In the field of city planning the limitations on artistry of arrangement have, to be sure, narrowed greatly in our day. Today such a masterpiece of city planning as the Acropolis of Athens is simply unthinkable. That sort of thing is for us, at the moment, an impossibility. Even if the millions were provided that such a project would entail, we would still be unable to create something of the kind, because we lack both the artistic basis for it and any universally valid philosophy of life that has sufficient vigor in the soul of the people to find physical expression in the work. Yet even if the commission be devoid of content and merely decorative—as is the case with art today—it would be frightfully difficult for our realistic man of the nineteenth century.

Today's city builder must, before all, acquire the noble virtue of an utmost humility, and, what is remarkable in this case, less for economic considerations than for really basic reasons.

Assuming that in any new development the cityscape [Stadtbild] must be made as splendid and pictorial as possible, if only decoratively in order to glorify the locality—such a purpose cannot be accomplished with the ruler or with our geometrically-straight street lines. In order to produce the effects of the old masters, their colors as well must form part of our palette. Sundry curves, twisted streets and irregularities would have to be included artificially in the plan; an affected artlessness, a purposeful unintentionalness. But can the accidents of history over the course of centuries be invented and constructed ex novo in the plan? Could one, then, truly and sincerely enjoy such a fabricated ingenuousness, such a studied naturalness? Certainly not. The satisfaction of a spontaneous gaiety is denied to any cultural level in which building does not proceed at apparent random from day to day, but instead constructs its plans intellectually on the drawing board. This whole course of events, moreover, cannot be reversed, and consequently a large portion of the picturesque beauties we have mentioned will probably be irretrievably lost to use in contemporary planning. Modern living as well as modern building techniques no longer permit the faithful imitation of old townscape, a fact which we cannot overlook without falling prey to barren fantasies. The exemplary creations of the old masters must remain alive with us in some other way than through slavish copying; only if we can determine in what the essentials of these creations consist, and if we can apply these meaningfully to modern conditions, will it be possible to harvest a new and flourishing crop from the apparently sterile soil. […]

Works of art cannot be created by a committee or through office activity, but only by a single individual; an artistically effective city plan is also a work of art and not merely an administrative matter. This is the crux of the whole situation. Granting that each individual member of a municipal building office, by virtue of his ability and knowledge, his numerous travels and other studies, as well as his innate artistic sensibility and lively imagination, could
design an excellent town plan, yet several in association in the office will never produce anything but dry, pedantic stuff that smacks of the dust of documents. The head of the office has, of course, no time to do the job himself, because he is inundated with meetings, reports, committees, administration, etc.; his subordinate, on the other hand, would not dare to have ideas of his own; he must stick to the official norms, and his drafting board will always reflect only these, not because he cannot do any better, no!—but because it is an official drafting board on which he is working, and his personal ambition, his individuality as a creative and sensitive being, and his enthusiasm for a thing for which he alone will be responsible before the world, do not, for reason of his official function, enter into the matter. Yes, strictly speaking, any such tendencies would represent a breach of discipline. […]

No! These shortcomings will not be eliminated merely by leaving matters of city planning to chance. It is absolutely essential to make a positive formulation of the requirements of art because today we can no longer count on an instinctive taste in art; this no longer exists. It is imperative to study the works of the past, and for the artistic tradition that we have lost there must be substituted a theoretical understanding of the reasons for the excellence of ancient layouts. Their effective bases must be spelled out as positive requirements, as rules for city planning: only this can really advance the cause, if it is still possible to do so.

Having examined our predecessors' works in the first part of this book it is clear that, as a final result of our whole analysis, we must try to establish rules for today.

In so doing, one thing must be borne in mind: artistically satisfactory parceling of a new section of town cannot be attempted without first having some idea as to what purpose this section will serve in the long run and what public buildings and plazas might be intended for it. Without any idea at all about what buildings and plazas are to make up a part of town or what purpose it is ultimately to serve, one cannot begin either to make a distribution in keeping with the site and its conditions or to attain any measure of artistic effectiveness. It is just as if a patron were to show a building lot to his architect and say to him: 'Build something on this for me for about one hundred thousand florins: 'You mean an apartment house?' 'No!' 'Or a villa?' 'No!' 'Perhaps a factory?' 'No!' etc.—This would be simply ridiculous, indeed crazy, and could not really happen because nobody builds without a purpose, and nobody approaches a builder without very definite intentions or without a building program.

Only in town planning is it considered reasonable to go ahead with a building plan without a definite program, and this derives from the fact that one simply does not know how any specific new district will develop. The consequence of this absence of a program is the familiar building-block system, which tells us in all bluntness: 'We could perhaps create something beautiful and useful here, but we do not know just what, so we humbly decline to deal with such a vague problem, and therefore present merely a division of the surface area so that its sale by the square foot can begin: What a contrast to the ideal of old! But this is no joke. It faithfully portrays reality. In Vienna such a gridiron plan was drawn up for the X District and turned out as one might expect; right now an identical one is on paper for the so-called New Donaustadt, and it could not be more inadequate and awkward.

Our assumption that a lack of program is one of the reasons for such unimaginative layouts is confirmed by the very largest parceling known—the division of North America into states. That vast new land has been everywhere divided according to the same rectangular
system, its straight lines corresponding to latitude and longitude. This is obviously due to the fact
that the terrain was not well-known at the time and its future development could not be
predicted, since America lacked a past, had no history, and did not yet signify anything else in
the civilization of mankind but so many square miles of land. For America, Australia, and other
unopened lands, the gridiron plan may for the time being still suffice. Wherever people are
concerned merely with colonizing land, live only for earning money, and earn money only in
order to live, it may be appropriate to pack people into blocks of buildings like herring in a
barrel. […]

When this [program] has been decided, then the most advantageous siting, grouping, and
necessary inter-relationships should be worked out. With this the designing of the city plan
proper begins, and for it public competitions would certainly have to be held. Apart from the
preliminary data already mentioned, the program for the competition would have to include an
exact survey of the terrain (showing all existing roads and other details) as well as information
about wind-directions, important water-table data, and whatever else might be of local
significance.

The task of the contestants would first be to arrange the required public buildings,
gardens, etc., in proper relationship to each other and at the most appropriate spots. For example,
several public gardens should be placed at an equal distance from each other if possible. None of
these large garden areas should be left open to the street, but instead ought to be surrounded by
buildings (for reasons cited earlier*) and made accessible through two or more gateways that are
in keeping with their surroundings but in any case not identical. The gardens would thereby be as
sheltered as possible, and long building frontages of considerable value would result, the whole
serving as a bulwark against the spread of the block system.

In contrast to the dispersal recommended for gardens, buildings ought to be united in a
suitable manner, for instance, parish house, public school, and related buildings adjoining the
church. Certainly monuments, fountains, and public buildings should be integrated as far as
possible, so as to produce plazas of more impressive effect. If there are to be several plazas it is
best to combine them as a group instead of scattering them. Each plaza should through its site, its
size, and its shape possess distinct and unique character, and at the same time attention should be
paid to the correct opening of streets into it and to the enclosed character of the plaza-wall.
Perspective vistas are to be considered as well as the exploitation of natural panoramas. The
commendable horse-shoe format of the Baroque, a system of fore-courts after the manner of
ancient atriums, etc., known to be unfailingly effective, should be kept in mind for occasional
use. Churches and monumental buildings should certainly not be isolated, but rather built into the
plaza-wall, thereby creating suitable spots for the future placement of fountains and monuments
around the edge of the plaza. Irregularities of terrain, existing waterways and roads should not be
forcibly eliminated simply to achieve a banal rectangularity, but should instead be preserved as a
welcome excuse for crooked streets and other diversities. These irregularities, nowadays so often
eliminated at great expense, are, in fact, most essential. Without them even the most exquisitely
designed plan would seem stiff and stilted in its total effect. Furthermore it is precisely these
factors which afford one an easy orientation within the maze of streets. They can also be heartily
recommended from the point of view of public health, since it is the curvature and crookedness

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* Chapter IX, pp. 102-103. See also Appendix I, p. 179.
of streets in the old parts of town which stop and deflect the prevailing winds, so that the strongest storms, however violent, only sweep over the roof tops, while in the regularized sections of town they blow right along the straight streets in a highly disagreeable and unhealthy manner. This is easy to observe wherever new and old parts of town coexist, perhaps best of all in Vienna which is more than blessed with winds. While anyone can cross the inner city in a medium wind without annoyance, he is immediately enveloped in clouds of dust on entering any new part. […]

Using this argument one might more likely be able to convince our predominantly materialistic age about the virtues of an artistically-developed town plan. To be sure, much has already been written about the economic importance of the fine arts to a nation, and this has become a generally accepted fact. This is significant because the purely ideal value of art as an end in itself—as perhaps the highest aspiration of our cultural endeavors and of human activity in general—is, on the other hand, not at all so universally accepted. However, since the arts also possess a social and economic significance, it might be that even hardheaded city officials will eventually discover that it would not be so bad for once to invest some sums in the artistry of town layouts in hopes of reaping civic sentiment, local pride, and, perhaps, more tourism. […]

Our study has certainly demonstrated that it is not at all necessary to design modern city plans in as stereotyped a fashion as is the custom, that it is quite unnecessary to forego in them all the beauties of art and the attainments of the past. It is not true that modern traffic forces us to do so; it is not true that hygienic requirements compel us. It is downright laziness, a lack of imagination and of good intentions, which condemn us modern city dwellers to pass our lives in formless mass-housing with the depressing sight of eternally similar apartment house blocks and unbroken frontage lines. It is probably the gentle force of habit that hardens us to them. We ought to consider, however, the impression we receive upon returning home from Venice or Florence—how painfully our banal modernity affects us. This may be one of the basic reasons why the fortunate inhabitants of those marvelously artistic cities have no need to leave them, while we every year for a few weeks must get away into nature in order to be able to endure our city for another year.