

Modern park stewards meanwhile faced the thorny issue of restoration. Taking control of crumbling ruins and rambling gardens, heritage managers pondered what period or style to return each park to. At Stourhead, exotic (and popular) rhododendrons and azaleas planted in the 1920s and 1930s arguably obscured the Arcadian idyll forged in the eighteenth century. At Prior Park, purchased by the National Trust in 1993, an overgrown garden had witnessed three phases of redesign in Ralph Allen's lifetime alone. The necessity of balancing preservationist impulses with visitor appeal further concerned managers. The park had to be popular with visitors (and thus commercially attractive) to compete in the marketplace of leisure tourism. That meant advertising the attractions as exciting prospects through leaflets, interpretative boards, guided walks and performance evenings. It also entailed the provision of up-to-date facilities, gift stores, kiosks and accessible car parking. Although unlikely to introduce lions at Stourhead to compete with nearby Longleat, National Trust stewards still had to meet the demands of public accessibility and recreational competitiveness.

### 3 The City Park: Bringing the Country to the Metropolis

From the hunting palaces of Assyria to the storybook landscapes of Stourhead and Stowe, the park idea has so far centred on grand rural landscapes. Yet the park idea is also rooted in urban spaces. Like the wily fox or racoon searching alleys for discarded chicken bones, the parkscape adapted to the built environment. From the European capitals of Paris and Berlin to the sprawling metropolises of Los Angeles and Mexico City, the major cities of the world all feature green spaces dedicated to providing relief from the urban grid(lock) of thrusting skyscrapers and buzzing freeways. Marked by distinctive cuisines, cultural traditions and architectural styles, such diverse cityscapes share common ground in the guise of the park.

#### THE BIRTH OF THE CITY PARK IDEAL

The great urban civilizations of antiquity produced the first city parks. King Sennacherib, who assumed the Assyrian throne in 705 BC, constructed the city of Nineveh as an impressive capital, from which he commanded a vast empire stretching from Palestine to Asia Minor. The mammoth building programme saw the small town beside the Tigris River transformed into a striking landscape of temples, palaces and squares. The largest city in the world by 668 BC, its 40-foot perimeter wall spanned seven and a half miles. Huge stone bulls guarded the fifteen city gates, while the magnificent palaces and wide paved roads radiated kingly magnificence. With tree-lined streets and canal irrigation, nature served a vital role in making the city beautiful. Adjacent to the royal palace, a city park known as 'paradise' contained rare botanical plants and lush orchards. According to the king, all the trees in the allotment were 'planted for my subjects'.<sup>1</sup> Regulations precluded the construction of houses or workshops around the park.

Revering open spaces for their health benefits, both Greek and Roman empires embraced the city park idea. In the fifth century BC, Greek ruler Cimon remodelled the sacred grove of Academus, Athens, into a city park for practising athletes and strolling philosophers. With its open vistas and shady arbours, the Academy became popular with many urbanites, who utilized the park as a meeting place, exercise yard and debating society. The *Porticus Pompeiana* in Rome served a similar purpose as a green oasis amidst the

ten-storey tenements and winding streets marked by throngs of people, squealing hogs and careening chariots. Parks were accessible to all free citizens, although prescribed gender roles lent them an overwhelmingly masculine quality. Women tended to visit friends in private homes, leaving the classical urban park a preserve dominated by men.

Emphasis on public access and civic amenity in the urban spaces of Greece and Rome bespoke the principles of early republican democracy. However, in other cultures, city parks attested to authoritarian relationships and rigid class structures. A spectacular green enclave of 168 acres in the Chinese capital, Beihai Park, Beijing, established in the tenth century by the Liao dynasty, contained a palace, a lake and island with water features, rock gardens, willows, lotus leaves and the famous Five Dragons Pavilion. The entire preserve remained the resort of the imperial family and their guests, who ventured from the hallowed echelons of the Forbidden City to an equally private park retreat. Invitee Marco Polo praised the pleasure gardens in 1266. An impressive White Dagoba was constructed to honour the fifth Dalai Lama, who visited the park in 1651. On an artificial mount overlooking the Forbidden City, Jingshan Park provided a further imperial refuge. Established in 1420, the preserve operated according to the principles of Feng Shui and protected the Forbidden City from evil spirits.

Fledgling city parks in Latin America proved equally exclusive. In the legendary city of Tenochtitlan (today's Mexico City), Chapultepec Park offered a hilltop retreat for the Aztec royalty. The fifteenth-century parkscape provided drinking water for the 300,000 residents of Tenochtitlán, but its impressive botanical gardens and wildlife collections were open only to the ruling dynasty. The arrival of Spanish overlords to Mexico resulted in little change. In 1592, Viceroy Luis de Velasco established a park next to Inquisition Square on the site of an old Aztec marketplace. By the seventeenth century, Alameda Park boasted geometric walks and tree-lined avenues that paid homage to the Islamic courtyard garden as well as to European trends. An enclosing wall ensured that only the elite could sample its delights.

The first city parks in Europe began as medieval deer parks. As urban settlements expanded, the sporting preserves became pockets of countryside within a built environment. Originally a hunting park for the dukes of Brabant, the Warande in Brussels became a city park in 1775, set aside for the benefit of those living in a luxury residential development nearby. Joseph II granted Prater Park, an old hunting preserve belonging to the Austrian monarchy, to the residents of Vienna in 1766. On its establishment, the park was a half-hour stroll from the centre of the city.

The city of London featured a plethora of royal parks, including Greenwich (1433), St James's (1532), Hyde (1536) and Richmond (1637). As the English capital expanded (reaching a population of 400,000 by 1650), old hunting parks provided valuable open spaces. Visitors commended such venues for bringing the country to the town. When asked by Charles II to remodel St James's Park after the fashion of Versailles, André Le Nôtre

deferred to the 'genius of the place', explaining that the area's 'native beauty, Country Air, and deserts, had something greater in them, than anything he could contrive'.<sup>2</sup>

From grazing pasture to riding parade, landscape garden to gaming venue, London's parklands offered a wide range of functions. During the reign of Henry VIII, Greenwich Park hosted lavish May Day fetes that included bonfire displays, archery, duels, jousts and banquets. In 1661, Charles II threw open the gates of St James's as a 'public park'. With the monarch keen to parade in front of his subjects, the park became less about deer stalking and more about people watching. Every afternoon, London's fashionable set gathered at Pall Mall to exchange society gossip and wander the tended avenues. Assembled groups played *paille maille* – a game popular in France that involved hitting balls through hoops with mallets – in a shady spot nearby. Thirsty revellers queued to fill their glasses from a farm maid tending a tethered cow. This blend of rusticity and social nicety made a visit to the park a regular pastime. The popularity of St James's Park even spawned a new addition to the popular vernacular – 'park time' – a term used by John Dryden in *Marriage à la Mode* (1673).<sup>3</sup>

Despite the populist rhetoric, most parks represented landscapes of exclusion. Kings or queens reserved the right to withdraw park privileges at will. Assassination threats on Charles II and the plague of 1665 temporarily closed the London parks, while Queen Anne hatched a plan to permanently cordon off St James's and Hyde parks for her own use. Even when gates were open, access remained curtailed by class. The affluent deployed a series of regulations to deter unsavoury citizens from using their parks. In the 1800s, the Duke of Cambridge dissuaded the local poor from entering Richmond Park to gather mushrooms by posting a ranger who prevented walking on the grass. Elsewhere, entry to parklands depended on holding a key, showing a ticket, or paying a fee. Gatekeepers and perimeter walls (originally designed to keep game animals in) ensured that the great unwashed remained outside, beyond the pale. Kensington Gardens employed a strict dress code, with gentlemen requested to wear breeches and boots. Like contemporary nightclub bouncers, park keepers assessed the respectability of each prospective punter. The royal park resembled a country estate brought to the city.

The innovative and the brazen none the less tested the impenetrability of park boundaries. In the 1750s, merchants and lower gentry took to the courts to argue for rights of way through Richmond Park. After brewer John Lewis successfully won the right to cross the preserve, locals engaged in a form of mass trespass by employing ladders to breach perimeter fences, and ranged 'at their pleasure over the greensward' much to the consternation of park keepers.<sup>4</sup> Servants barred from entry to Kensington Gardens harassed visitors at the gatehouses. One irate commentator bemoaned: 'Yesterday it was hardly possible to get near the gate leading into the Gardens, for the crowd of servants who gathered round there, and who insulted every person not particularly known to them, going in, or coming out of the Gardens.'<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile,

enterprising locksmiths cornered a lucrative market in unofficial keys. Authorities issued 6,500 licensed keys for St James's Park. Twice that number existed. Thieves, muggers and shysters dodged official entrances entirely by climbing perimeter walls. Such practices left some parks with dubious reputations after dark.

## EARLY GREEN SPACES IN THE CITY

Urban spaces outside the traditional park diaspora inspired the city park idea. Street markets, shrines, cemeteries and vacant land designed as fire or flood breaks allowed urbanites to convene, converse and recreate. These 'unstructured playgrounds' hosted civic events such as fireworks displays, festivals, organized games and social interaction, thereby serving as informal city parks.<sup>6</sup>

Urban dwellers also escaped the city bustle in private gardens. In the mercantile cities of medieval Europe, burghers, livery companies and guilds established green spaces for the benefit of their members. London's Worshipful Company of Merchant Taylors crafted its own garden in 1415. In Renaissance Italy, prosperous merchants and dignitaries opened city gardens for high society to mingle in. The garden became a place for witty conversation, illustrious organic display, and social climbing. Florence sported 138 gardens by 1470. Similar enclaves marked the cityscape of Paris, the most notable being the Jardin des Plantes, a medicinal garden established by Louis XIII in 1626 and opened to the public 24 years later.

The provision of city gardens won plaudits from philosophers and writers. In *Utopia* (1516), Thomas More conceived of the perfect city as a green one, with wide streets framed by terraced houses, each with a backyard entrance to an enclosed area filled with flowers, fruits and grassy lawns. Inter-street competitions existed for the best gardens. As More enthused, 'Certainly, it would be hard to find any feature of the town more calculated to give pleasure and profits to the community.'<sup>7</sup> However, the gardens of urban Europe differed greatly from the communitarian vision extolled by More. Whereas *Utopia* envisioned a landscape without property ownership, with houses changing hands every 10 years, the green enclaves of Florence and Paris represented private spaces controlled by the power elite. Ownership of a renowned garden bespoke authority in civic affairs, wealth and prestige. Eager to attract an exclusive clientele, owners imposed rigorous entrance requirements on their organic retreats. Entry to the sanctum rested on guild membership, personal standing, city office or contacts. Those who made it on to the hallowed guest list could access the garden only when the owner decided to unlock its gates. The city garden thus represented a private venue in which the rich could commune with nature – a smaller, urbanized version of the landscape park.

If the city garden celebrated elitist nature, the town square emphasized the importance of civic amenity. A landmark of the built environment since antiquity, the square offered a focal point for residents to congregare for gossip,

trade, parades, festivals and even executions. As a public space in the heart of the city, the square cemented community identity and brought citizens together literally and mentally. As architectural historian Paul Zucker commented, the square represented a 'psychological parking place within the civic landscape'.<sup>8</sup> Such a realm expressed the animation of city life in all its energy and spectacle.

One of the most famous squares in the world, Venice's Piazza di San Marco, earned acclaim for its crowds, coffee, absence of traffic, and impressive display of open space in the sinking city. Since its establishment in AD 1000, the piazza served as an important place for residents and visitors to wile away their time. However, the piazza reflected the city rather than offering an escape from it. Invaded by the street hubbub, it remained part of the built landscape, with flocks of pigeons the only nature on display.

However, squares in other cities were likened to parks. The Agora in classical Athens encompassed a large, unpaved space interspersed with trees. Created from marshland in 1775, Padua's Prato della Valle, one of the largest squares in Europe, featured trimmed lawns, a canal, radiating paths and sculptures in French-Italian formal design. Eighteenth-century town squares in England subscribed to the same naturalistic aesthetics as found in landscape parks. Designed by architect John Wood, Queen's Square, Bath, melded urban space with organic decoration. A verdant enclave of lawns and shrubbery, the square was separated from surrounding Georgian houses and carriage roads (today a busy interchange) by a low wall. Wood explained his blueprint as a mixture of aesthetics and utility, viewing the presence of nature as conducive to the principal role of the square as a meeting place. As Wood elaborated:

The inclosing, planting, turving and gravelling this open area, in the manner above described, was a work of much greater expence than the paving the whole surface of it would have been . . . But yet I preferred an inclosed square to an open one, to make this as useful as possible: For the intention of a Square in a City is for people to assemble together; and the spot whereon they meet, ought to be separated from the ground common to Men and Beasts, and even to mankind in general.<sup>9</sup>

Queen's Square enshrined nature as an important aspect of civic space. It suggested that a green city was more amenable to live in – a view held by town planners since Sennacherib's time, and one that exerts a strong impact on the city park idea to this day.

Residents seeking entertainment in the eighteenth-century English city often looked to the commercial pleasure ground rather than the city square. A response to urbanization, the pleasure ground offered a formalized space for activities that had previously occurred in fields and on village greens. Reinventing private gardens as entertainment centres, pleasure grounds boasted concert venues and refreshment stalls. Part city park, part garden and part amusement complex, the pleasure ground advertised a wide range of activities. Fireworks, magic lantern shows, dances and circus performers provided sparkle. Flower-beds, hedges and tree-lined paths – complete with

pertinently observed, 'no wonder aristocrats left London for the country to escape its bleak, black foggy atmosphere and smoke of sea coal.'<sup>13</sup>

Within city limits, the park idea found favour among middle-class residents eager for civic authorities to create urban spaces for their benefit. Citing the high price of real estate, the lack of bureaucratic vision, and the intense pace of city growth, newspaper columnists complained of the lack of green spaces in the metropolis. Areas previously used for leisure and entertainment – common land or village greens – had been swallowed up by the urban behemoth, and rudely replaced by a workaday landscape of railroad depots, factories and commercial buildings. Town squares and royal parks were either non-existent or too small to accommodate burgeoning populations. In Britain, the Select Committee on Public Walks (1833) bemoaned the lack of greenery in the industrial towns of Bradford, Hull, Bolton and Sheffield. *Scribner's Monthly* pointed to similar recreational deficiencies in mid-century New York: 'There is actually no stroll possible! The hateful railroad . . . cut off all access to the river shore . . . and, if one climbs the hill to the highway, he finds that fences, walls, hedges and close huddling houses cut him off from all but a few tantalizing glimpses of the landscape he would enjoy.'<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, the middle class considered the park landscape to be a vital source of uplift for the working class. Middle-class reformers saw their role as 'moral entrepreneurs' capable of encouraging the rowdy masses to behave with decorum.<sup>15</sup> The city meanwhile was viewed as the future for the civilized world, but only if its social and environmental deficiencies could be adequately addressed. As Frederick Law Olmsted proclaimed, 'Our country, has entered upon a stage of progress in which its welfare is to depend on the convenience, safety, order and economy of life in its great cities.'<sup>16</sup> Social campaigners demanded the improvement of urban spaces by the provision of welfare assistance, sanitation, building codes and municipal museums, concert halls and libraries. The park comprised a significant part of their agenda. As an all-purpose medicine for staving off inertia, alienation and social discord, the park amounted to a vital prescription for healing the unsettled. A visit to the park offered the working classes a vital escape from the built environment by entry into a world of greenery, leisure and freedom. Reformers hoped that by retreating into the park urban workers would feel not only healthier – by virtue of taking exercise and breathing 'country air' – but also psychologically refreshed. The park offered a place in which to rediscover oneself beyond the machine, to work off the stresses of the week and commune with others in pleasant surroundings. To the nineteenth-century social reformer, the formulation of such a landscape served the higher interests of the city in both environmental and social terms.

Park creation in the nineteenth-century city also drew on notions of regional and national pride. With the growth of the industrial metropolis came myriad celebrations of urban living. Idealistic visions of the city as a modern, technological and utopian space engendered a sense of civic virtue. For wealthy industrialists and municipal leaders, the establishment of a park

offered the chance to proclaim the prosperity, beauty and vigour of their urban stomping grounds. Like Sennacherib in Nineveh, nineteenth-century elites viewed the park – along with public buildings, libraries, museums and concert halls – as an emblem of city identity and civic hospitality. Wealthy benefactors spoke a language of payback by forging green spaces for the factory hands that facilitated their grand life-styles. In 1840, industrialist, social reformer and ex-mayor Joseph Strutt ceded Derby Arboretum as a pleasure ground for the citizens of the town. In his dedication, Strutt motioned: 'as the sun has shone brightly on me through life, it would be ungrateful in me not to employ a portion of the fortune which I possess, in promoting the welfare of those amongst whom I live, and by whose industry I have been aided in its acquisition.'<sup>17</sup> For Strutt and his contemporaries, park creation amounted to a form of social duty. A potent combination of philanthropy and municipal pride ensured a keen market for the park idea.

The reason why reformers and planners of the nineteenth century chose the park over playgrounds, town squares and amusement complexes had to do with education. Significantly, the city park stood apart from other venues by dint of its emphasis not just on idle fun, but on embetterment. The park represented a moral landscape. The crucial ingredient that lent the park this hallowed reputation as a site of redemption and emancipation was the presence of nature itself. With its landscape of trees, meadows, lakes and flowers, the city park represented a conscious attempt to re-create the country in the city. It aimed to counter the debilitating influences of urban life by providing a natural space in the city, to paraphrase academic Leo Marx, bringing the garden to the machine.<sup>18</sup> Park popularity pivoted on the concept of nature as a repository of purity, simplicity, harmony and morality – rendering it an ideal foil for the perceived degradation, complexity, tension and corruption of city life. Such a sentiment drew on Romantic sensibilities that bemoaned the loss of untamed land and viewed nature as a venue for aesthetic rapture and spiritual rejuvenation. It also bespoke a long-standing oppositional relationship between nature and culture. From the Greek and Roman philosophers who recalled the Golden Age of Perpetual Spring to Thomas Jefferson's famous pronouncements on the virtues of agrarian republicanism, individuals viewed perfect societies as shaped by 'natural' values. In the nineteenth-century city – a man-made environment governed not by seasons but by shift work, navigated not by contoured hills but by brick buildings – this philosophy translated into a desire for reconnection with the natural. Eager to bring bucolic scenery into the built environment, the American Art Union instructed urbanites to hang landscape paintings on their walls. Nature stood for goodness, order and peaceful living.

## CREATING PARKS FOR THE PEOPLE

The formation of city parks in the nineteenth century entailed two basic practices: first, the appropriation of old royal parks for public use, and second, the building of entirely new parks.

Across Europe, royal parks were reconfigured for popular use. Parisians gained access to the Jardin des Plantes and the Tuileries Garden courtesy of the National Revolutionary Convention. In 1828, city authorities dedicated the Parc de Sceaux (the seventeenth-century country seat of minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert) as an urban recreational space. Further east, residents of Prague enjoyed the delights of Petrin Park, a private garden opened to the public in 1800, along with Chotkovy Sady Park, given over to public access in 1833. Inspired by Enlightenment philosophy together with academic discussion of the merits of parks as social and moral spaces, Friedrich Wilhelm III remodelled the famous Tiergarten hunting preserve in Berlin as a public park. The Tiergarten, or 'garden of beasts', was officially opened in 1840, complete with new lake and zoo.

In 1824, park designer Peter Joseph Lenné berated English parks 'kept for the nourishment of game instead of human beings' compared to the 'liberality of his king and other German princes who generously throw open their gardens to their public at every hour of the day'. British park advocates such as the writer J. C. Loudon agreed that the English capital compared unfavourably with continental Europe in its provision of green spaces. 'The present time seems to be favourable for improving our public parks and gardens which foreigners justly observe are inferior to those of every other great city of Europe,' Loudon railed. Created in 1811 by architect John Nash, Regent's Park received criticism for its closed entry system. As the Select Committee on Public Walks explained, 'It is an absurdity to think of it as a place of recreation and use by the public. It is not a public park, but a place set apart for the use of the wealthy only.' In 1834, 88 acres of Regent's Park were duly opened to public access. Similar measures followed at other parks. In 1827, new regulations at St James's Park mandated 'the whole of the space . . . now laid out in grass, and from which the Public are excluded, will be thrown open'. In Hyde Park, imposing perimeter walls gave way to a less fortified look of painted iron railings. With most entrance requirements to London's parks broadened by the mid-1800s, the city park became a place for the people.<sup>19</sup>

The drive for city parks in the nineteenth century involved the formation of new public spaces. Residents of Bath paid a subscription fund to create Victoria Park, opened by the Queen in 1830. Sponsors viewed the park as a way to bolster the credentials of Bath as a tourist resort and to aid the urban poor. In 1843, civic authorities established the world's first publicly funded park for use by all at Birkenhead. Local dignitaries lobbied for a municipal park to cater for the growing working population. Commissioners bought 185 acres of marshy land notorious for gambling and dog fighting from F. R. Price, with the intention of making a public park. Park establishment represented an opportunity to improve both the area and the lives of the local working class.

Joseph Paxton, railway engineer, MP and landscape architect, produced an £800 blueprint for Birkenhead Park, based on plantings of beech, cypress,

weeping willow and silver pear, the excavation of two lakes, and the construction of lodges, boathouses, sports fields and winding drives. Some 10,000 people attended the formal opening of the park in April 1847. Birkenhead earned acclaim as the 'people's park' due to its democratic genesis. *The Stranger's Guide through Birkenhead* (c.1851) pondered the egalitarian and aesthetic qualities of the new reserve thus:

When the important advantages to the poorer classes, of such an extensive and delightful pleasure ground, are taken into consideration, no one will be inclined to say that such an expenditure does not merit the most unbounded success, and the deepest public gratitude. Here nature may be viewed in her loveliest garb, the most obdurate heart may be softened, and the mind gently led to pursuits which refine, purify, and alleviate the humblest of the toil-worn.<sup>20</sup>

## FREDERICK LAW OLNSTED AND CENTRAL PARK

For many Americans in the mid-1800s, the word 'park' connoted aristocratic Old World decadence. No US city maintained sizeable parks for public recreation.<sup>21</sup> Boston had its common and Philadelphia its town squares, but most urban centres were bereft of green areas for ordinary folk to relax in. However, the creation of Central Park in New York during the 1850s and 1860s demonstrated the applicability of the park idea to New World shores.

Impetus for the creation of Central Park came from a cadre of New York literati, journalists and social critics (including garden designer Andrew Jackson Downing and editor of the *New York Evening Post* William Cullen Bryant), who lobbied intently for the designation of green space in a burgeoning city of 654,000 residents. Existing public spaces were either inadequate – Battery Park spanned 10 acres and earned a reputation for rowdy immigrants and idlers – or were accessible only to wealthy property owners. Campaigners argued that a park would elevate the reputation of New York as a cosmopolitan and cultured space, as well as improving the health of its inhabitants. More mercenary supporters pointed to its potential for raising real estate values.

Cultural nationalism informed desires for emparkment among the wealthy fraternity. Urban greenery signalled American power, prosperity and cultural maturity. The setting aside of parks for the public good responded directly to those who derided American society as crass and materialistic. As Downing noted, 'The true policy of republics, is to foster the taste for great public libraries, sculpture and picture galleries, parks, and gardens, which *all* may enjoy.'<sup>22</sup> Such pronouncements paid homage to the United States as an egalitarian and democratic society, in contrast to old Europe. The park, in its New World incarnation, symbolized the opportunities of republican democracy. It hoisted New York as a natural wonder and a social utopia combined.

At the same time, advocates looked to European precedent for the specifics of park design. American tourists praised parks in both Paris and London as 'lungs for the city'. Writing in the *Horticulturalist*, Andrew Downing noted 'every American who visits London . . . feels mortified that no city in the

United States has a public park'.<sup>23</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, who toured Britain in 1850, paid particular attention to the merits of Birkenhead after a proud local baker suggested a visit. While Olmsted complained about the ostentatious classical gateway – depicting 'a sort of grandeur . . . that the English are fond of' – he applauded Paxton's transformation of the 'flat, sterile, clay farm' into an immense parkscape. 'Five minutes of admiration, and a few more spent in studying the manner in which art had been employed to obtain from nature so much beauty, and I was ready to admit that in democratic America, there was nothing to be thought of as comparable with this People's Garden,' he confessed. The democratic theme of the park particularly impressed Olmsted: 'All this magnificent pleasure-ground is entirely, unreservedly, and forever the People's own. The poorest British peasant is as free to enjoy it in all its parts, as the British Queen. More than that, the baker of Birkenhead had the pride of an Owner in it. Is it not a grand good thing?'<sup>24</sup> The lack of such a democratic space in New York smacked of neglect. As writer Caroline Kirkland bemoaned, 'Nothing we saw in London made our own dear city of New York seem so poor in comparison as these parks . . . After seeing these oases in the wilderness of streets, one can never be content with the scanty patches of verdure . . . that [in New York] form the only places of afternoon recreation for the weary, the sad, the invalid, the playful.'<sup>25</sup>

Mayor Ambrose Kingsland recommended the establishment of a public park before the New York Council in April 1851. The Council legislated in favour of a 773-acre site in Manhattan in July 1853. The Central Park decision showed the broadening of governmental responsibilities to include civic health and the willingness of authorities to purchase real estate for public recreation. In 1857, commissioners announced a competition for the design of Central Park, with the promise of a cash prize for the winner. Thirty-five entries were submitted. The winning Greensward plan was the brainchild of British architect Calvert Vaux and Connecticut landscape designer Frederick Law Olmsted.

The Greensward Plan lived up to its name – Greensward meaning unbroken stretches of turf or lawn in old English (see fig.4). Olmsted and Vaux envisaged Central Park as a rural idyll between 59th and 106th streets, where urbanites could escape from city life to immerse themselves in pastoral scenery. The crafting of an illusion of rolling countryside dominated planning considerations. At the time of construction, Manhattan had encroached only as far as 38th Street, but Olmsted and Vaux foresaw a time when Central Park would 'be in the centre of a population of two millions hemmed in by water at a short distance on all sides'.<sup>26</sup> Preserving a fantasy of sylvan peace, the designers planted a tree belt around the park to screen off the urban world. So as not to disturb the tranquil unity of the park space, the four roads that bisected the landscape were sunk into the ground and walled, akin to the ha-ha. The park featured an upper region of undulating meadows and a lower wooded region. Visitors navigated the entire two and a half mile long preserve via a series of winding footpaths, bridleways and carriage drives. An open square at the



Figure 4. Aerial view of Central Park, New York, 1973. US National Archives, photo number 412-DA-5908.

centre of the park – the Mall – served as a focal point for citizens to meet, stroll and converse. Close by, the Bethesda Terrace led down to a vast lake and the Ramble, a mysterious area of dense woodland with twisting walks, waterfalls, rocky outcrops and an Indian cave in the fashion of the eighteenth-century landscape park's 'wilderness'.

The Olmsted–Vaux design promised both contemplation and fulfilment. Central Park was consciously crafted in opposition to the city – pastoral nature versus industry. As Olmsted motioned in 'Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns' (1870): 'We want, especially, the greatest possible contrast with the streets and the shops and the rooms of the town. . . . We want depth of wood enough about it not only for comfort in hot weather, but to completely shut out the city from our landscapes. These are the distinguishing elements of what is properly called a park.'<sup>27</sup>

Although residents sought escape from urban confines through the park template, its fundamental remit lay in making the metropolis liveable. The park was designed to remedy the problems of city life, to make urban denizens feel happier, healthier and work harder. The park thereby civilized the city by naturalizing it. Behind the organic designs of Greensward lay ideologies of social paternalism, civic reformism and democracy. Central Park was steeped in egalitarian imperatives – the landscape itself was to provide a conduit for community expression, civic mingling and cultural uplift. For Olmsted and Vaux, the natural aesthetics of the city park serviced physical health, psychological refreshment and communitarian ideals.

As soon as city commissioners decided on the location of Central Park, surveyors were sent in to assess the area and recommend purchase orders. The designated site was far from vacant. No blank canvas existed on Manhattan Island on which to forge a fantastic rural retreat. Instead, the area slated for park purchase featured shanty towns, hog farms and squatter camps housing poor Irish, German and African-American families. Some 1,600 residents were evicted prior to Central Park taking shape. City plans for a park thus involved schemes of slum removal and gentrification. New York administrators perceived park creation as a programme of social and environmental improvement, establishing an enclave of aesthetic beauty and leisure pursuits in a neighbourhood notorious for its 'vagabonds and scoundrels of every description'.<sup>28</sup> Newspaper columnists and social critics derided the residents of the site as savages who lived off the refuse of the city, built their own tumbledown homes, spread disease, and indulged in violence and criminality. The area was renowned for its illegal liquor distilleries, rowdy dance halls and odious bone-boiling plants. Planners believed that establishing a park in the vicinity would effectively rid them of a 'problem' neighbourhood.

In making this judgement, city officials demonstrated both their ignorance of local communities and their prejudice against immigrants and minorities. Records show that 'pre-parkites' lived in stable, and cohesive settlements.<sup>29</sup> Many worked as unskilled labourers and servants, while one in ten owned a business. The largest of the communities, Seneca Village, comprised a vibrant African-American centre complete with schoolhouse and Methodist and Episcopal churches. In 1853, a judicial commission began its survey of property in the area – ruling to offer compensation payments of an average \$700 per lot. Following protracted jockeying and legal appeals, Albany Judge Ira Harris upheld the Commission's Report in February 1856, and the bailiffs moved in. Though disgusted at the paltry compensation they received, residents vacated their homes without incident. Many New Yorkers balked at the \$5,000,000 cost of acquiring park land.

When Olmsted took charge of the cleared site in 1858 as architect-in-chief, the Central Park lot comprised mostly boggy swampland and salt marshes. Its poor soil, ravines and rocky outcrops of granite hardly fitted the Greensward Plan of undulating meadowland. Sceptics contended that this was the reason why the park site was selected from the outset. Its rugged terrain arguably rendered it too expensive for commercial development. Between 1858 and 1861, Olmsted presided over a huge construction site. Some 4,000 workers sweated up to 10 hours a day excavating, draining and levelling the area; 166 tonnes of gunpowder were used to blast the bedrock. Fertile topsoil had to be shipped in from New Jersey. Behind the rural vision lay a comprehensive engineering infrastructure. Olmsted and Vaux utilized new technology to bring their park design to fruition – from tarmac road paving to a network of pipes that filled the 20 acre reservoir and controlled run-off. Gardeners planted a total of 270,000 trees and bushes.

Central Park was gradually opened to New York's citizenry as new features took shape. By the end of 1863, visitors had the run of the grounds, carriage drives and footpaths below 102nd Street. The Lake and the Ramble proved particularly popular. The *New York Herald* enthused: 'there was never perhaps an institution established for public enjoyment which has grown popular and available so rapidly.'<sup>30</sup> With distinctly nationalistic overtones, Vaux celebrated the creation as 'the big art work of the Republic', a public space where all could convene to appreciate American nature.<sup>31</sup> By 1865, attendance reached 7,600,000 per year. The city park was hailed as a paragon of civic pride, moral purpose and democratic wisdom.

The authors of the Greensward Plan received notable plaudits. In 1861, Henry Bellows described Olmsted as a 'Capability' Brown for the nineteenth century:

The Union of prosaic sense with poetical feeling, of democratic sympathies with refined and scholarly tastes, of punctilious respect for facts with tender hospitality for ideas, has enabled him to appreciate and embody, both in conception and execution of the Park, the beau-ideal of a people's pleasure ground.<sup>32</sup>

City planners clamoured for Olmsted and Vaux – now cemented as the principal landscape architects in North America – to create green spaces in their neighbourhoods. Olmsted, Vaux & Co. went on to design parks and parkways in Buffalo, Brooklyn, Boston, Detroit, Chicago and Montreal. They also expanded the city park idea. Convinced of its character as a restorative landscape, Olmsted and Vaux appropriated the park concept for living spaces. Their blueprints for a suburban community in Riverside, Illinois, set houses and winding streets within an undulating park-like space of 'refined sylvan beauty' along the Des Plaines River.<sup>33</sup> The educational benefits of green space underlay similar spatial designs for the university campuses of Berkeley and Stanford in California.

The urban park emerged as a standard feature of the modern North American city during the latter years of the 1800s. In 1869, the *San Diego Union* claimed: 'Every considerable city in Europe and the United States . . . has its vast tract of land reserved and beautified as a park.'<sup>34</sup> San Diego itself boasted Balboa Park, 1,400 acres of desert chaparral ceded as a public recreation area in 1868. City officials in San Francisco reached an agreement with land owners and squatters to establish Golden Gate Park the same year. In Butte, Montana, residents enjoyed the facilities at the Columbia Gardens pleasure ground from 1888 onwards, a park space which the local *Miner* newspaper described as 'a resort worthy of the Great Metropolis of Montana'.<sup>35</sup> North of the 49th parallel, the fledgling City Council of Vancouver established 1,000 acre Stanley Park as one of its inaugural acts in 1886. In Europe, Napoleon III opened the Parc des Buttes-Chaumont to Parisians in 1867. Parks proliferated in British industrial towns burdened by pollution, overcrowding and disease. Presiding over a city judged the third most unhealthy in England, authorities in Bristol created Eastville, Greville Smyth, St Agnes

ethnic components, together, but the practice of racial segregation was so unquestioned that officials did not need to call attention to it in any way.<sup>41</sup>

Gender inequalities further moderated the egalitarianism of the city park ideal. In the 1800s, gender roles rested on constructions of biological difference and social functionality. While men operated in a public context, and seemed marked by competitiveness and aggression, women were widely deemed emotional nurturers, and remained confined to the private sphere. According to the Victorian Cult of True Womanhood, the ideal woman exuded piety, purity, domesticity and submissiveness. Such gender stereotypes had broad application for social reformers keen to project women as moral guardians and stabilizing forces in an era of mass industrialization and urban alienation. Park campaigners saw femininity as an integral aspect of a wholesome landscape of leisure. Reformers lionized the family outing to the park as a way of circumscribing undesirable male-oriented leisure activities of saloon drinking, gambling and street fighting. In 1903, Charles Eliot, President of Harvard, lauded the park as a promoter of 'family life', noting that 'the pleasures men share with their wives and children are apt to be safer pleasures than those they take by themselves'.<sup>42</sup>

The city park strove to project itself as a female-friendly venue. Women-only spas, casinos and restaurants wooed New York females to Central Park. In Golden Gate Park, a refreshment centre overlooked a children's playground, allowing mothers to watch over their kids and chat with friends. Women who failed to abide by gender conventions or appropriate social codes proved less welcome. Park administrators singled out prostitutes as particular enemies of the park ideal. Licentiousness and sexual desire were not judged appropriate in the park landscape. Such sentiments also manifested themselves in the sexual segregation of park space. Proscribed gender roles ensured that fathers were barred from looking after their children in the playground, while rocking benches were marked 'mothers only'. Leisure activities proved similarly mediated. Different sports catered to male and female actors, with genteel games of croquet for girls, baseball for a 'more vigorous' male audience. The fun-fair in Golden Gate Park featured side-saddled wooden horses for female riders.

A complex landscape resonant with egalitarian rhetoric yet party to social inequalities, the nineteenth-century city park presented a flawed idea. It reflected contemporary class, racial and gender divisions. At the same time, the city park was not a static landscape. Gradually, the people claimed the city park for their own.

Like rebellious peasants conspiring to steal deer from the royal park, disaffected urbanites took to the city park as a place to challenge authority. The copes of city parks offered a realm beyond the purview of government scrutiny. In 1830, revolutionary forces fired the first shots in the war for Belgian independence in Warande Park, Brussels. Agitators used Berlin's Tiergarten to ferment support for their revolutionary activities in 1848. In Hyde Park, democratic oratory was championed in Speaker's Corner. Legalized by an Act

of Parliament permitting legal assembly and the addressing of crowds, the soap-box venue became a hotbed of political discussion, anarchic rabble-rousing and pertinent social comment from the 1870s on. Karl Marx, George Orwell and suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst all enthralled audiences at Speaker's Corner. From its non-sectarian beginnings, the city park quickly emerged as a landscape of protest.

Park activities also challenged conventional gender boundaries. Female activists asserted their independence by organizing initiatives without male input. In San Diego, the Ladies Annex of the Chamber of Commerce led a programme of park beautification in 1889–90. Arguing that the green space of Balboa Park served as 'the lungs of the city', and emphasizing the necessity of shady spaces for pleasant recreation, the group raised an impressive \$514 for tree plantings. Assumed to favour child-rearing pursuits and docile strolls, many women engaged in energetic sports. Women learned to row, skated on park lakes in all-female parties, and cycled roads *without* male assistance. In 1891, one New York paper bemoaned 'the somewhat dangerous nature of the driving of women in Central Park' – a testament both to female empowerment and mainstream gender bias.<sup>43</sup>

The public voice was heard in the park on other, more frivolous issues. While activists challenged political authority and gender conventions, everyday citizens confronted park officers over the issue of recreation. Elite visions of the park as a venue of passive leisure activities came under fire in the latter years of the 1800s by an audacious and vocal citizenry that demanded a broad range of services. Community groups petitioned park officers for refreshment stands, organized sports and lively entertainments. In the 1870s, patrons of Central Park took the law into their own hands by picnicking on the hallowed grass. The working classes expected the park to serve as a multi-purpose recreational landscape, including a social club, sports arena and fairground. Academic Dorceta Taylor elaborated: 'After endless hours of brutal, mind-numbing work, some people wanted to engage in compensatory, active leisure pursuits. The working class had no place at home to exercise and no access to college gyms or country clubs. Therefore, the parks became the premier location for exercising, playing games and sports, organizing social gatherings, courting, and resting.'<sup>44</sup>

Civic authorities responded to popular demands by remodelling the city park into a flexible recreational landscape in the late 1800s. The city park slowly became a democratic landscape of play. New preserves catered specifically to working-class neighbourhoods – among them the Sarphati in Amsterdam, Bolton's Queens Park and San Francisco's Mission Dolores Park – while amenities at existing parks expanded to include organized games, animal attractions and lively amusements. Additions included children's playgrounds, circus shows, tennis courts, athletic tracks, petting zoos, carousels and skating rinks. Amidst the new frivolity, administrators still hoped to maintain the moral purpose of the park. Parks were compartmentalized for different activities. Visitor behaviour was moderated, and facilities



such as zoos and galleries advanced an educational function. In the 1880s, old-school park designer Frederick Law Olmsted embraced the new creed by integrating areas for organized sports into schematics for the Boston park system. His blueprints for Buffalo incorporated a baseball diamond, a sport popular among US park visitors.

## THE BASEBALL PARK

Baseball facilitated the rise of another popular park form in cities across the United States during the latter years of the 1800s. While the recreation grounds of the city park serviced the ball-hitting desires of amateur players and enthusiasts, across town the ball park provided structured play for professionals and spectator sport for local fans. By the late 1800s, the baseball park had become an important part of the leisure landscape in the USA, highlighting associations of the park with recreation and urban identity.

Devised by New Yorker Alexander Cartwright in the 1840s, baseball gained prominence in the United States during Reconstruction. With gambling common among both fans and players, early games proved rowdy affairs. However, baseball had more to offer than simple vices. Baseball player John Montgomery Ward considered the game eminently 'suited to the national temperament. It requires strength, courage and skill; it is full of dash and excitement, and though a most difficult game in which to excel, it is yet extremely simple in its first principles and easily understood by every one.' During the 1890s, managers at Baker Bowl, Philadelphia, attracted 'respectable and refined classes', by serving notice of park rules forbidding 'gambling, betting, profanity, obscenity and disorderly conduct, as well as Sunday ball playing'. By the end of the nineteenth century, baseball had emerged as America's favourite national pastime.<sup>45</sup>

Baseball fields found fertile soil in bustling cities. The first urban baseball parks emerged in recreational fields, old race tracks, or on deserted exposition and fairground land. Until City Hall intervened with traffic plans in 1889, the New York Giants played at a baseball field on the north-east corner of Central Park. Like amusement parks, baseball grounds were often located at the end of trolley lines to foster tram use. Rarely enclosed or well managed, early baseball parks were concerned with the sheer spectacle of the game rather than the beautification of the urban landscape. Wooden stands offered simple comforts to watching crowds. Just like the city park, the baseball diamond became associated with sound recreation, healthy exercise and democratic gathering. Welcoming venues such as Chicago's Comiskey Park provided the working class with a valuable escape from everyday industrial life.

Beginning in 1909 with the construction of Shibe Park in Philadelphia, steel and concrete baseball parks replaced their wooden counterparts. The use of fireproof materials testified to American industrial might and the common belief that baseball was there to stay. New parks emerged as grand celebrations of city, team and team owner (the most powerful industrial magnates finding

in baseball an outlet for their accumulated currency). With a floor of Italian marble and featuring a baseball stitching pattern, the rotunda inside the main entrance to Ebbet's Field, built in 1913 as a venue for the Brooklyn Dodgers, exuded architectural glamour. A chandelier with its arms shaped as wooden bats hung from the ceiling. Parks represented landscapes of popular power and mass cultural significance. In 1910, at the start of the baseball season, President William Howard Taft threw the first ball at National Park, home of the appropriately named Washington Senators. Later Presidents John F. Kennedy and George W. Bush kept up the tradition.

Caught within thriving urban environments, baseball parks varied in shape and size as a direct response to existing road networks and buildings. Fenway Park in Boston resembled a giant footprint due to city restraints. Backed up against Lansdowne Street, its 10-foot-high left field embankment (Duffy's Cliff) stood only 315 feet from the home plate and within reach of many big hitters. In 1934, owners constructed a new wall nicknamed the Green Monster due to its paint hue. The wall reached 37 feet into the sky to dissuade visiting teams from knocking balls outside the park. An even higher screen protected windows in Lansdowne Street from being smashed by home runs.

Rather than compromise play action, the distinctiveness of each park assured an element of chance in team encounters. As baseball writer Philip Lowry commented, 'geometrical variety' proved 'healthy for the game'. Distinct pitch configurations suited pitchers, fielders and batters. Home teams moved and raised fences and walls in order to assist with point scoring, hoping to perfect a home-field advantage or at the very least make the game more entertaining. Huge advertising boards offered rewards to big hitters. At Ebbet's Field, Abe Stark, 'Brooklyn's Leading Clothier', promised a suit to whoever hit his sign. Natural contours also determined entertainment parameters. At Crosley Field, home to the Cincinnati Reds, the sloping nature of the park meant that outfielders ran up a hill to catch flying balls. At Braves Field, Boston, manager Casey Stengel nicknamed the gusts blowing from the nearby Charles River, 'Old Joe Wind, my fourth outfielder'. The idiosyncrasies of each park made each game different, and set turn-of-the-century baseball apart from other sports, where standardization ruled.<sup>46</sup>

Squeezed between outside streets and outfield, grandstands in steel and concrete parks typically allowed spectators an intimate view of the game, and helped fuel baseball as a cherished recreational pastime. City dwellers identified not just with their local team, but with their own unique home field and even its peculiar grandstand layout. Individual parks enriched the baseball experience, the venue itself contributing to the charm of the game. Diamonds such as Wrigley Field in Chicago and Ebbet's Field in Brooklyn thereby assumed the status of mythical landscapes. Baseball commissioner Bart Giamatti considered Fenway Park 'on the level of Mount Olympus, the Pyramid at Giza, the nation's capital, the czar's Winter Palace, and the Louvre – except, or course, that it's better than all those inconsequential places'.<sup>47</sup>

## THE CITY PARK IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

As with any park landscape, the city park evolved during the twentieth century to meet shifting social dictates, economic pressures, political rubrics and environmental preferences. Old parks were remodelled, and new ones created. Design parameters changed as parks adapted to the cultures that they served.

Concepts of social reform continued to influence park design in the early years of the twentieth century. The park increasingly facilitated goals of cultural assimilation and national identity formation. US planners lauded parkscapes as spatial melting-pots where immigrants could learn the cultural mores and leisure norms of mainstream America. The Stadtpark in Hamburg (1914), forerunner of the Volkspark system, espoused German nationalism in its sports activities. Authorities saw organized play as a valuable medium for cultivating good citizenship and assuaging anti-social behaviour. Structured sports activities, fetes, arts and crafts displays, and gardening allotments all found their place in the park landscape as means to bring people together. The coterie of athletics championships, children's playgrounds and cultural festivals lent the modern city park a far more functional flavour than its forebears. In the early 1900s, planners were more likely to see swimming pools as appropriate park water features, rather than serpentine lakes. Leisure assumed primacy over nature, action superseded ideas of contemplation. Designer of the Stadtpark, Fritz Schumacher, explained that productive use of the park lay 'not in the sense of a passive enjoyment of the scenery, but in an active participation to be practiced in the open air: playing, taking part in sports, lying on the grass, paddling in the water, riding on horseback, dancing; going far beyond the appreciation of music, of art, of flowers and of physical pleasure'.<sup>48</sup>

Significantly, designers working within this new recreational mandate attached less importance to shutting out the city. Views of the city skyline became commonplace. Cars entered Golden Gate Park for the first time in 1900. Formal design schematics reflected the increasingly functional role of the park. Paths were straightened to provide additional space for gaming, and buildings were constructed for changing rooms and as venues for cultural events. Landscapers favoured level ground for the ease of ball players. Designed by Jean-Claude-Nicolas Forestier in 1911, the Parque de María-Luisa, Seville, featured a grid of tree avenues, shady plazas and garden compartments to cater for intensive visitation. Landscape architect Alan Tate applauded the design for its 'sensitivity to context. It explored Moorish garden design traditions at the same time as responding to existing site characteristics, to climatic imperatives and to the emerging functionalist paradigm of recreational utility'.<sup>49</sup>

The parks of the early 1900s provided recreation for the masses in a way that their nineteenth-century precursors failed to do. A wide range of cultural and entertainment pastimes attracted a diverse audience. Nevertheless, racial and sexual divisions remained. In US parks, women were assigned their own

gymns, separated from male areas, and screened by trees to prevent peeping. Swimming baths hosted 'men only' and 'women only' nights. Separate park zones existed for African Americans, although poor recreational provisions for black communities belied the 'separate but equal' rhetoric of racial segregation. As of 1919, only 3 per cent of the nation's playground facilities were accessible to children of colour. In Lexington, Kentucky, authorities created a separate network of parks, governed by a dedicated Parks Board, to service African Americans. Frederick Douglass Park (1916), along with ten other parks, catered to the African-American community in Lexington and surrounding areas. As well as a refuge from city life, the park offered a brief escape from social alienation. Frederick Douglass Park gave geographical expression to a cohesive community which gained identity and empowerment by participating in organized events. Groups gathered in the park for sporting competitions, picnics and fondly remembered Fourth of July parades. On one sultry August day in 1932, 20,000 people visited the area.

In the inter-war period, the city park underwent a further evolution. The urban parkscape shed its inclination for social reform and fully embraced recreation as its defining mandate. Authorities no longer couched the value of parklands in terms of social goals. As Galen Cranz noted, 'park facilities were an expected feature of urban life. Park officials around the country adopted this attitude, repeating the claim that they no longer had to justify parks and that recreation had been accepted as an essential of life.'<sup>50</sup> Gorky Park, established along the Moskva River in 1928, offered a range of leisure pursuits for Muscovites. Designed as the 'First Park of Culture and Rest', in it citizens navigated 300 acres of ornamental grounds, a skating rink, playgrounds, amusement arcades and a rollercoaster ride. Architects praised Bos Park in Holland, built during the 1930s, for its functional approach to spatial design. In North America, the focus on recreational provision altered the character of landmark urban spaces. Under the stewardship of Robert Moses, Central Park expanded its amenities. In the 1920s, only the Heckscher Playground existed there. By 1941, Central Park featured twenty dedicated kids' play areas, each covered in asphalt for easy maintenance. As part of Moses' rubric of order and efficiency, the car received a hearty welcome. Car parks were created, roads widened, and features demolished to accommodate automobile usage.

World War II posed new challenges. Many park authorities found their budgets severely curtailed. Staff shortages abounded due to funding cuts and call-up cards. The park none the less continued to contribute to civic culture. Administrators held patriotic drives in parks and volunteered buildings for billeting troops. US GIs learned canoe drills in swimming pools, while British park authorities tore up iron railings to melt down for the war effort. Civil defence priorities also demanded the creation of air raid shelters in green spaces, with the park seen as a refuge from wartime targets. However, due to their placement in towns and cities, many parks were damaged during bombing runs. Used as a military depot, Hamburg's Stadtpark was subject to

bomb blasts that destroyed its restaurant and dairy. Across the English Channel, Birkenhead Park lost Palm House and its gate pillars to incendiaries.

In the post-1945 period, increased leisure time and greater affluence renewed the stature of the city park. The park served as a multiple-use leisure area fit for walking, cycling, roller skating, kite flying, softball and soccer leagues, music festivals and cultural events. It also operated as a libertarian space. In the USA, 'love-ins' and anti-war rallies appropriated the park as a protest landscape for alternative life-styles and political rebellion. The psychedelic 'Itchycoo Park', sung by the Small Faces in 1967, co-opted the park as a venue for drug taking, duck feeding, sun soaking and personal reflection. In 1989, 1,500,000 million people gathered in Letna Park, Prague, to listen to oratory from Vaclav Havel and Alexander Dubček during the Velvet Revolution.

The environmental revolution also made its mark on the city park idea. Park staff offered ecology tours highlighting the nature on display. Authorities incorporated butterfly zones, bog gardens and wild grass meadows in order to satisfy consumer taste for exploring functioning ecosystems and representative biota. Interpretive programmes emphasized the value of city parks as filters for hydrocarbons, airborne contaminants and noise pollution. In Seattle during the 1970s, Freeway Park greened the roof of Interstate I-5. Workers employed trees and water features to eliminate vehicular noise.

Significantly, the ideas of Frederick Olmsted gained new currency with a generation of urbanites eager to connect with nature. Once more, the park was celebrated as a natural retreat for the city dweller, an ecological enclave. Like Olmsted, environmentally inclined urbanites saw access to green space as a means towards successful city living. In 1991, Toronto City Council announced a park design competition hoping to 'create a new *natural oasis* [and] re-establish a foothold for nature in this vibrant neighbourhood'.<sup>51</sup> The winning template for Yorkville Park featured ten representative Canadian landscapes crossed by pedestrian walks – a nation's ecology depicted in micro-cosm. Similar impulses governed blueprints for Honmoku Citizens' Public Park in Yokohama, Japan – a city supporting 3,000,000 residents. In 1986, park authorities remodelled a drainage ditch and holding pond to create a wetland ecosystem for twenty-seven species of dragonfly, an endangered insect prized as a symbol of spirituality in Japanese culture.

Modern park designers contended with a range of urban maladies. Not only did the built environment circumscribe the physical limits of the park, but pollutants and toxic soil also dictated botanical choices. The city remained embedded in the park experience. However, unlike the horticulturalists of the 1800s who endeavoured to screen out the urban jungle from the pastoral lines of the park, modern landscape architects appeared far more comfortable with the social and historical impulses affecting park design. By the late twentieth century, the park had earned acceptance as a cultural artefact, part of an evolving and adapting urban cityscape.

In some locales, designers incorporated pieces of industrial archaeology into their schematics. Part of urban regeneration, the post-industrial city

park embodied nature, art, technology and manufacturing processes. In El Parc del Clot, Barcelona, established in 1986, an industrial heritage of railroad sidings sat alongside Dalí-inspired sculpture and Islamic water pools. Woods, gardens and an aqueduct provided areas for strolling, while asphalt zones (designed around an old railroad engineers' work pit) serviced the needs of rollerbladers and skateboarders. El Parc del Clot celebrated the park as a place of aesthetics and of utility, of the past and the present, of nature and people.

City parks in Paris also celebrated an industrial past. Built on the site of a car factory closed in the 1970s, the Parc André-Citroen opened in 1992 to popular applause. The 35 acre preserve was arranged around a formal rectangular canal and lawn. Adjacent to the central axis stood 'Serial Gardens' based on the themes of artifice, architecture, movement and nature. Parc André-Citroen offered visitors dedicated compartments of sensory delight that combined gardening and contemporary art, although one commentator lambasted the ensemble as 'a kind of horticultural IKEA'.<sup>52</sup>

#### THE CITY PARK: THE BEST AND THE WORST OF URBAN LIFE

In the 1920s, French architect Le Corbusier envisaged his ideal urban conurbation 'Radiant City' as a vertically arranged landscape of skyscrapers and elevated freeways. The whole city was situated in an expansive parkscape. Like Olmsted, Le Corbusier saw the park as integral to the utopian city. As a valuable place for citizens to rest and gather together, the park stood as an emblem of the modern city at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Urban green spaces attracted a human zoo of joggers, chess players, tai chi experts and picnickers. In Gorky Park, citizens took advantage of chilly winters by skating on the ice-covered pavements. Eager to claim the prized Peter Pan Cup, intrepid swimmers bathed in Hyde Park's Serpentine on Christmas Day for the purposes of vigour and yule-tide exuberance. The park represented a rare public space in an increasingly privatized cityscape. Writing in 1980, sociologist William H. Whyte measured the vitality of the modern city by the presence of well-utilized open spaces with shady seating and attractive vistas. Others heralded the park as vital to urban health. In 2002, Chinese authorities remodelled Heilongjiang Forest Park in Harbin with such a goal in mind. Some 1,200 plants, an artificial lake and garden areas were specifically designed to reduce humidity and city noise. Put simply, the city park was what made the city liveable.<sup>53</sup>

At the same time, the modern city park failed to offer urbanites a perfect Eden. The problems and pressures of the urban jungle frequently filtered into park space. As town planner Jane Jacobs adeptly pointed out, 'Parks are volatile places. They tend to run to extremes of popularity and unpopularity. Their behavior is far from simple. They can be delightful features of city districts, and economic assets to their surroundings as well, but pitifully few

are . . . there are dozens of dispirited city vacuums called parks, eaten around with decay, little used, unloved.<sup>54</sup>

Municipal financing represented a major obstacle to ensuring the sustainability of city parks. As city councils faced spiralling bills, many cut funding to their parks. In the 1970s, Birkenhead and Central Park fell into disrepair due to economic recession and urban unemployment. Dilapidated park buildings invited the attentions of graffiti artists. Piles of trash and rusty railings compared unfavourably with the glitzy cleanliness of the theme park, the beach or the shopping mall.

Crime contributed to the declining fortunes of the city park. Anti-social behaviour had always concerned park authorities – Greenwich Park featured a sturdy oak used to incarcerate felons during the 1700s, while Olmsted appointed a police force in Central Park in 1858. In the twentieth century, gangs, rapists, prostitutes, muggers and drug dealers employed the city park for their activities, lending many parks unsavoury reputations after dark. Shootings, assaults and discarded needles provided evidence of urban social decay. Sara Delano Roosevelt Park, New York, hosted pitched battles between rival gangs, the Forsyth Street Boys and the Sportsmen. Reverend Jerry Oniki commented: ‘Every sort of vice you can think of goes on in that park.’<sup>55</sup> Also in New York, Bryant Park totalled 150 muggings and thirteen rapes in 1976 and 1977 alone. The city park contained real dangers.

Yet the reputation of criminality in the city park also derived from sensationalist journalism and media spectacle. In 1973, the *New York Times* contained extensive coverage of three murders in Central Park (1,676 occurred elsewhere in the Big Apple, but received less reportage). The dark corners and subtle lighting of the park played on fears of the savage wilderness. Freeway Park, Seattle, despite its bright lights and alarm buttons, still struck visitors as ‘a somewhat scary forest [that] still seems forbidding and spooky’.<sup>56</sup>

The democratic structure of the city park made it an ideal venue for marginalized groups, sometimes to the concern of city administrators. With ‘love-ins’ in Sheep Meadow and pot smoking around the Bethesda Fountain in Central Park, America’s counterculture looked to the park as a place to challenge conformity. Those seeking anonymous sexual encounters also took to the park. As a 1995 gay guidebook to Paris motioned, ‘Swimming pools, public parks, the quays along the Seine, train stations and major tourist attractions all have potentials never imagined by their builders. Keep your eyes open.’<sup>57</sup> In the 1990s, punters dubbed Hon Lim Park in Singapore ‘Jurassic Park’ due to its mature homosexual male clientele. Use of the park as a ‘cruising ground’ spurred criticism from conservatives who objected to its appropriation as a sexual space.

City parks developed vibrant youth subcultures that utilized park steps, benches and pavements for skateboarding, much to the consternation of wardens. Some authorities issued regulations and rendered their parks ‘skateproof’ by removing opportunities for board stunts, while more progressive councils ceded dedicated land for a new variety of park, the skate park.

The modern city park further served as a refuge for itinerant peoples without jobs or homes, or those suffering from mental problems or substance abuse. For the homeless, the park offered a place to meet others in the same situation, as well as a forum for bartering, reading or sleeping. In Osaka, Japan’s second largest conurbation, urban parks supported 2,152 vagrants living in makeshift tent cities. Visitors baulked at homeless usage of the city park, complaining of panhandling, harassment and litter, while authorities attempted to dissuade use of the park by the homeless by installing sprinkler systems and ‘bum-proof benches’. In 2001, authorities in Osaka served eviction orders that mandated the removal of Nagai Park residents to a nearby housing shelter. In response, park dwellers established the Association of Poor People of Nagai Park, styling themselves as ‘street-sleeper comrades’.

At the end of the twentieth century the city park presented a landscape of duality, hallowed as a healthy leisure resort and manifestation of democratic society, yet derided as a landscape of dereliction and decay. Sentimental peons from Friends of the Park societies sat alongside criticisms of ‘Skid Row parks’, ‘crime parks’ and ‘pervert parks’. Some landscape architects condemned the city park as a relic irrelevant to the Internet generation, while others pointed to opportunities for urban renewal, cultural festivals and community involvement. At the very least, the park remained a fixture of the modern urban landscape. As the editors of landscape magazine *Topos* noted, ‘A city without parks is not a city, at least not a modern one.’<sup>58</sup>