“What is the city but the people,” wrote William Shakespeare more than four hundred years ago ([1608] 1899, 114). Shakespeare could have hardly imagined how cities would change by the end of his millennium, but his insight, as usual, was timeless. The Bard could be seen to complement the Greek philosopher Plato who, almost two millennia earlier, had seen the city as a correlate and a reflection of the human soul. The present study is about two leading urbanists of the twentieth century, Ebenezer Howard and Jane Jacobs, who very much represent mutually contrasting views on the modern city and on urban planning; yet, in their opposing viewpoints they only confirm the sayings of the two great minds that preceded them. The conflict between the urbanist ideas of Howard and Jacobs helps us understand that human thought and city form are intertwined. In this sense, the study attempts to cast an urbanist outlook that goes beyond the history of twentieth-century city planning.

There is little doubt, though, that the struggles and hopes of cities and urbanists in the twentieth century were no better personified than by Ebenezer Howard and Jane Jacobs. Yet, in seemingly opposing outlooks on the growth and planning of cities, Howard and Jacobs present views that have more in common than meets the eye. Howard envisaged small towns, newly built from scratch, founded on the idea of single-family homes surrounded by small gardens. Jacobs embraced existing inner-city neighbourhoods, emphasizing the verve of the living street. A direct dialogue between the two never occurred. Jane was a young girl in Scranton, Pennsylvania, when Sir Ebenezer died in 1928 in England as a celebrity urban-planning pioneer, his Garden City concept having spread across the industrialized world, east and west. Three decades later Jacobs came out swinging against Howard’s ideas, becoming an urbanist luminary of her own. By the turn of the twenty-first century, urbanist debate in North America had raged between two contrasting standpoints largely evolving from Howard’s and Jacobs’s original stances. On the one hand, sprawling suburbs, initially an expression of the American Dream of freedom and prosperity, had become the butt of criticism for their uniformity, alienation, and placelessness.
On the other hand, the inner-city neighbourhoods and their streets had come to be seen as victims of commodification, having become newly discovered hubs of urban authenticity, drawing commercial interest as well as prosperous descendants of the suburban patrons from the early twentieth century.

The present book does not resolve the urbanist dilemma of North America, but it presents Howard and Jacobs within a broad psychocultural context that also suggests a synthesis of the two. Addressing our urban crisis is the recognition that city form is a gendered, allegorical medium expressing femininity and masculinity within two of the most fundamental features of the built environment: void and volume. These two features are deeply entrenched as paradigms of mind, expressed throughout the history of the built environment as projections of the archaic parables of the Garden and the Citadel. They bring to the fore the tensions, but also the opportunities of fusion, between pairs of urban contrasts: human scale against superscale, gait against speed, and spontaneity against surveillance. Jacobs and Howard, in their respective attitudes, embraced the two ancient archetypes, the Garden and the Citadel, leaving it to urban posterity to blend their two contrasting stances.

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