

Hiss, Tony. *The Experience of Place, a Completely New Way of Looking at and Dealing With Our Radically Changing Cities and Countryside*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc, 1990. Illustrations. \$30.00 (cloth); \$15.00 (paper)

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umes to provide her answers. The first volume, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age*, was published in 1984. In it she undertook an extensive review of different perceptions of poverty, focusing upon Adam Smith's treatment of poverty as a branch of moral philosophy and Thomas Malthus' view of it as a part of political economy. The current volume, *Poverty and Compassion: The Social Ethic of the Late Victorians*, continues the study by examining the intellectual origins of the modern welfare state. Both volumes are excellent examples of the historian's craft. Both also reflect Himmelfarb's strong views on social policy and on research technique.

The volumes share several assumptions. In the first place, these are histories of ideas, concerned with perceptions of poverty rather than with the nature, dimension or causes of poverty itself. She thus avoids direct involvement in the hoary "standard of living" debate, though she makes her own optimistic views known nonetheless. Further, she attempts to go past mere opinion or ideology to what she calls the "moral imagination" of English society. Moral imagination is not merely ideology in other clothing. To Himmelfarb it is that level of cognition which so penetrates and defines reality "that reality has no form of shape apart from it," as she puts it in *The Idea of Poverty*. This approach allowed her to assume that the values and perceptions which she detected informed a number of policies and actions, both public and private, which she leaves otherwise unexamined. Again the focus is upon what she thought rather than what was done.

In *Poverty and Compassion*, she mines the written literature of the period, beginning (as she had earlier ended) with Henry Mayhew, moving to Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree, through a number of less obvious philanthropists such as

Thomas Barnardo and Samuel Barnett, to more formal social and moral philosophers such as T. H. Green, Sidney and Beatrice Webb and Alfred Marshall, and to groups such as the Christian Socialists and Fabians. The changes in outlook which she detected were significant. In lieu of concern for the poverty of the few, the conviction emerged that the state was responsible for the welfare of the many. Concern for individual responsibility and morality was separated from questions of social policy. With this, Himmelfarb's argument comes full circle: Adam Smith's treatment of poverty as a dimension of moral philosophy has ultimately succumbed to Malthus' poverty as a dimension solely of political economy.

The welfare state which resulted from this new moral imagination failed, she argues, not only to achieve equality but, less forgivably, to eliminate poverty. The welfare state failed because the premises upon which it was based were one-sided and incomplete. At this point the book most obviously becomes a tract for the author's time. For the reader who overlooked or forgave the often pointed or barbed evaluations and comments scattered thickly throughout the book, Himmelfarb's warning to contemporary America becomes unmistakable.

Just as she warns her fellow citizens, she provides an example to her professional colleagues. On record in other of her essays as a severe and articulate critic of the claims of social historians, or the "new history," to primacy or superiority, she has presented the reader with an exhaustive analysis of largely traditional sources. The literature which she chose to examine was vast—so vast that it overwhelmed both her and her readers. Her insistence upon treating individuals and institutions at length resulted in long passages which were only partly assimilated into the main argument. The object of the

book is too often obscured by her delight in pursuing a myriad of by-ways and interesting diversions.

These points aside, this is a book for those who enjoy being witness to a sharp mind engaged in an on-going debate about the proper structure of society and the purposes for which it exists. It is a passionate book, an intelligent and even an elegant one. It is also one which, for many of its readers, will appear to be wrong-headed and unnecessarily polemical. It is certainly not a book for the passive reader. For these reasons I recommend it.

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Hiss, Tony. *The Experience of Place, a Completely New Way of Looking at and Dealing With Our Radically Changing Cities and Countryside.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc, 1990. Illustrations. \$30.00 (cloth); \$15.00 (paper).

Tony Hiss' book *The Experience of Place* is a thought-provoking examination of how we experience urban and rural places. It maintains that an increased understanding of the perception of place could lead to an improvement of the built environment.

Much of *The Experience of Place* originally appeared in the *New Yorker* magazine, where Hiss has worked since 1963. It is divided into two sections, "Experiencing Cities" and "Encountering the Countryside." In each, the author examines the factors that contribute to that special sense of connectedness engendered by successful urban spaces and unspoiled landscapes. Hiss believes that every human being has a "sixth sense": an ability to sense or experience places that has consistently been ignored in the planning process. He calls this ability "simultaneous perception." Hiss believes that understanding how we per-

ceive places will equip city and country dwellers, planners, preservationists, and environmentalists to fix ailing spaces and create successful new ones.

Hiss illustrates this "sixth sense" by taking the reader through selected spaces—Grand Central Station, Times Square and Brooklyn's Prospect Park—and analyzing what makes them special. His narrative meanders delightfully through the streets of New York, citing art historians, psychologists, preservationists and architects who have also studied spaces. His analysis of what modern urbanites need to be healthy and happy in an urban environment, based on studies, readings and interviews with experts, leads him to conclude that, to thrive in an urban environment, we need to feel safe, see the sky, walk on grass and be offered a variety of views to lead us on.

Hiss is not a no-growth, no-change advocate. He realises that cities will evolve as needs change and that the post-industrial, service-oriented city will be very different than its predecessors. His concern is that the experience of place be preserved even as cities change. But how do we know whether or not a new building will enhance or diminish the urban experience? Hiss turns to the Environmental Simulation Laboratory in Berkeley, California for the answer to this question. Researchers at the "Sim Lab" construct one-sixteenth scale models of neighbourhoods and film the experience of driving or walking through them, using a camera lens on a periscope at eye level. Lights simulate the sun, so the impact of building shadows can be seen. The real utility of the "Sim Lab" is that buildings can be easily removed and new ones inserted and filmed, allowing the impact of a development on urban places to be measured. "Sim Lab" movies have not been widely pro-

duced, but have proved remarkably effective in the communities where they have been employed as a planning tool. For example, the San Francisco Department of City Planning produced a series of films over a six year period which were broadcast on TV in the city while a new official plan was being drafted. The films, which simulated the effects on sunlight and views of increased development, helped the passage of a plan which limits height, bulk and the actual number of new developments. It is success stories like this that make the book so appealing and so hopeful. Planners, preservationists, and urban activists can recognize the possibilities for translating these successes into their own.

In the second part of the book, "Encountering the Countryside," Hiss examines the management of the countryside and proposes solutions to the crisis facing the United States as a result of rapid suburbanization. Hiss presents his arguments, with a convincing, matter-of-fact charm, leading the reader to agree that experiencing unspoiled landscapes is crucial to our physical and mental well-being. This section leaves the reader feeling hopeful about our chances to preserve the working landscapes and wilderness areas of North America.

Hiss argues for a "landscape" or "regional" approach to planning that would treat cities and their hinterlands as a unit and make decisions that benefit both. He maintains that the completion of the interstate highway system has prompted the need for this new approach to planning because, for the first time, development pressure is being applied equally to urban, suburban and rural areas. He argues that if city dwellers had a better knowledge of the contribution of their region to their health as the supplier of food, water, recreational areas and unspoiled

greenspace, they would form a "partnership" with their countryside and fight to preserve it.

The Experience of Place is an optimistic book and provides a welcome respite from the constant stream of doom and gloom about the future of our cities and landscapes. Its elegant prose is a change for the dry planning studies and overly-serious analyses that to date have formed the basis of many studies of place. After reading Hiss we can know why we love certain places and why we feel such a sense of loss when they are violated.

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Hall, Thomas, ed. *Planning and Urban Growth in the Nordic Countries*. New York: Chapman & Hall, 1991. Pp. 271. Illustrations. \$79.50 (U.S.); \$99.50 (Canada).

When most North American urban researchers think of countries characterized by progressive and innovative urban planning, the nations of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and/or Sweden will likely come to mind. However, when I was preparing to teach urban studies in Denmark (1987) and to conduct research on Swedish pedestrian streets (1990), I was surprised to find very little English language literature on planning in these countries, aside from some work on well-known Swedish new towns. Hall's volume certainly would have been helpful to me, as it serves to fill a major void in the literature on urban planning history.

The purpose of the book is to provide a general overview of urban planning history in the Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden (Iceland is inexplicably left out). The essays emphasize the evolution of land