chemicals were carcinogenic in humans.²³ The separation of town and country was turning out to be harmful to human survival.

Bursting the Fetters

Back in 1938, Mumford had thought that the megalopolitan city could get no worse: if it continued, he wrote, it would destroy itself. In a section of *The Culture of Cities* called "A Brief Outline of Hell," he called the metropolis "systematic barbarism" and asserted that it represents "the maximum possible assault on the processes of civilization." Our civilization, he continued, will soon see "phenomena of the end." The only question remaining is "whether disintegration must be complete before a fresh start is made."²⁴

What would finally push the city over the cliff? For Mumford, the trigger would be financial. As the city became ever more congested with people, land values would soar. High land values would magnify the cost of doing business; transportation and storage would become too expensive. Growth itself thus "economically weakens" the megalopolis, and after a certain point "it cannot evade or pass on elsewhere the burden of its own magnified expenses." Yet even as it lives beyond its income, still more new residents arrive, packing into old neighborhoods or creating new ones. But the city cannot afford to provide them with services. The growth of the city, Mumford observed, depletes it. Credit is no longer available, the city can't pay its bills, and bankruptcy threatens. The city's food supply may be endangered. People vote with their feet and move to the countryside, or to smaller cities. "How quickly the ornate central offices empty: how inessential the giddy restaurants and the fifteen-room apartments suddenly become."²⁵

Twenty-two years later, many urban dwellers had indeed moved to the suburbs, but as Bookchin saw, the financial crisis had not come, the megalopolis had not collapsed, and civilization persisted. But the collapse Mumford predicted, he was sure, had merely been delayed. The very fact that "millions of people ... have picked up their belongings and left" for the suburbs" proved that "megalopolitan life is breaking down—psychically, economically, and biologically." All the problems were still present and had worsened, and new ones had been added. Bookchin reaffirmed that the megalopolis had reached its limits: it cannot be "significantly improved or changed." Indeed, "the possibilities of the city are exhausted," he affirmed. "They can never be revitalized again."²⁶

As a student of Hegel, the concept of limits had particular meaning to Bookchin. In Hegelian philosophy, a thing that develops—a growth process, a historical process—inevitably encounters some kind of limit (*Grenze*) that prevents it from continuing to grow as it was. But the development as a whole must continue moving forward, and in order for

²³ Herber, "A Follow-up," p. 57; Herber, "Problem of Chemicals in Food," pp. 235-38.

²⁴ Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, pp. 272-79.

²⁵ Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, pp. 272-79.

²⁶ Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment*, p. 238; Herber, "Limits of the City," p. 215.

it to do so, the process must get over and beyond its limits. It can do so only when it senses that its deeper nature is involved in another *possible* something, some larger whole that extends further than its own limits, that must actualize its own nature; in the light of that potentiality, limits become fetters and must be burst.²⁷ For Bookchin (and Mumford surely agreed), the developing process was the city; but the larger whole is civilization; in order for humanity to become fully civilized, the urban process must burst the fetter that the megalopolis had become.

The Expressway Completed

In 1960, as Murray was writing on these subjects, Robert Moses's construction crews completed the East Tremont section of the Cross Bronx Expressway. Once it was built, cars poured into the highway, belching exhaust fumes into the air, where they entered the windows of the three thousand apartments overlooking it. The elderly Jewish immigrants choked and gagged. All day and all night the automobiles roared, punctuated by diesel tractor-trailers shifting gears, making sleep impossible. "Talk to people who live in the 3000 apartments next to the Cross Bronx Expressway," said Caro, "and one hears applied to that noise, over and over again, a single adjective: 'unbearable.'"²⁸

Area residents had reached their limits and moved out, to their children's homes, wherever they could find a place. The storekeepers who had provided them with whitefish and horseradish, with shoes and cigars, could no longer find buyers; they boarded up their storefronts and joined the exodus. In these Bronx buildings that had once offered clean, modern living spaces for immigrants fleeing the Lower East Side tenements, windows were broken; graffiti was scrawled; pipes were ripped out; staircases were broken. By 1965 the buildings were ravaged hulks.

The Cross Bronx Expressway destroyed the Bronx utopia of Bookchin's childhood. Rose's last years there, during construction, must have been wretched, but she did not endure the roar of traffic for long: she died in 1961, soon after the highway was completed. She had come a long way from her girlhood in the rutted dirt roads of Bessarabia (present-day Moldova). Her son changed the title of the book he was working on: instead of *The Rational Society*, it would be *Our Synthetic Environment*. In the acknowledgments, he thanked Lewis Mumford "for reading my discussion of urban life."²⁹ And upon its publication in 1962, he dedicated it to Rose.

Garden Cities

What would happen after the modern metropolis burst its fetters? Would it collapse into rubble and debris, like those East Tremont buildings? Not necessarily, in Mumford's view: in *The Culture of Cities* he offered a way out. Following the first movement (the medieval city) and the second (the baroque city) could come, possibly, a third: regeneration. "While

²⁷ Sidney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx* (New York: Humanities Press), pp. 69-70; I've paraphrased Hook's explanation of this concept. Murray greatly admired this book and made frequent use of it. Marxism, which grounded itself in Hegelian philosophy, was concerned to determine the limits to the proletariat's immiseration and to the bourgeoisie's toleration for the declining rate of profit.

²⁸ Caro, *Power Broker*, pp. 889ff.

²⁹ Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment*, p. xvii.

there is life, there is the possibility of counter-movement, fresh growth," he affirmed spiritedly. It would take a great effort and would "go against the basic pattern of the metropolitan economy," but in the name of civilization, the megalopolis would have to be regenerated.³⁰

Mumford's regeneration would integrate rural and urban, as in the medieval city, but in modern terms. Two urban planners in Great Britain, writing at the turn of the twentieth century, influenced Mumford's thinking along these lines. In the wake of the Industrial Revolution, Ebenezer Howard and Patrick Geddes too had wanted to rebalance cities, industries, and natural regions. Another influence was the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin, whose book *Fields, Factories, and Workshops* he mentions respectfully but only in passing.³¹

The British-born Howard had had the idea that the internal colonization of a country could be done deliberately. Why should we leave the location of cities to chance or to the past? he asked. Why should we not consciously found new cities, in the name of civilization and civic life? He proposed the conscious creation of Garden Cities—small-scale communities that were situated outside the urban core, surrounded by swaths of open countryside dedicated to agriculture, recreation, and other rural occupations. A Garden City's population would be limited to 30,000; the town would encompass both residences and workplaces. "Town and country," wrote Howard, "must be married, and out of this union will spring a new hope, a new life, a new civilization."³² He proposed this scheme in 1898, and in 1903-04 a garden city built after Howard's outline, called Letchworth, was created in Hertfordshire, and in 1920 a second, Welwyn, nearby.

A few years after Howard, Patrick Geddes was among the first to undertake "a thoroughgoing civic survey as a preliminary to town planning"; fascinated by biology, he included in his survey of Edinburgh something rather unorthodox for urban planning: "the geographic setting, the climatic and meteorological facts, the economic processes, the historic heritage." Geddes elevated these environmental aspects to "matters of first importance" and thereby "made the necessary passage from the civic survey to the regional survey."³³

Following Howard, Mumford too proposed new cities that would integrate the natural environment into urban life, with greenbelts and parklands and dispersed populations. Following Geddes, he wrote that regions, not cities, had to be the focus of planning, to incorporate the rural: "To be built successfully, the garden city should be the product of a regional authority, with a wider scope of action than the municipality."³⁴ In the 1920s he and like-minded thinkers, planners, architects had formed the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA), which had created several experimental communities to demonstrate the alternative.

³⁰ Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, pp. 295-96.

³¹ Murray Bookchin absorbed Kropotkin's ideas through Mumford. Not until the late 1960s or early 1970s would he read Kropotkin's books.

³² Quoted in Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 396.

³³ Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 376. Mumford, by the way, labeled Geddes an "ecological sociologist."

³⁴ Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 401.

It would be difficult to “break up old centers of congestion” and “create new centers of industrial and civic life,” Mumford wrote, but it “is perhaps the most pressing task of our civilization.”³⁵ Curiously, he offered scant political strategy for how to accomplish this agenda and achieve the regionalist republic. He seems to have hoped that he and the RPAA could change the hearts and minds of individual people, who would vote with their feet by leaving the city.

Bookchin’s Eco-decentralist Solution

Mumford was no dialectician, but he must have sounded something like one to Bookchin when he wrote in 1956 that he wanted to reestablish “the ecological balance that originally prevailed between city and country in the primitive stages of urbanization,” but “in a more complex unity, with a full use of the resources of modern science and techniques.”³⁶ In some sense the three-part structure of *The Culture of Cities* resembled a Hegelian developmental process: a thesis (medieval city) and antithesis (baroque city and metropolis), resulting in a synthesis (the Garden City in the region).

In any case, Bookchin borrowed the three-movement format. Having described the Athenian polis and the bourgeois city, he too proposed a regeneration. The megalopolis would be broken up, not by being regionalized but by being decentralized. Engels provided validation for this aim, having said that to “fuse” town and country one must have “as uniform a distribution as possible of the population over the whole country.” As Bookchin read him, Engels had meant to call for “the physical decentralization of the cities.”³⁷

Decentralizing, according to Bookchin, would mean creating small cities or towns that were humanistic in scale and appearance. They would be integrated with the surrounding landscape and embedded in an agricultural matrix. Their inhabitants would have easy access to the countryside and farmland, where they could work on raising crops and savor recreation. Decentralization could thereby achieve a “lasting equilibrium” between humanity and nature.³⁸

The noise of traffic, the isolation and demoralization of city life—all would be remedied in these well-balanced and rounded communities. One could sleep at night. Their smallness of scale would render the automobile less necessary if not entirely redundant. Significantly, the production of food would no longer require chemicals. In the decentralized society’s small-scale fields, crops would be raised not for the larger market but for local needs; this “agricultural and biological diversity” would obviate the need for

³⁵ Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, pp. 346, 298.

³⁶ Lewis Mumford, “The Natural History of Urbanization,” in William L. Thomas, Jr., *Man’s Role in Changing the Face of the Earth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 397. This article was particularly fascinating to Bookchin, according to Wayne Hayes, interview by Janet Biehl, August 2009.

³⁷ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 323; Frederick Engels, *The Housing Question* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), p. 49, quoted in Bookchin, *Limits of the City*, p. 114n; and Murray Bookchin, “Listen, Marxist!” in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (San Francisco: Ramparts Press, 1971), p. 209.

³⁸ Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment*, pp. 242-43.

pesticides; crops would be rotated, thereby avoiding chemical fertilizers; and since the distance between farm and marketplace would be small, preservatives would have no place. We could get the poisons out of our food.³⁹

Small farms would make possible “an intimacy between the farmer and the land” and help replace economic interests with “a sense of social responsibility.” Production would be local and guided by human needs, not by artificially contrived wants. The baleful commodity relationship could come to an end. People would be released from the tensions of competitive society: insecurities, greed, avarice, and venality. Neither coercion nor the state would be necessary. Decentralized communities would thus open “magnificent vistas for individual and social development.”⁴⁰

Decentralization seemed an overwhelmingly difficult objective, and many would say it was impossible; as much as Mumford, Bookchin had to face this problem. But he had an original answer: modern technology, innovations in communication and transportation, had actually made it possible. “Automobiles, aircraft, electric power, and electronic devices have eliminated nearly all the problems of transportation, communication, and social isolation that burdened man in past eras,” he wrote. “We can now communicate with one another over a distance of thousands of miles in a matter of seconds.” He was thinking of the telephone, not the Internet. “And we can travel to the most remote areas of the world in a few hours. The obstacles created by space and time are essentially gone.” The objection that decentralization was impossible, then, might have been accurate sometime in the past, but no longer.⁴¹

As for manufacturing, that too could be decentralized: technology was making thinkable the breakup of giant factories. Production that made use of automation, miniaturization, and electronics could be scaled down to a smaller scale: “The smoky steel town, for example, is an anachronism. Excellent steel can be made and rolled with installations that occupy about two or three city blocks.” Versatile and compact machines “lend themselves to a large variety of manufacturing and finishing operations.” Once the decentralized community had its small-scale miniaturized, automated factory, people would be left to do finishing and handcraft work. Such quality production would be much more satisfying than the routines of office work. Specialists would be replaced by rounded human beings, would make all the political decisions for their own small communities.⁴²

In another genuine innovation, Bookchin proposed that decentralization would go hand in hand with the use of new sources of energy. Instead of fossil fuels and nuclear power, the decentralized community could “make maximum use of its own energy resources, such as wind power, solar energy, and hydroelectric power.” Using these sources would bring elements of nature into the social world, contributing to a revolutionary renewal of human ties to the planet.⁴³

Gutkind's Decentralism

³⁹ Herber, “Problem of Chemicals in Food”; Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment*, pp. 237-45.

⁴⁰ Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment*, p. 215; Herber, “Follow-up,” p. 56.

⁴¹ Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment*, pp. 242-43.

⁴² Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment*, pp. 242-43.

⁴³ Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment*, pp. 242-43.

Bookchin's most important influence, in envisioning "decentralized balanced communities, built on a human scale, which would combine the cultural advantages of the city with the rural qualities of the village," was Mumford.⁴⁴ But apart from Mumford, the thinker who most influenced his thinking, I believe, was a little-known German named Erwin Anton Gutkind.

Gutkind, born in 1886, was trained as an architect and left Germany in April 1933 to live in Paris, then in London, where he became involved in city planning. In 1945 he returned to his native Berlin as a member of the Control Commission that governed the British Zone; he was charged with helping to reconstruct the city but quit when he found the operation too bureaucratic. He dedicated himself to writing books, then was hired by the University of Pennsylvania, where he taught in the Graduate School of Fine Arts until his death in 1968.

Like Mumford and Bookchin, Gutkind wrote narratives of urban decline and regeneration, which by now are familiar to our ears, in two books: *Community and Environment* (1954) and *The Twilight of Cities* (1962).⁴⁵ Preferring small-scale communities that balanced urban and rural, he traced the city in history from the polis to the medieval town through the fortress towns of the Renaissance and the residential towns of the absolute prince. The Industrial revolution brought "the fallacious belief in progress and in the promethean power of technology," whereupon towns expanded into cities that subordinated the countryside. People "began to plunder the riches of the earth," and capitalism "swept away all limitations." The present-day megalopolis is "at best it is an association of different classes of society on an economic basis, at worst an agglomeration of human atoms." Conforming to "the rationally conceived State," it venerates efficiency, and is "the city of the 'practical' and 'technically minded' drawing-board architect and road builder." But as such it "enforces a sterile specialization and conformity on its citizens."⁴⁶

Gutkind called for decentralization, by which he meant "the physical decentralization of the cities and ... the cultural decentralization of fossilized institutions. He criticized the Garden City movement for its willingness to leave the central city intact and create satellites; he wanted to eliminate the central city and disperse settlement over a broad area. Industrial production would be split up "in publicly owned or cooperative groups"; indeed, his decentralization process would redistribute practically all aspects of life: "homes, work, distribution, and circulation, leisure and recreation, social intercourse, and cultural stimulation."⁴⁷

Gutkind's new communities, "distributed organically over the country," would be fairly equal in size, "without the domineering preponderance of a 'happy few' big cities to the disadvantage of all the others." Small in scale and dense in structure, they would be

⁴⁴ Lewis Herber (pseud. for Murray Bookchin), *Crisis in Our Cities* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 188.

⁴⁵ E. A. Gutkind, *Community and Environment: A Discourse on Social Ecology* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954); and *The Twilight of Cities* (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

⁴⁶ Gutkind, *Community and Environment*, pp. 55, 56, 66; *Twilight of Cities*, 42, 43, 48, 81.

⁴⁷ Gutkind, *Community and Environment*, p. 81; *Twilight of Cities*, pp. 42, 149, 150.

imbued with “mutual aid and cooperation” and would rejuvenate humanity, giving rise to “an inspiring diversity and a new élan vital.”⁴⁸

Unlike Mumford, Gutkind was an explicit antistatist, considering “the emergence of communities in a stateless world” to be “the highest ideal which we can discern at present.” He gave his ideas a name, “Social Ecology,” to stress “the indivisibility of man’s interaction with his environment.” Social ecology as a discipline, he wrote, can provide “a stereoscopic view of man in his relationship to the environment.” Bookchin, also an antistatist, admired Gutkind’s “masterful discussion on community,” as well as the name “social ecology,” which he borrowed for his own ideas. In the next decades, authoring twenty-odd books and numerous articles, Bookchin would develop social ecology into a complex and sophisticated set of ideas, giving it dimensions that had been lacking in both Mumford and Gutkind. Suffice it to say here that even as he made the name “social ecology” famous, he had the integrity to credit Gutkind for originating it.⁴⁹

The Limits of Fossil Fuels

But Gutkind had no suggestions as to how decentralization would come about. The cities and the state, “the present structure of settlement,” he says vaguely, would wither away: “the senseless conglomerations of our cities and the retarding isolation of the countryside will give way to a more even distribution of population.” Perhaps one reason for his vagueness was the fact that it took the Second World War to render his native Berlin suitable for reconstruction. In any case, for whatever reason, Gutkind regarded “the twilight of cities” as “a fact.”⁵⁰

Bookchin shared Mumford’s basic belief that people would have to change their hearts and minds, and had absorbed from his mentor Weber a basic belief that once people were presented with a rational idea, they see that it was right, drop their old ideas, and embrace it. On some level he believed that when city dwellers came to the end of their rope, when the insults to their mental and physical health became too great, and when they learned more about decentralization as an alternative, they would do what the proletariat hadn’t done: they would rise up against the pernicious society and demand a humane one.

In a 1954 article Bookchin described the molecular process by which change could happen. “In the anonymity of daily life” people “slowly collect their experiences, quietly drawing their own bitter conclusions.” As they do, “apathy shades from cold indifference into unmistakable hostility.” Thereupon “the vast basin of discontent fills, its waters grow dark with the stirrings in the deep below.” But “precisely when all the elements in the official chorus can be detected, ... when the crescendo has finally been reached—at just this point, the first snap ... announces the irrevocable separation of the people from the noisy reaction ... The masses, long disillusioned and bitter, finally break away, and with

⁴⁸ Gutkind, *Twilight of Cities*, p. 183; *Community and Environment*, p. 76.

⁴⁹ Gutkind, *Community and Environment*, pp. 81, 47, 50. Note that the subtitle of this book is *A Discourse on Social Ecology*. See Bookchin, “The Concept of Ecotechnologies and Ecommunities,” in *Toward an Ecological Society* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1980), p. 108.

⁵⁰ Gutkind, *Community and Environment*, p. 75; *Twilight of Cities*.

unerring instinct find their own, separate direction.”⁵¹

The process of change would inevitably be political, involving movements and organizations; but he would not address that issue till later in his life. For now, he would say that deciding to reconstruct society along new lines would require solidarity. Once the new society was created, people would need a liberatory means of governance. Face-to-face democracy, deriving from the Athenian polis but updated for modern society and without its socially regressive features (sexism, slavery), would be the political expression of the decentralized society.

But no matter how rational people were, no matter how discontented, something material would be needed to get them started. Neither propaganda nor coercion, Bookchin wrote, “will ever supplant the daily pressure of material interests; no inflation of personalities, however cozy the chats or demagogic the oratory, can prevail against the need for bread, cheese and material security.”⁵² Nor, for that matter, will concerns for health.

As a young Marxist, Bookchin had absorbed the lesson that technology drives social change (in that case, driving the proletariat to revolution). Was there a technological imperative for decentralization?

In his 1964 book *Crisis in Our Cities*, Bookchin thought he’d found one, or at least had come as close as humanly possible. It concerned the issue of energy issue. Here is the argument.

Fossil fuels are essential to the megalopolis: “The modern city depends upon coal and oil as its principal sources of energy.” Fossil fuels are appropriate for the larger scales of production and consumption: “They are used most economically in immense power plants, in soaring multiple dwellings, and in large industrial and commercial enterprises.” Fossil fuels are thus intimately intertwined with the megalopolis, with urban gigantism—they promote and depend on each other, like evil twins. “If for no other reason than the demands and possibilities of this [fossil fuel] technology, cities tend to reach immense proportions and merge into sprawling urban belts.”⁵³

But fossil fuels have no future—they are, to be Hegelian about it, “historically limited”—because they pollute air and water and damage human health. Moreover, they are responsible for what would later be called global warming. Bookchin wrote presciently in 1964:

During the past one hundred years, [people have] contributed 260 billion tons, or 13 percent more of the gas [carbon dioxide] to the earth’s atmosphere. This blanket of carbon dioxide tends to raise the atmosphere’s temperature by intercepting heat waves going from the earth into outer space. ... Theoretically, after several centuries of fossil-fuel combustion, the increased heat of the atmosphere could even melt the polar ice caps of the earth and lead to the

⁵¹ Robert Keller (pseud. for Murray Bookchin), “Year One of the Eisenhower Crusade,” *Contemporary Issues* 18 (Jun.-Jul. 1954), p. 110.

⁵² Keller, “Year One of the Eisenhower Crusade,” p. 110.

⁵³ Herber, *Crisis in Our Cities*, p. 186.

inundation [sic] of the continents with sea water. Remote as such a deluge may seem today, it is symbolic of the long-range catastrophic effects of our irrational civilization on the balance of nature.⁵⁴

In other words, if we continue to use fossil fuels we face catastrophe. If our civilization is to avoid that fate, “if an industrial civilization is to survive,” humanity must find a replacement for fossil fuels, must “develop entirely new sources of energy.”⁵⁵ Bookchin ruled out nuclear fuels as too dangerous, producing radioactive wastes. The only real solution was to turn to solar, wind, and tidal energy.

Mumford had written a bit about renewable energy, speculatively, in his 1933 *Technics and Civilization*, and Bookchin too had mentioned them in his pre-1964 writings, but now he elevated their importance. “Experimental turbines, solar reflectors and mirrors, heat exchangers, and thermo-electric devices,” he wrote, “could harness these forces.” He called for “parabolic collectors that concentrate and build up the heat in sunlight” and explained their design and functioning. These “revolutionary lines of technological innovation . . . hold the promise of a lasting balance between man and the natural world.” From “the heat of the sun, the fury of the winds, the surge of the tides,” humankind “could draw inexhaustible quantities of energy without impairing the environment.”⁵⁶

Why role do these technologies—which Bookchin would later call ecotechnics—play in decentralization? Their smallness of scale makes them appropriate, of course, for a small-scale society. But the crucial point was that these technologies are unusable a mass scale. Solar and wind power, he wrote, simply could not supply “the large blocks of energy needed to sustain densely concentrated populations and highly centralized industries.” Large cities are based “on huge packages of fuel—mountains of coal and veritable oceans of petroleum. By contrast, solar, wind and tidal energy can reach us mainly in small packets.” They would have to be used “locally and in conjunction with each other” to “meet all the power needs of small communities.” If we were to turn to them—and we had to—then we would have to change our society in order to accommodate them and make them practical.⁵⁷

Bookchin also called for a shift from “gasoline-fueled motor vehicles “ to “quieter, more efficient, and certainly cleaner electric cars” because they too would place us “on the brink of a new urban revolution.” After all, he said a few years later, electric cars “are not feasible for long-distance driving,” but “they do make sense in small communities; people can be transported very efficiently and effectively and in a nonpolluting way for distances of 80 miles, local use. Here one sees that a transport system can be developed that is most efficient in a decentralized society.”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Herber, *Crisis in Our Cities*, p. 187.

⁵⁵ Herber, *Crisis in Our Cities*, p. 186.

⁵⁶ Herber, *Crisis In Our Cities*, pp. 188-89.

⁵⁷ Murray Bookchin, “Towards a Liberatory Technology” (1965), in *Post Scarcity Anarchism*, pp. 128-29; Herber, *Crisis in Our Cities*, pp. 194-95.

⁵⁸ Herber, *Crisis in Our Cities*, pp. 194-95; Bookchin, “Social Anarchism,” Great Atlantic Radio Conspiracy, audiocassette tape, c. 1972.

At least until 1976 he continued in this vein. "It is doubtful," he wrote that year, "if the downtown districts of large cities could be lighted by solar energy or wind power. ... In a highly centralized society based on densely populated areas, we would require energy in such massive and concentrated quantities" that ecotechnics "would seem irrelevant, if not utterly utopian." Yet "our sources of fossil fuels are limited and nuclear alternatives open the prospect of ecological disaster." One of the central meanings of *social ecology* was that "increasingly we must think of energy not merely in terms of eco-techniques but in the social context."⁵⁹

The Limits of Defining Limits

Sadly, these ideas got little attention. *Our Synthetic Environment* and *Crisis in Our Cities* received a few reviews that appreciated the problems he raised but regarded his proposed solutions as impractical.

In the next decades, the city eluded, Houdini-like, the limits that both Bookchin and Mumford thought had shackled it. Far from bursting their fetters and falling into perdition, cities have grown immensely: Megalopolis has become, not Nekropolis, but Megacity. Defined as conurbations of at least 10 million inhabitants each, megacities now dot the planet, from Mumbai to Tokyo, from New York to Shanghai. Town and country are ever more separated; congestion is even more extreme; agriculture has become more industrialized; soil degradation and deforestation are widespread.

Limits are harder to identify than social theorists may suppose. (Marxists discovered that point, much to their dismay, when it came to proletarian revolution.) Air pollution and water pollution have only gotten worse; to breathe the air in many megacities (as well as smaller ones) is to choke, and some two billion people are now at risk of not having clean drinking water. People have displayed more tolerance for assaults on their health than Bookchin expected.

But then, he was not alone in predicting the end of the giant city: Engels thought the separation of town and country had reached "its extreme point" in the 1870s,⁶⁰ while Mumford thought that the city of 1938 was the end of the line. Limits are subjective, and tolerance of hardship varies from person to person. Urban decline is often gradual, allowing people to accommodate themselves to it; community organizations and mutual support networks in neighborhoods sustain them. Mumford and Bookchin criticized tedious office work, but at least it involves no backbreaking toil in fields. And if the city has limits, it is not only hardships that define them but also genuine pleasures. Cities offer high hopes for a better life, and attract people from the countryside year after year, and in pursuit of their dreams, people will tolerate much hardship. Hegelian philosophy notwithstanding, limits are an unreliable ground upon which to rest hopes for social change.

The limits to runaway use of environment is another problem, as global societies are be overwhelmed finite resources; the question of limits is a signal problem for the twenty-first

⁵⁹ Murray Bookchin, introduction to Hans Thirring, *Energy for Man* (New York: Harper, 1976).

⁶⁰ Engels, *Housing Question*, p. 49.

century, but not one that Bookchin grappled with in these early works. But the production and consumption of food and energy—two problems he discussed innovatively in these writings—have both become major economic, cultural, and political issues. The organic farming movement, driven by a repulsion for chemicals in food, has been around for decades, joined by green city movements, community-supported agriculture, urban gardening, the locavore movement, and more, all reintegrating town and country.

As for energy, Bookchin was right that our dependence on fossil fuels cannot be maintained: the global warming that it causes, and that he predicted so long ago, has become conventional wisdom. He was right that current rates of energy consumption are unsustainable. And he was also right, to my knowledge, about the connection between carbon-based fuels and largeness of scale: petrochemicals and gasoline seem basic to large-scale agriculture, in all the ways that he pointed out in the 1950s, and it's not at all clear that anything could replace them at a large scale. The alternative to petroleum-based agriculture may indeed be smallness.

As for renewable energy, it too has become part of progressive thought and action. But after the mid-1970s Bookchin seems to have dropped the idea that renewable energy, or ecotechnics, is necessarily linked to smallness of scale. He ceased writing about it, as proposals for large-scale solar and wind installations (in the Arizona desert, in or outer space) seem to have disabused him of this idea. But to date solar and wind still seem eminently suited for local use, popular on individual homes and schools and offices. To be sure, solar and wind energy are potentially usable over for large cities, given the existence of electricity-distribution grids. But according to a reputable scientific journal, "At least for the foreseeable future ... local generation is unlikely to supply the sheer quantity of energy that large fossil-fuel plants now provide."⁶¹

Proud Defiance

A few years ago, I journeyed to the Bronx in search of Bookchin's childhood haunts. I found East Tremont to be stuck in poverty, surely in great part because of the Cross Bronx Expressway. Its roaring traffic has continued unabated since 1960. Along Tremont Avenue, where Murray once bought knishes and bagels, fast-food joints and hair salons now stand. But the people I passed on the street had kind faces, and nearby Crotona Park, where Murray played as a child, is still a jewel, undergoing ecological reconstruction by the city.

I walked along 175th Street, clutching a slip of paper with the address of Rose's building, hoping to see where it had stood. I passed a vacant lot and—astonishingly, number 710 was still there. It was one of the only structures on that block, looking battered, but still providing homes for determined people. It held itself proudly like an old warrior, in continuing defiance of Robert Moses.

The struggle to integrate town and country, to create an ecological society, is both arduous and necessary; perhaps sometime cities will reach their limits, although no one hopes for a crisis that causes suffering. In the meantime the closing words from *The Culture of Cities*

⁶¹ David Roberts, "Local Power: Tapping Distributed Energy in 21st-Century Cities," *Scientific American*, June 15, 2010.

remain as iconic today as Bookchin thought them in 1962: for in a tribute to his mentor on urban history, he quoted them as the closing words to *Our Synthetic Environment*. So as a tribute to their common project, I reproduce them to end this article:

“We have much to unbuild, and much more to build: but the foundations are ready: the machines are set in place and the tools are bright and keen: the architects, the engineers, and the workmen are assembled. None of us may live to see the complete building, and perhaps in the nature of things the building can never be completed: but some of us will see the flag or the fir tree that the workers will plant aloft in ancient ritual when they cap the topmost story.”⁶²

Burlington, Vermont
August 21, 2010

⁶² Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 492; quoted in Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment*, p. 245.