Book review
Anthony Fontenot, *Non-Design: Architecture, Liberalism and the Market*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021, 376 pages.
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More than sixty years after the publication of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*,[1] the influence of the book and its author Jane Jacobs has not waned. Jacobs' once provocative, heretical positions have been, by now, hegemonic for decades, and their centricity in urbanism has not abated with generational shift and the perspective of time. But what if the "common sense" urban remedies prescribed by Jacobs, and which are so popular with both radical and middle of the road urban activists, are in fact underpinned by Friedrich Hayek's "spontaneous order," a key pillar of the Chicago School of Economics and of neoliberal ideology? Is Jacobs' "diverse city," rather than emancipatory in any progressive sense, a transposition of Hayek's ideas to urban ideology, a "spontaneous city"?

In his recently published *Non-Design: Architecture, Liberalism and the Market*, Anthony Fontenot responds to such questions by mapping the links between the thought of Hayek and an array of postwar architectural and urban ideas and theories that promote bypassing human agency, identified here as "non-design" and the related "non-plan."[2] No less important than Jacobs in the book is the indefatigable Reyner Banham, who unabashedly embraced the consumer society of the 1960s, championed anonymous corporate design, and contributed to the 1969 diatribe against planning, "Non-Plan."[3] Each of the book's chapters features key protagonists, such as Jacobs, who often reappear in support roles elsewhere. There are others here, not directly related to architecture, chief among them Hayek, who through their omnipresence bind together the diverse narratives that form the book. These include philosopher Michael Polanyi, economist Ludwig von Mises, cyberneticist Warren Weaver, philosopher Karl Popper, and the art critic Ernst Gombrich.

The book opens with a discussion of Hayek's "spontaneous order." The second chapter studies New Brutalism and its conception as an antidote to the 1950s hegemony of left-wing architects, challenging common associations today of Brutalism with the Welfare State. The book proceeds to discuss the interest in and intellectual support of unsophisticated, mass-produced commodities ("borax"), before turning to the work of Jacobs in the fourth chapter. Next, the work of Charles Moore, Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi is analysed, including the latter's fascination with the Las Vegas Strip and the catalogue housing of Levittown, in the context of the debates regarding the American city and its "chaotic" market-driven growth. In the sixth chapter, "The Indeterminate City," Bernard Rudofsky, Christopher Alexander, and Archigram lead the discussion of the unplanned city. The book outlines the process by which what were at the time fringe libertarian ideas infiltrated the worlds of architecture and planning en route to establishing their broad hegemony.

"Design is the result of intended action," offers Fontenot, "whereas non-design is the result of unintended action without a specific outcome […]" (p. 2). The artist Jean Dubboffet and the Outsider Art that inspired him are briefly acknowledged (pp. 11; 58; 80-81); COBRA, the art movement that learned from children's art, is indirectly mentioned in passing (p. 80); John Cage's interest in indeterminacy makes an appearance (p. 12). The list of non-design phenomena and those interested in them is long, and includes many which are understandably absent in this book, such as the found objects of Marcel Duchamp, or William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin's cut ups. Structuralism's sidelining of human agency ostensibly depicts a world which the designer does not control. To what extent, then, is *all* "non-design" necessarily related, whether directly or indirectly, to the ideas of Hayek and company? Much of the work listed above presents a desire to liberate the individual from the constraints of society's indoctrination, to retrieve spontaneity and an elusive "authenticity" by circumventing, decentring, or rethinking the designer or artist's agency, understood as the servant of

ideology. The very short list above, however, should suffice to demonstrate that not all non-design and interest in non-design necessarily advocate a spontaneous order, let alone a market-driven one.

Helpfully, Fontenot distinguishes between "*Non-design*, […] [as] a phenomenon that emerges without intention or deliberate human design and [as] a philosophy that is characterized by a rejection of conscious design" (p. 2) – a differentiation which is all too easy to overlook here. The focus of the book is the latter, the philosophy that legitimizes non-design. "Fundamental to the philosophy of non-design," suggests Fontenot, "is the rejection of any design of a social and economic order made according to a centralized authority" (p. 1). "Centralized authority" infers both the individual expert (designer, architect, planner) and "central design," a term that captures economic, social, and spatial planning. State planning in its multiple forms is associated by Hayek with socialism. Fontenot, focused on a critique not of Hayek, but of "Hayekian" architectural and urban theory, does not bother to highlight state planning's Fordist and Keynesian, rather than socialist, grounding.

The book is almost exclusively focused on the UK and US. Perhaps this is driven by the two countries' centricity to neoliberal thought, and before that, to classical liberalism and neoclassical economics. In contrast, prominent conservative thinkers based in continental Europe were rarely advocates of the free market (e.g., Martin Heidegger, Jakob von Uexküll). Less obvious is the outsized role of British architecture in the book, which includes here not only truly international figures such as Banham, Nikolaus Pevsner, or the Smithsons, but also the "soft" modernists of the London County Council, the Asplund-inspired Oliver Cox, and critic Ian Nairn.

The periodization framing the discussion suggests that the era of 1900-45 was a period of planning and centralization, whereas 1945-2000 was one of liberalization and non-design. "Following the victory of the Conservative Party in 1951," argues Fontenot (p. 268), "the convergence of several political and philosophical critiques ushered in the non-planning paradigm, which coincided with the golden age of capitalism […]." Yet 1900-1945 was the era of laissez-faire capitalism, even if the 1929 crash and the Great Depression meant the free-market was increasingly out of favour and in retreat. In the later part of this period, opposition to laissez-faire was growing and the argument for planning was strengthened through the New Deal, Keynes' *General Theory* (1936), and Henri de Man's *planisme*.[4] Spatial, economic, and social planning, in their Fordist and Keynesian sense, were not fully implemented in the UK until Clement Attlee's 1945-51 government. The Conservative governments of 1951-63 did not turn their backs on planning and did not usher in laissez-faire. "[T]he Tories," surmised journalist William Keegan, "accepted the essence of the welfare state they inherited in 1951."[5] In the US, Keynesian economics reached their zenith as late as the mid-1960s, with neo-Keynesians such as Ken Galbraith enjoying direct access to presidents Kennedy and Johnson. Conflating these postwar years with the era of Thatcher and Reagan is odd – the monetarism and "roll back" neoliberalism of the 1980s shared more with the laissez-faire of the 1920s than with postwar State Capitalism.[6] The Chicago School of Economics moved from the margins to the centre only in the late 1960s, and its ascendence was marked by Hayek's 1974 and Milton Friedman's 1976 Nobel Memorial Prizes, and the latter's widely broadcasted 1980 TV program "Free to Choose" (PBS). In comparison to the book's careful and rigorous interrogation of ideas and theories, the periodization appears clumsy.

Non-Design is not formulated as a critique of architecture's co-optation by neoliberal ideologies. Fontenot writes from a distanciated, dispassionate position. "My aim is not to endorse the doctrine of non-design," he exclaims, "but rather to investigate its relationship with design theory" (p. 2). In a sense, the material assembled here speaks for itself, and yet the veil of neutral scholarship, which is only partially lifted in the concluding chapter, is not necessary. The hardship and damage caused by the disciples of Hayek over the last decades is hardly disputed nowadays.[7] There is some concern

that at times the book internalizes the perspective of the advocates of the free market, as in characterizing all the supporters of economic, social, and spatial planning – in effect the promoters of Fordism and Keynesian economics – as "socialists" (see, for example, pp. 105, 267), or in suggesting that "Many people believe that the stock market crash of 1929 in America was a result of unchecked capitalism […]" (p. 28) – would a phrasing such as "many people believe" be used to describe advocates of evolution theory, or those arguing that climate change is human-driven?

Despite his neutral tone, Fontenot does here much more than "investigate [the philosophy of non-design's] relationship with design theory": the book de-naturalizes and hence politicizes architecture and urbanism by exposing an ideological grounding that has often been obscured if not thoroughly veiled. In this sense, *Non-Design* is a substantial critical work, indicting the theories that shape current, dominant practices, doctrines, and understandings in architecture, urban design, and planning. Readers will not fail to identify the fingerprints of Hayek in contemporary architecture and urban approaches such as parametricism, complex cities, localism, and tactical urbanism, which argue for a diminished role for the designer and government in processes of urban development and design, and too often conflate democracy or popularity with the market.

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[1] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Modern Library, 2011 [1961]).
[2] In effect, a re-evaluation of Jacobs has been gathering steam for some time, to a degree that architectural historian Joan Ockman felt recently the need to come to her defence. But Fontenot's careful interrogation of Jacobs' work leaves little doubt regarding its tight correlation to Hayek's ideas. See Joan Ockman, "A Tale of Two Villages: Jane Jacobs, Marshall McLuhan and Their Visions of Collective Life," in Penny Lewis, Lorens Holm, Sandra Costa Santos (eds) *Architecture and Collective Life* (London; New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 13-30; Robert Pogrebin, "Rehabilitating Robert Moses," *New York Times*, 23 Jan 2007, at: https://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/23/arts/design/28pogr.html (accessed 3.1.23); Tahl Kaminer and Maros Krivy, "The Participatory Turn in Urbanism," *Footprint*, issue 13, Autumn 2013, pp. 1-6; Hilary Ballon, Kenneth T. Jackson (eds) *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007).
[3] Reyner Banham, Paul Barker, Peter Hall, and Cedric Price, "Non-Plan: An Experiment in Freedom," *New Society*, vol. 13, no. 338, 20 March (1969), pp. 435-443.
[4] John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment Interest and Money* (London: Macmillan, 1936); Ludo Cuyvers, "Was Henri de Man an Early Post-Keynesian Neo-Marxist?" *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Vol. 47(1), 2015, pp. 90–105.
[5] William Keegan, "Wilson Won After 13 Wasted Tory Years. Starmer Can Do Exactly the Same," *The Guardian*, 22 January 2023, at: https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/jan/22/wilson-won-after-13-wasted-tory-years-starmer-can-do-exactly-the-same?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other (accessed 27.1.23).
[6] Tahl Kaminer, "The Emaciation of Planning: Dirigisme, May '68, and Anti-Statism," in Carlos Tapia (ed.) *ReciprociUdad: Design Diplomacy in Seville* (Malaga: Recolectores Urbanos Editorial, 2021), pp. 49-63; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[7] See, for example, Loïc Wacquant, "Crafting the Neoliberal State: Workfare, Prisonfare, and Social Insecurity," *Sociological Forum* Vol. 25, No. 2 (JUNE 2010), pp. 197-220, or Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore (eds) *Spaces of Neoliberalism: Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).