



up to the early eighteenth century the usual way of showing a city to the reader of a book was the topographical view, which conveyed a sense of looking down at the town but did not say much-or not very clearly-about how the place was actually laid out. But a plan's power of abstraction made urbanism possible. It let you imagine the city as a whole system. Its malleability as a drawing made it easier to imagine big changes in it. If the plan was God's eye view, then revising it was more God's act: a pencil slash abolished the barri, the aptly named ruler drove straight avenues through the ancient congestion of alleys. Blocks of people could be uprooted here and replanted there. Hidden patterns floated up off the plan. Cerda had envisioned 550 blocks covering a land surface of nearly nine square kilometers. But this grid was absolute; it bore no relation to the site; it could be expanded forever, a pure modular city. On the large social plan, each district of four hundred blocks (twenty square) would have its own hospital large park, and so forth. Each of these hundred-block units would further break into four barris, each of twenty-five blocks (five by five), with its own schools and day-care centers. Only about a third of each block (five thousand square metres) was to be covered by buildings, and the corridors of open space between the apartments were to be patio gardens lined with plane trees. Some blocks were to be entirely open and left as small parks. Every block would have at least a hundred trees. some on the sidewalk and the rest inside. Every block would be 113.3 meters square, and the streets between them 20 meters wide; three blocks plus three street widths thus equalled exactly 400 meters.