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J.W.R. Whitehand has collected four papers by M.R.G. Conzen and contributed introductory and concluding essays of his own, assessing the background to and influence of Conzen’s work. The four works, published between 1962 and 1978 and including one that has been translated from German, do not include Conzen’s best known study, of Alnwick, Northumberland, the influence of which suffuses this book. This masterpiece, perhaps the most effective demonstration of Conzen’s methodology and its value, validates the subsequent publications presented here and is a touchstone for those who would seek to learn from this research tradition.

Urban morphogenesis, in the coded brevities of social science, describes Conzen’s approach to the historical investigation of change in the landscape of towns. Whitehand, in tracing the morphological approach adopted by Conzen to the German context of his scholarly origins, also helps us to understand the remarkable isolation of this man’s work from contemporary currents in urban geography in the English speaking world. Signs of increased interest in the historical evolution of town plans, and in such of the components of this analysis as the minute examination of changes in the intensity and use of individual land parcels, are carefully outlined in Whitehand’s concluding chapter. Whitehand recognizes some apparent barriers to the adoption of such an approach to the study of cities in America where until recently neither geographers nor other social scientists interested in towns considered their historical development to be worth the serious study that attends issues of practical or theoretical significance. There are, however, now signals of a change of mind, not least in the interest governments are taking in studying and preserving, or even recreating where it be deemed necessary, crucial historical elements of townscapes.

In this context, on this side of the Atlantic, there is immediate value in being reminded of Conzen’s research and in having conveniently to hand some of his critical and interpretative writings. Many of us will benefit from closely examining these thoughtful essays that should convince us, if of nothing else, that there is a need to study the whole and to see the most interesting parts in the context in which they were set.

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The Grand Domestic Revolution — a term coined in 1855 by anarchist Stephen Pearl Andrews — was to socialize housework by moving cooking, laundry and child care out of the home into communal settings and thus not only revolutionize the life style of Americans but also the architecture and design of their living-space. Dolores Hayden’s painstakingly researched work presents the protagonists of that revolution, those “material feminists” who, since the middle of last century, have linked women’s emancipation to their economic independence, and their economic independence to their freedom from domestic work. What Hayden offers is no less than a reinterpretation of nineteenth and early twentieth century feminism, basing it on the feminists’ struggle “to overcome the split between domestic life and public life” and accepting both spheres. This projection of the private sphere into the public arena permeated the various campaigns for the vote, temperance, higher education and other social reforms.

The material feminists who elaborated their daring schemes between the Civil War and the Great Depression were inspired by the optimism generated by nineteenth century beliefs in evolution, progress and unlimited technological innovations. The new urban space was to reflect these ideas and provide the setting for social and economic experiments. As domestic industries moved to factories, housework was to leave the home for communal kitchens, apartments houses, cooperative or commercial laundries and day care centres (there is little discussion of maintenance and cleaning which unfortunately couldn’t be moved anywhere).