Imagining Cities

PLACES

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Imagining Cities, Imagining Civilization

With what do we imagine cities? With our eyes, with our fingers, with our feet? Or with words, numbers, diagrams and pictures? Do we call forth the future with an inner voice, or with tools rendered dispassionate by their distance from our selves?

In this issue we consider the scope of such imaginings, from the visions of civic landscape that stirred the hearts of many San Franciscans early in the century to the bland and tinseled uniformity that dominates in those places where commercial interests have usurped the public realm.

Despite our best efforts, we never seem to get it all. Whole groups of people are left out, or the landscape is trundled aside, or the multiple patterns of exchange that underlie the very purpose of the city are simplified into those that calculate as economic return.

Calculations abound; transactions are charted, logistics are scheduled, impacts are assessed and images are bartered for community support. Nevertheless, we have difficulty imagining fully the lives that are led within cities or the complex ways that they can be transformed by our actions. We continue to avert our eyes from the homeless, from the dispossessed and undereducated, from the waste in which we are embedded and from the "others" with whom we must share this world, one way or another.

That we generally imagine poorly is nowhere more evident than in our propensity to make war. How, except through a failure of empathy and a trust in steely (mis)calculation, can we commit such brutality against our cities and the principles of civilization upon which they are founded?

One of the great works of Modern art, Picasso's *Guernica*, grew from the intellectual and emotional necessity to visualize the stark, emphatic, mindless horror of a single bombing raid on a Spanish village and to make that reality present in our lives. Today we keep a distance, allowing similar raids to be called "sorties" and to be numbered in the tens of thousands.

As war raged in the Middle East, what did we know of the sufferings in Baghdad, or in Iraqi or Kuwaiti villages, or of the destruction of precious Islamic heritage — television coverage notwithstanding? What did we know of the consequences of battle for the lives of soldiers and their families? Are we able yet to imagine continuing civil disorder or future dislocations to our own lives, other innocent people and the places we inhabit? How well have we imagined a city of terror at home?

We need to become human again.

We must learn to imagine concretely and with passion; vividly and with generosity; systematically and with uncertainty; creatively and with empathy. We must learn to live the city, live civilization, in our minds — then join with others to make it take place.

—*Donlyn Lyndon*

Cover: The Palace of Fine Arts is the only structure from San Francisco's 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition that is still standing. The architectural and planning visions embodied in the Exposition buildings and grounds inspired a generation of designers.
Photo by Alice Wingwall.

The House of Montisi

Jill Stoner

On top of a hill in one of the more remote regions of Tuscany, where the nearest train station is half an hour away by car and the pulse of agriculture is still stronger than that of tourism, where the roads curve arduously up and down steep slopes and around sharp bends from one hilltop to another, is the village of Montisi.

Tuscany is built on the hilltops: The cities, the towns, the villages and even the individual *podere* (farmsteads) make the high hills seem higher, accentuate the distance between them and reinforce the sense that each built hill, from the larger towns like Siena to the smallest village, is in some sense one building, one house.

These "houses," claiming their hills with astonishing regularity (the zoning

The hill town of Montisi is like a house, and the streets serve as its rooms. Photos, drawings by Jill Stoner.

in Tuscany is dictated by topography, not town planners) are surrounded by moats of cultivated hillside and valley. From a distance the hill-town boasts its uniqueness, both individually and as a member of a type that has been much acclaimed for its picturesque image and way of life. At the end of a month-long visit, however, I was convinced that Montisi is in fact typical — not only of the Tuscan hill town but of all houses potentially: houses of unnamed rooms.

On approach the town reads as a fortified cap. With no particular shape of its own, it hugs the convex hilltop as though knitted of stone. But although solid at this landscape scale, Montisi is a true vessel; it exists as both object and container. Like a nautilus, that which appears singular from the outside is in fact many-chambered.

Inside the walls of Montisi are the chambers. The streets are rooms, the private houses like thick walls containing closets and cupboards in which only the most private acts of daily life take place. All the rest — eating, talking, cooking, washing, working, playing, reading and resting — can and does happen in the rooms of the street. These activities are not paired with named spaces. The tiny piazza at the top of the town is a parking place for six or seven small cars, but these are banished to the lower streets outside the walls on the eve of the Palio, when the square magically converts to an outdoor dining hall for 200 people.

One day a street is a workshop, full of cabinetmakers' windows, tools and sawhorses. That night the sawhorses multiply to dozens, as plank wooden tables and benches snake through the street to seat the entire *contrada* (a social group whose members generally come from a specific district in the town) for an eight-course meal. The event extends far into the night, but by

morning the tables and chairs have vanished, packed away into the "cupboard" of the *contrada* house like a set of kosher dishes to be used only at special times of the year. In the street, swept clean of debris but with toasts and song still lingering on the air, a young man dismantles his car in the street-cum-body shop. Vinyl upholstery lies on the cobblestones and chrome fenders distort the reflections of ancient walls. This village street is not an arbiter of taste; it offers a fair venue to anyone.

In these street-rooms, articulation is independent of use. No delineated sidewalk or curb separates "motorist" from "pedestrian." The street slopes to the center rather than to the edges, making the space an emphatically concave container with a focus toward the middle. Walls meet the paving directly at right angles, but both walls and paving are strong, textured surfaces that hold fast to their intrinsic nature, in spite of the life that comes and goes.

The charm of a village like Montisi could easily be explained by the richness of these textures, colors, intense chiaroscuro and diminutive dimensions. These, we may say, are obsolete, out of our time and place and therefore irrelevant. But, perhaps blinded by the picturesque, we miss the more elusive lesson, which is independent of time and place — the lesson of unnamed rooms.

The eloquence of the Montisi street-rooms is in the mingling of children and grandparents, cars and peo-
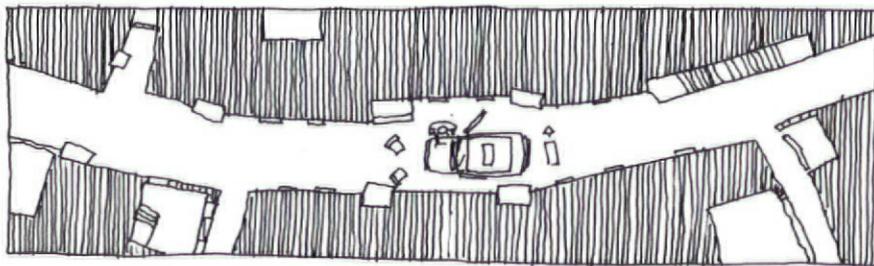
The street-room as body shop.
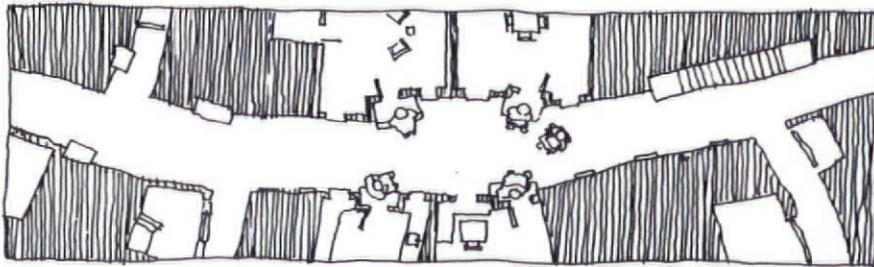
The street-room as parlor.
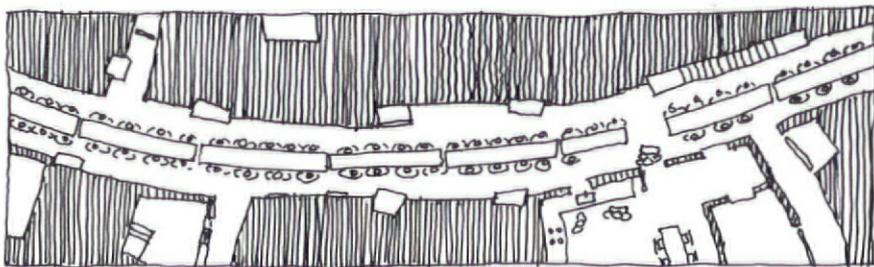
The street-room as dining hall.

ple, work and conversation, the constant reappropriation and reinvention of the same places, time and again. This is exactly the opposite of our American multi-purpose room, a featureless, textureless space that cannot be appropriated because it has no character. No such programming preceded the construction of Montisi's places, nor the kind that predicts: "Here the children will play, here the elderly will rest." The town seems aware that such designations make places mute.

Here then is the paradox of the unnamed street-rooms. So particular within themselves, each can nevertheless contain many things—the street-room as kitchen, as parlor, as dining hall, as playroom, as workshop, as garage, as laundry, as garden, as porch.

Four women sit, each on her stoop, the one-step threshold between the street and private house. The street is about two and a half meters wide, the adjacent doors only a meter apart. In their relationship to each other, the stoops approximate the placement of chairs in a conventional parlor. The street is a parlor *al fresco*, a parlor with a mezzanine, for the husbands occasionally lean out from a second-floor window to join a friendly argument. A car comes respectfully by, a not-unwelcome interloper whose driver has time not only to slow down but also to stop. The street-room can accommodate this, for the car claims nothing for itself. A temporary furnishing, it moves on, making way for the next event — a caravan of tricycles and wagons.

This parlor is public; everyone is uninvited but welcome. It is also the extension of the private house; each of the four women possesses an invisible porch that extends to the center-line of the street. The existence of this porch dissolves the street momentarily.

Like an optical game that presents two images alternately, presenting both equally the street-room is both public and private, unnamed on any plan or land-use study.

While Montisi is unarguably picturesque, it is so only by default, by the omission of any unified effort to modernize. Television antennas, rock music, polyester suits and dresses, plastic toys, new (but small) cars, packaged ice cream and video games have moved in happily among the old clay rooftops and cobbled pavement of the eccentric plan. This is the evidence of authentic reappropriation; themost obvious acts are unpressed, unreviewed. The village is code free and zoning free.

In front of the church and bar, the two "public" buildings of the village, the street widens enough to accommodate the card players and after-church crowd, but not so much that it ceases to be a street. The street exists in Montisi everywhere that the buildings are not. On a Sunday it contains the unceremonious mingling of bells from church and from pinball machines. A motorcycle roars past.

The street rooms echo with the complementary voices of ritual and practicality, tradition and fashion, age and youth. Their tolerance is their discipline. Accommodating change but remaining themselves unchanged, they hold the house together.

Montisi is not behind the times, but neither has it left the times behind.

VISIONARY SAN FRANCISCO

How does the way we imagine the future of our cities affect the way that we ultimately build them? That was the question explored by *Visionary San Francisco*, an exhibition held last year at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The exhibition and its catalogue included a historical overview of visions for San Francisco since the beginning of the century and a commissioned group of contemporary gallery installations and writings that were prepared by teams of architects and authors.

The exhibition aroused a good deal of interest and debate, partly because the works created by the writers and teams of architects did not fit into the formula of visions that, if followed, would march the city (or some part of it) towards heretofore unimagined heights of progress.

Places asked Paolo Polledri, curator of the show and founding director of the museum's architecture and design department, to comment on why he felt it was important to mount such an exhibition and on the considerable reaction that ensued (his article is expanded from an essay in the exhibition catalogue). We then present a portfolio of drawings from the exhibition with commentary by Donlyn Lyndon and Neema Kudva that follows one theme — movement — through a century of civic visions for the city.

— *Todd W. Bressi*

Dreamscape, Reality and Afterthoughts
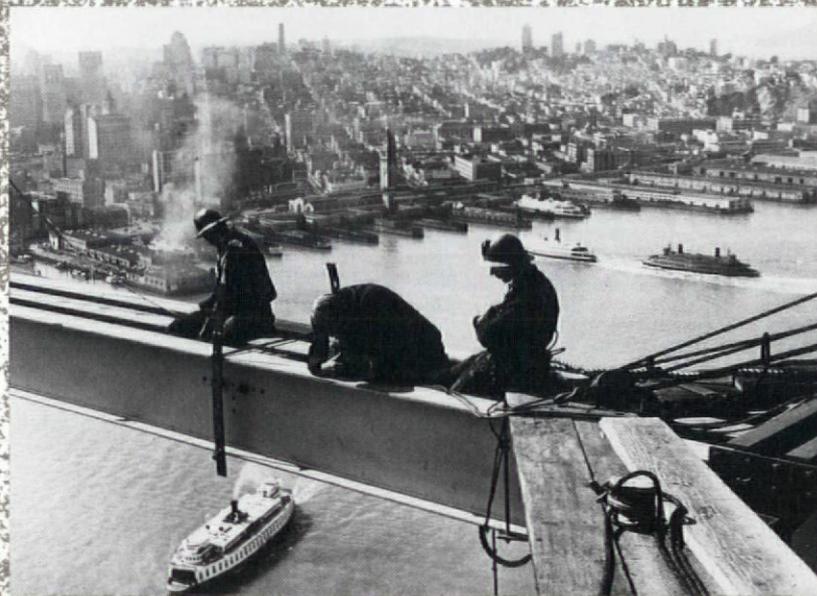
The *Visionary San Francisco* exhibition attracted a considerable amount of attention. Some critics found the title ambiguous and misleading, criticized the theme and structure of the exhibition and were disappointed by the collaborations produced by the teams of architects and writers. Many felt the tone of the exhibition was too somber, if not cynical, and thought instead that architects and urban designers, especially those who claim to be visionary, should leap over the problems that plague our times and envision the environment of a bright, happy future.

This criticism implied a very different concept of "vision" from that accepted in the show and catalogue. The architects and artists who participated in the exhibition chose themes such as the AIDS plague, homelessness and earthquakes (always a danger in San Francisco) that contrasted with the Modernist vision of a radiant city, a vision that still seems to guide the expectations of American architects and architectural critics. A friend remarked that reviewers think of architects as essentially optimistic beings and look with suspicion or disdain at artists and writers who feel the need to focus on immediate problems as a way to envision the future. Yet, the latter was the message implicit in the exhibition.

In spite of these sobering themes, the exhibition was inherently optimistic in its effort to denounce current urban problems and focus public attention on finding solutions to them — solutions that will improve our urban condition. These problems are not limited to a single area of the city or to part of its population; they affect all of us. They are so complex that their solutions elude the imagination and the well-intended efforts of individuals and require the collaboration of the entire community. We need a vision to point us in the right direction to overcome the uncertainty and

unease that pervade contemporary urban life. The exhibition and catalogue manifested the view that San Francisco, like any other city, is more than a physical environment; it is an ethical and political environment.

Physical Change, Ethics and Politics

It would be absurd to imagine the body of relationships, traffic laws, human institutions and buildings that form a city without also imagining the people who live in it. These relationships, laws, institutions and buildings are made by and for people and establish a hierarchy of values that shapes the pattern of our lives.

There is a continuous exchange between the physical form of the urban environment and the people who inhabit it. Urban forms are not fixed but dynamic forms in which the parts — buildings, open spaces and infrastructure — interact constantly with one another and with the whole. Each new building establishes a new set of relationships with surrounding buildings. Other buildings are influenced by these alterations, as are the ways in which people use them, the activities performed in them and the economy of the area.

These changes are not always immediately visible on a map. Blocks remain the same size and street names do not change. Nevertheless, even small changes have an immediate impact. In San Francisco's Mission District and Chinatown, the pattern of shop fronts establishes the rhythm of the pedestrians' step and even influences the speed of passing vehicles. A change in any of these buildings — in their ownership or use, or their demolition — can provoke a change in how shop fronts are used and subsequently influence not only the visual character of the area but also the movement pat-

terns of pedestrians and vehicles. Each new building starts a chain of events that continues well beyond the edges of the building. Architecture, urban design and planning are engaged in mutual exchange. The difference between them is ultimately one of scale: Buildings have an impact on the overall form of the city, the city makes demands on individual buildings.

As buildings interact with people, so people constantly modify the city. Individual actions may have a small, immediate impact. But the accumulated acts of many people can change the city in much more substantial ways. Changes in the economy may cause entire areas suddenly to become affluent or derelict. If we understand the impact a group of people can have on the environment, we can direct this change to meaningful ends. If we do not, we will modify the environment irresponsibly or will suffer the change brought about by others.

A problem seemingly remote to those of us who have a home and a job is homelessness. A homeless person on the street appropriates a public or semi-public area that pedestrians then take great pains to avoid or ignore. With the presence of the homeless, a building and a part of the city seem to decline almost overnight. Even Union Square, the premier shopping district of San Francisco, leaves us with a bitter aftertaste when we see its increasing population of homeless people. A consequence of their impact on the city is to make homelessness not only a problem of the homeless alone or of welfare officials, but also one that is ours, and for which we are responsible.

A controversial section of the exhibition was the installation designed by Ming Fung and Craig Hodgetts, which was based on a short story written by William Gibson. Gibson envisioned a San Francisco of the near future, in

San Francisco's skyline has changed dramatically since 1940. Yet, the characteristic elements of the city were there 50 years ago — for example, the downtown towers and the long spine of Market Street. The transformation has resulted from small changes made on almost a daily basis.
Top: Photo by Ben Blackwell, courtesy San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.
Bottom: Photo by Gabriel Moulin, courtesy Moulin Studio Archives.

which homeless people occupied the Bay Bridge, by then no longer used for traffic. Fung and Hodgetts designed the urban environment that could have triggered the transformation of the Bridge. Their installation included the model of a group of self-sufficient, self-contained high-rise buildings isolated in the amorphous environment of the city. Packaged in crates, and surrounded by pages of Japanese comic strips, scrap metal and computer chips, the installation had the seductive quality of the urban nightmare of the film *Blade Runner*. Its message, though, was to appeal to civic responsibility by showing the effects of its absence.
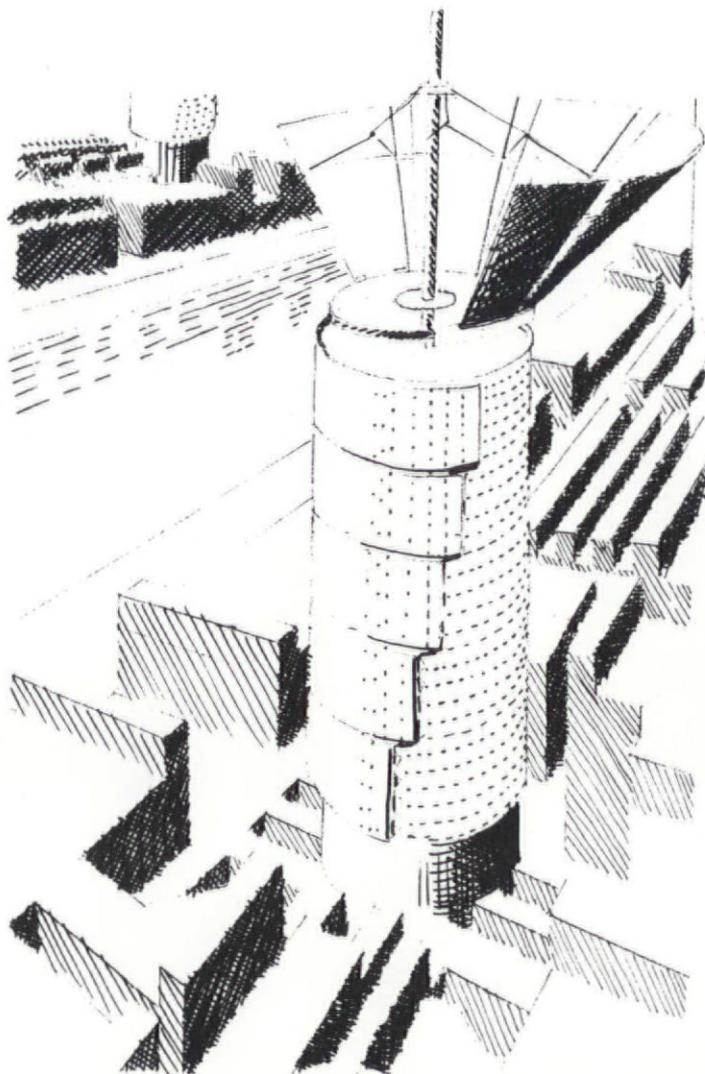

The Need for a New Vision

As painful as change may be at times, it is part of the urban environment. If efforts by planners or nostalgic activist groups to stop change from occurring in San Francisco were even modestly successful, the city would become nothing more than a tourist attraction. Already, there are telling signs that this is happening. The northern waterfront, one of the best known areas of San Francisco, is being transformed into a tourist ghetto, with hotels and shopping malls on the water. People come to San Francisco with the same expectations and frame of mind they have when visiting Disneyland: They want to enjoy the rides on the cable car, take a picture of sailboats on the Bay, drive down the serpentine section of Lombard Street and have a bite at a theme restaurant—Chinese, Italian, or *nouvelle cuisine*.

If this were to continue, the consequence would be serious. San Francisco would become a one-industry city; it would slowly decline and in a few years be a hollow version of what it is now. Venice has suffered a similar fate during this century; it has been transformed into a museum, seemingly unchanging but constantly decaying.

In an article published in 1988, San Francisco historian Kevin Starr attributed the unease that seems to have been part of San Francisco civic life since the 1970s to a loss of public identity. Large-scale works like the Civic Center, produce market and Sutro Baths were not only picturesque landmarks but also social and cultural points of reference. With their demolition, part of San Francisco is gone.

The loss of public identity has led to reluctance to change. Any change, it is feared, would be a change for the worse. New public or semi-public development projects, such as Yerba Buena Center and Mission Bay, and
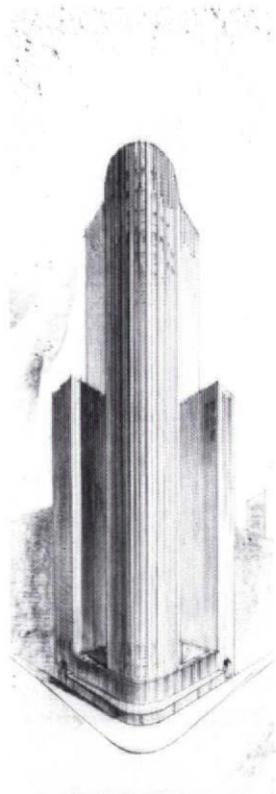
Skyscrapers — both as envisioned and as built — have been regarded as signs of progress. But in this contemporary vision of San Francisco's future (left), citizens have given up hope for the city and retreated into self-sufficient high-rise towers.

Left: Drawing by Ming Fung and Craig Hodgetts, courtesy San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Above: Drawing by Timothy Pflueger, J. R. Miller and T. L. Pflueger, courtesy Butterfield & Butterfield.

Right: Photo by Ben Blackwell, courtesy San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

new ventures, such as the home port for the battleship *U.S.S. Missouri* in San Francisco and the city's candidacy for the 1996 Olympic Games (since awarded to Atlanta), have been blocked by factionalism.

By contrast, the history of San Francisco is that of a rapidly changing urban environment and of people who took responsibility, and delight, in envisioning and carrying out its transformation. These people had a goal and worked toward it; their vision did not refer to an imaginary future but to the problems the city was facing at the moment. In the early part of the century, they viewed San Francisco as the capital of the Pacific, the "Paris of the West." Civic leaders such as Mayor James Duval Phelan and Mayor James Rolph believed that a beautiful physical environment would result in a better urban society. During the 1920s and 1930s, civic leaders sought a prominent role for San Francisco in the Bay Area. Frederick Dohrmann organized the Regional Planning Association in the mid-1920s and envi-

sioned San Francisco as part of a larger metropolitan community in the Bay Area. More recently, civic leaders have seen San Francisco as a gateway to the Pacific Islands and the Far East.

Many architects and urban designers also consistently demonstrated a commitment to the improvement of San Francisco, independent of any prospect of gaining a commission. Bernard Maybeck and Willis Polk and, after World War II, Mario Ciampi, Vernon DeMars and Lawrence Halprin, to name only a few, always suggested new solutions for San Francisco's urban problems. In many cases, even though their plans may not have been realized, their visions helped to set the agenda for the future.

These visions were not distant utopias unanchored to reality; they were practical, realizable prescriptions for San Francisco's future. By showing alternatives to the city of their time, these visionaries focused on what it lacked and, by so doing, directed their efforts toward supplying what the city needed. Even though their ideas may

not have been realized, they neverthe-less influenced architects' and plan-ners' visions for San Francisco, set an agenda for the future and molded what was actually built.

Burnham's Vision for San Francisco

Nineteenth-century Paris, the model for Daniel H. Burnham and Edward Bennett's 1905 plan for San Francisco (the first complete plan for the city), was profoundly transformed by the pressures of a new social and economic order. Baron Haussmann, chief engi-neer of this transformation, had a plan that was ambitious yet practical. His main concern, and that of Napoleon III (to whom he reported), was to insert a new logic in the old city.

The grand boulevards of Paris inspired a generation of City Beautiful designers.
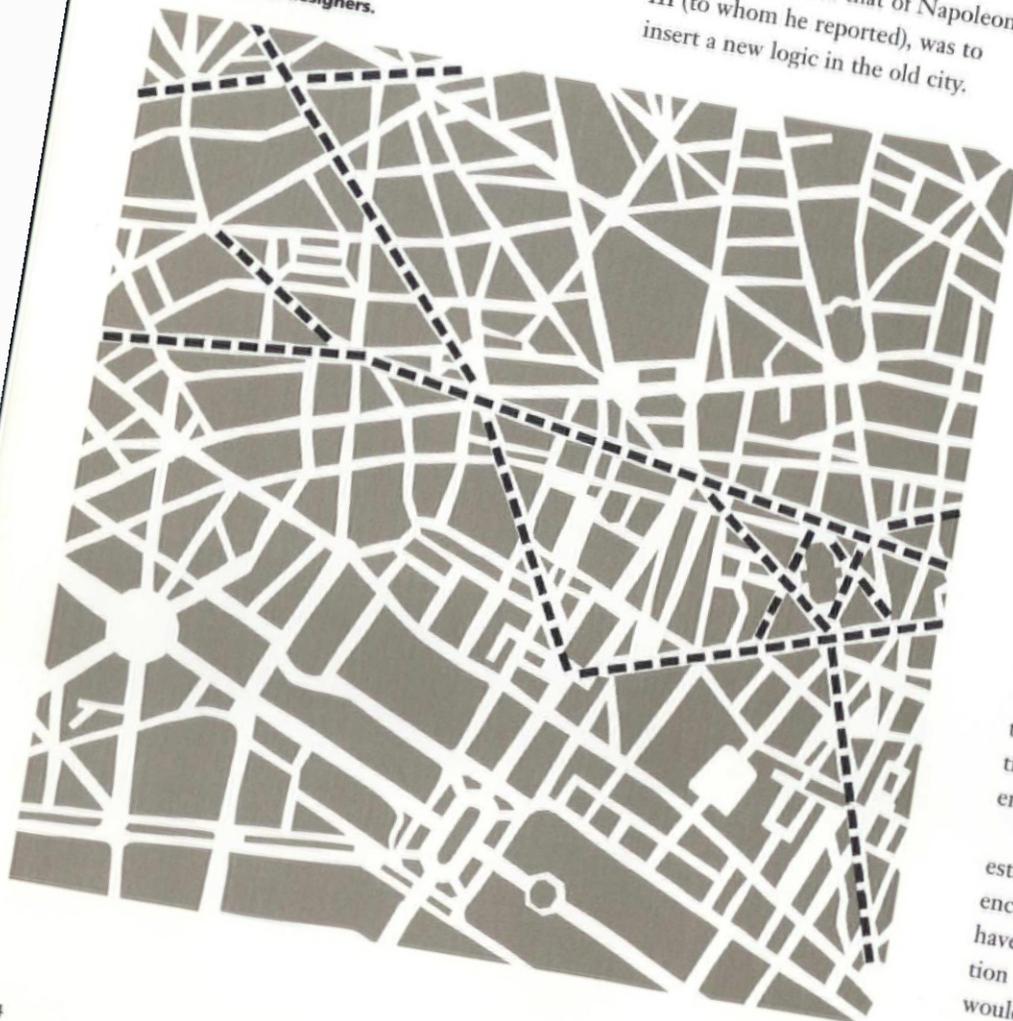
Over the old fabric of the city, Haussmann designed and imposed a new one that could accommodate the need for rapid transportation and new, large-scale buildings to serve com-merce and tourism. The city of pic-turesque, rambling quarters gradually became a city of long boulevards. These streets cut ruthlessly across the existing web of irregularly shaped blocks to converge on monumental squares and to form a new hierarchy of urban spaces. Long, uninterrupted rows of apartment buildings of the same height defined boulevards lined with trees, which echoed the rhythm of the porticoes at the ground floor of the buildings. Instead of the quaint, European capital it is today, at the time Paris was viewed as a functional economic and political capital.

Burnham and Bennett adopted Haussmann's basic vocabulary in their plan for San Francisco. Unlike Haussmann, however, they did not start with an abstract idea of functional connections and formal design ele-ments. From the top of Twin Peaks, Bennett surveyed the city, sketching out its major features, and allowed the topography to suggest the new pattern of boulevards. Burnham and Bennett surrounded San Francisco with a boulevard and from this ring reached into its center with radial streets. They also established a series of secondary centers that took advantage of the topography of the area. Each intersec-tion offered new perspectives at the ends of the converging boulevards.

The new urban order would have established a new set of visual refer-ences and new landmarks, and would have provided a new sense of connec-tion and orientation. The entire city would have been unified within this grand design, but the diversity of the city would have avoided the danger of monotony. Like Haussmann, Burnham

and Bennett emphasized the aesthetic component of their plan. Aesthetics, however, was elevated to the level of logic; the new city would work better because it would be governed by a higher natural order, and, therefore, it would be more beautiful.

Unlike Haussmann, however, Burnham and Bennett could not count on a monarch to carry out their plan. Strengthened by the experience of the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition and the planning of the Washington, D.C., Mall, they understood that a plan of such dimensions for San Francisco (Burnham urged his clients not to make modest plans) could not be realized without the support of its citizens. From the very beginning they proselytized wealthy businessmen and influential politicians, convinced that these men would convert all the others to their ideas. To assist civic leaders in reaching as broad an audience as possible, they published the *Report…on the Improvement and Adornment of San Francisco*, a book richly illustrated with plans, renderings and seductive bird's-eye views of the whole city.

While the plan was not adopted, Burnham and Bennett were partly successful. The Panama–Pacific International Exposition of 1915 and the design of the Civic Center, projects in which both Bennett and Jules Guerin, Burnham's favorite renderer, played an important role, successfully incorporated Burnham and Bennett's ideas in the design of the city.

Never in the history of San Francisco was civic unity stronger than it was during the Exposition. The preparations for it brought together civic, business and labor leaders, and all cooperated in making the Exposition an unprecedented urban event. "Merchants, bankers, clerks, stevedores, high-salaried corporation managers, factory hands," writes a historian of the exposition, "all marched in the same columns, in the same ranks." Architecture and urban design created consensus.

Burnham and Bennett's plan remained a reference for the city long after City Beautiful ideals had lost their appeal, and some of its suggestions are still valid today. In promoting their plan, they relied on its aesthetic appeal; this was evident in the monumentality of the plan and in the care and time they lavished on its presentation. Burnham thought of monuments as poles of urban growth. Monuments were the only firm points in his grand plan of broad outlines. He maintained that monuments appeal to the imagination of planners and the

With this plan, published in 1905, Daniel H. Burnham and Edward Bennett proposed to transform San Francisco into the "Paris of the West." Courtesy San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.
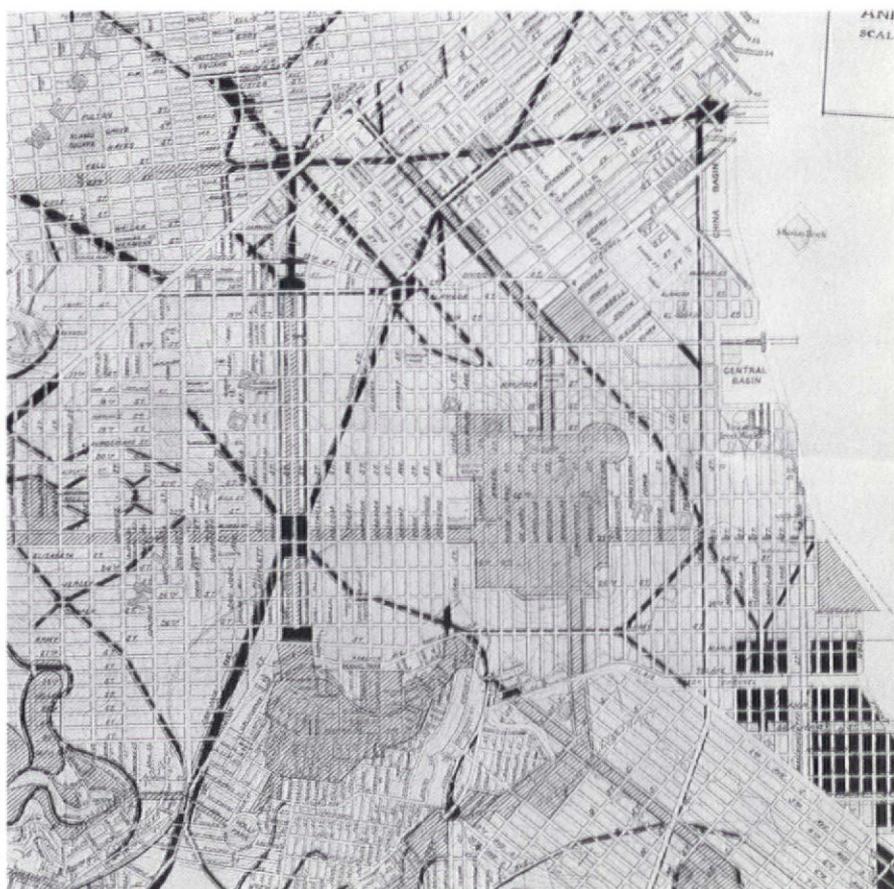
public and that in time, monuments come to symbolize entire districts. He knew that large-scale projects take many years, require a long-term commitment by the public and undergo many transformations before being completed. Without a monumental focus, a reminder of the scope and form of the project, this commitment may fade over the years, or disappear altogether. Because of the aesthetic emphasis of Burnham's presentations, he was able to communicate his goals to a broad public, not just a small elite.

Yerba Buena Center Central Blocks, 1969. The main features of this proposal were two massive parking and commercial structures with a pedestrian mall in between. Office towers and a sports complex were also included.
Photo by Gerald Ratto.
Courtesy John Dykstra.

Vision Diffused

Architects' reliance on the aesthetic appeal of drawings diminished after World War II. Beginning in the 1920s and 1930s, the attention of planners and architects shifted from the city as a whole to individual areas, and public attention turned from visionary goals to finding the means to resolve everyday problems.

Politicians, architects and planners enthusiastically prescribed visions that acknowledged an increasingly complex urban reality by employing increasingly complex techniques. Their goal was to replace planning based on aesthetic considerations (considered insufficient to provide solutions to complex urban problems) with objective planning techniques based on statistical information. The new planning required that urban designers' physical model of the city be replaced by the planners' abstract model. "Function" became the key word used in the new planning.

Between the end of World War II and the late 1960s, architects educated in the climate of European functionalism responded enthusiastically to this call. Drawings became an abstract means of communication and required an understanding of codes and conventions that was usually limited to trained architects or experts in the field. Aesthetics lost its prominent position in the architects' list of priorities in favor of a seemingly more logical mode of representation.

This change was dramatically evident in the exhibition. The large and impressive water colors by architects trained at the École des Beaux Arts were gradually succeeded by diagrams sketched on yellow tracing paper. As this change occurred, architects' drawings lost their appeal for the public and became an exclusive means of communication among experts; information contained in these drawings relied on a complex set of conventions

that were significant only for other experts. By excluding a large part of the public from understanding and appreciating their ideas, architects and planners also limited public participation and support.

More recently, increasing opposition to large-scale development projects and increasing factionalism have succeeded in delaying projects like these for decades. As Professor William Issel noted at the symposium following the opening of the exhibition, the decline of level-headed, non-partisan liberalism (a rationalist and progressive position that emphasized that all human institutions could be improved by individuals working toward the common good) at the end of the 1960s coincided with the rise of activist groups who relied on emotional appeal to pursue their interests. This movement culminated in the supremacy of local interests and neighborhood or activist groups—the NIMBYs (Not In My Back Yard)—over the goals of the entire city.

So rampant is the skepticism about improving our condition that when new opportunities present themselves, we immediately anticipate wasting them. With the closing of the U.S. Army base at the Presidio (in the northwest corner of the city), the Defense Department will bequeath 1,400 acres of park and unspoiled coast to the Golden Gateway National Recreation Area, a unit of the National Park Service. Architectural critic Allan Temko has written that although the Presidio offers an unprecedented opportunity for a new, visionary plan, he fears its future could be undermined by the lack of vision and parochial interests of petty bureaucrats, technocrats and "populist nuts."

Focusing only on immediate surroundings or interests, seeking only short-term gain and losing sight of a
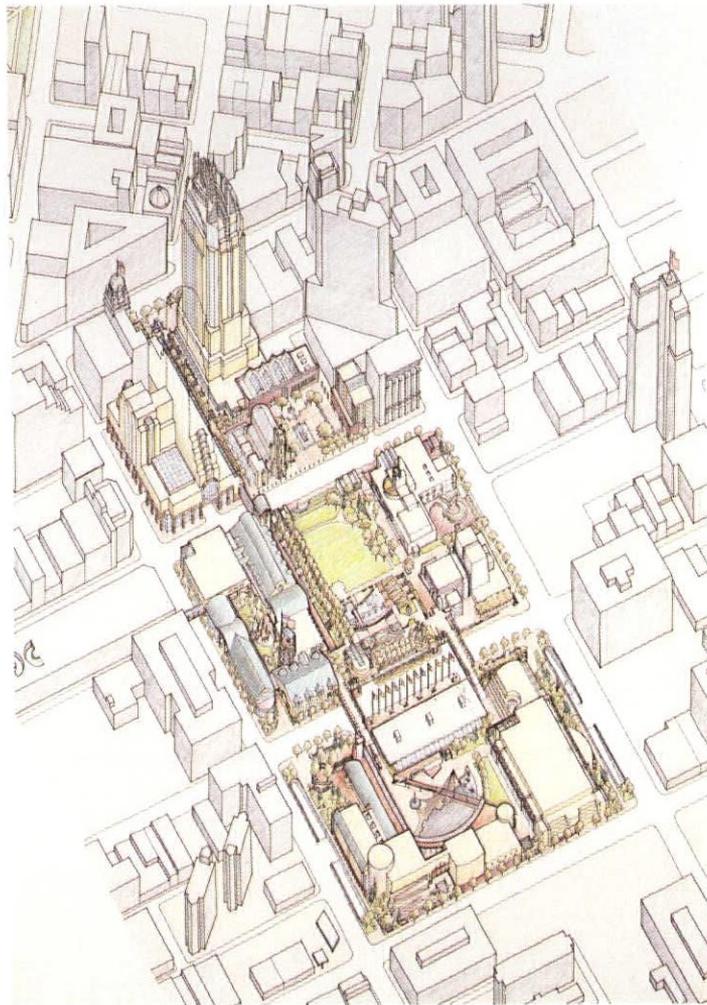
broader perspective seems to be endemic to contemporary American culture. The agendas of groups, individuals, or public officials, even when legitimate, polarize viewpoints not shared by the entire community. Along with a lack of consensus comes strong opposition to any ideas that are proposed. The decision-making process slows to a standstill. A vision to bind the public spirit seems to be lacking.

Two Modern-Day Visions?

In San Francisco, an opportunity to overcome these obstacles rests with Yerba Buena Gardens and Mission Bay, two large-scale redevelopment
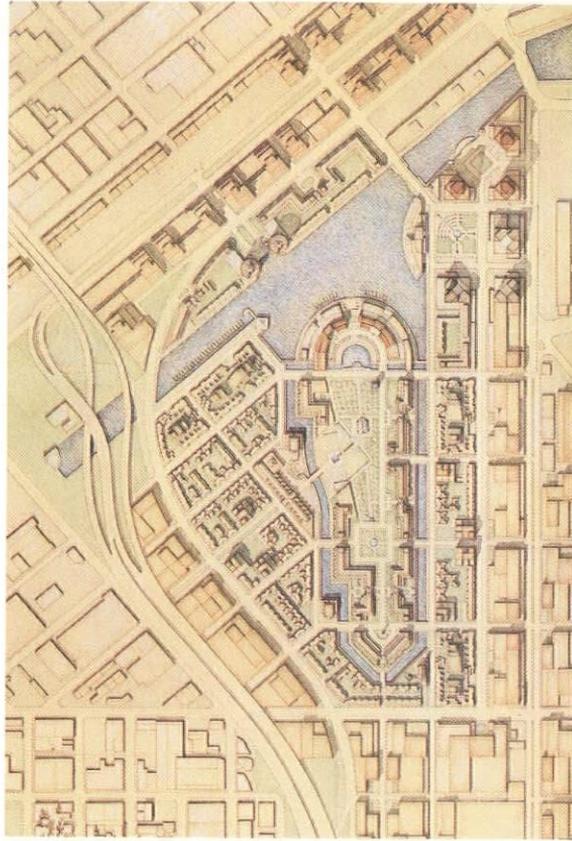
plans in or near the central business district. That projects as large as these can even be pursued today, when we are so tentative in our plans for building cities, is in itself sufficient to put Yerba Buena and Mission Bay in the category of visionary projects.

Both projects rely on a grand design, and both emphasize the importance of the connecting redevelopment to the existing fabric of the city. Similarities, however, end there. Yerba Buena Gardens would be part of the city, an extension of the financial district south of Market Street. Mission Bay would be almost a separate area, its land uses and urban design different from the surrounding area and an idealized imitation of the rest of the city. It would provide enough housing, work, shopping and recreational opportunities that residents, theoretically, would not need to venture into the rest of the city.

Yerba Buena was conceived more than 35 years ago, when the area south of Market Street was designated for redevelopment. The first design for the area, however, appeared a decade later, when Justin Herman, director of the city's Redevelopment Agency, commissioned Japanese architect Kenzo Tange and San Francisco architects Gerald McCue and John Bolles to work on the project's design. The result was a megastructure, which, by its very imposing presence, was expected to spawn the growth of the surrounding area.

This and a modified design in 1973, however, did not attract the attention of developers. The project was hit by lawsuits, and the proposed design and the proposed plans for relocating residents of the area came under heavy public criticism. Only a reconstituted group of concerned citizens and public officials, under the guidance of Mayor George Moscone, was able to overcome public opposition and complete a convention center in 1981.

In 1980, the Redevelopment Agency tried a different approach. Rather than proposing a design and then seeking developers, it called for proposals by competing teams of architects and developers. The winning proposal, by a team composed of architects Zeidler-Roberts from Toronto, Beverly Willis of San Francisco and Canadian developer Olympia & York, suggested a much closer connection between the new and the existing urban fabric and relied on a more traditional architectural design than the Tange/McCue/Bolles scheme. The strong emphasis on visual axes and the predominance of public spaces recalled some of the urban design principles from the Burnham and Bennett plan. Also from the Burnham and Bennett plan was the concept of making Yerba Buena a monumental area, a pole of urban growth that could stimulate the renewal of the surrounding area by mere virtue of its presence.

But the fragmentation of uses and spaces and, even more importantly, the involvement of several prominent architects (such as Fumihiko Maki, Cesar Pelli, James Polshek, Romaldo Giurgola and Mario Botta) in projects within a short distance from one another, promises to detract from the unity of the project and reduce both its visual strength as a monument and its impact on the surrounding area. Also, as a monument and a future cultural center, its success is far from certain; the project will compete with special districts in the city, such as Civic Center and the financial district. Because of the uncertain real-estate market, bureaucratic slow-downs and fresh public opposition, only construction for the expansion of the convention center has begun.

The origin of Mission Bay is more recent. Architect John Carl Warnecke proposed to develop this large area, formerly a railroad and warehousing yard, one mile south of downtown, in 1981. In 1983, a comprehensive plan was prepared for the site owner, Santa Fe Pacific Realty, by James I. Freed of Pei Cobb Freed & Partners. Under this proposal, new development would have been carefully inserted into the existing urban fabric. The connections with the three street grids bordering the triangular site, the use of high-rise buildings to identify the district on the skyline, and a mixture of housing, commercial and office spaces (similar to that of the surrounding area) would have strengthened the project's connection with the rest of the city. The plan won a *Progressive Architecture* citation in 1984.

In 1985, in response to public opposition and criticism of the commercial density (and the height of some of the office buildings), the San Francisco Planning Department issued a set of guidelines for what it termed a
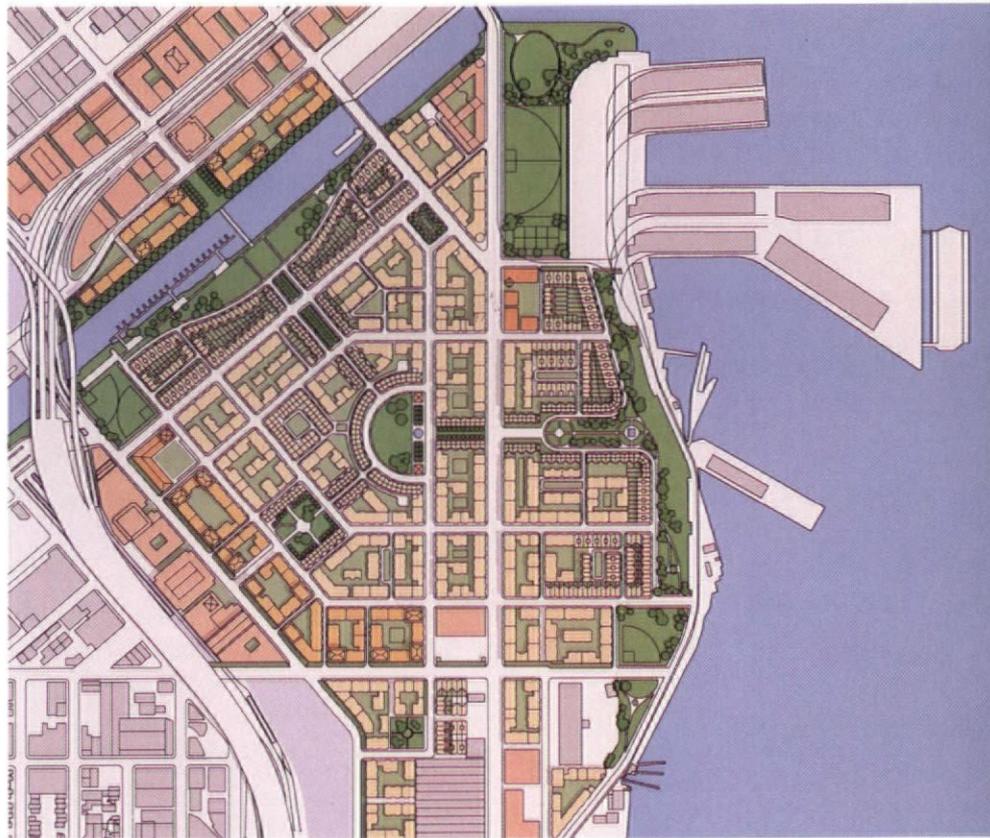
new "planned neighborhood." A new plan, prepared for Santa Fe Pacific by EDAW and associated architects, was presented in 1987. This proposal reduced the amount of office space and emphasized housing; it, too, won a *Progressive Architecture* citation.

With the election of Mayor Art Agnos in 1987, the city won funding from Santa Fe Pacific to prepare its own plan for the site and commissioned a team headed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill's San Francisco office. In this scheme, the conceit of creating a new neighborhood is developed to the point of suggesting separation, rather than integration, between the new area and the existing urban fabric. The street system would be less connected to the rest of the city than it was in the Freed scheme. The predominantly residential character of the new neighborhood would discourage the use of monumental architectural elements. Some elements, such as open spaces and converging boulevards, might recall the Burnham and Bennett plan, but Burnham had relied on monumentality and unity of design to

The 1990 plan for Mission Bay would produce a nearly self-sufficient neighborhood, with housing, work places and a shopping strip organized around two main streets and several formal open spaces.
By Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, San Francisco, courtesy San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

guarantee the long-term continuity of the plan. The current plan for Mission Bay will also require several decades to complete. With the absence of a strong goal and aesthetic integrity, what guarantee is there that the final result will look like the initial idea?

A New Vision for San Francisco

The exhibition and catalogue illustrated not a vision of the city's future, but the urgent need to gain a vision. Would Burnham and Bennett's plan, or any other grand plan, still be a solution today? Burnham and Bennett envisioned a unified plan for an equally unified society. In that time, San Francisco was a far more cohesive social and political entity than it is today. Expectations, leadership, commitment to and participation in civic life were different then. Any new vision for San Francisco's future must take into account the current social and political fragmentation.

We seem to have lost control of social problems like poverty, homelessness, AIDS and isolation. We can no longer provide adequate housing, health care, transportation and education. Any vision for San Francisco's future must consider solutions to these difficult problems.

As a political and ethical environment, the city embodies — or should embody — values shared by all of its inhabitants. Yet, the presence of large numbers of citizens who occupy a marginal position in urban life indicates that the opposite is true. Most of us display concern only about problems that touch us directly, and are disinterested in or apathetic about broader issues.

The understanding of urban and architectural issues is limited to a small, specialized and professionally trained segment of the public. The lit-tle that is written in newspapers about architecture and the design of cities only accentuates its distinctiveness and, therefore, reinforces the notion that design ideas and the design process is remote from the general public. As a consequence, much of the physical environment is unknown and incomprehensible to the majority of its inhabitants, even though it is they who, willingly or by default, are the real designers of the city.

If we are successful in reconstructing this lost public dimension of architecture, architects and planners should not fear a diminished role. They should anticipate a future in which architecture and urban design play a much more relevant role in society and politics, and in decisions people make that affect the physical environment. Architects and planners can be the leaders in envisioning an urban environment that is diverse enouigh to reflect the changing values of its inhabitants, but coherent enough to develop a commnity.

Note

1. The four collaborative teams of writers and architects were: Joe Gores with architects Diana Agrest and Mario Gandelsonas; Richard Rodriguez with artist Sohela Farokhi and architect Lars Lerup; Mark Helprin with architect Barbara Stauffacher Solomon; and William Gibson with architects Ming Fung and Craig Hodgetts.

VISIONS OF MOVEMENT: Exhibition Notes

Donlyn Lyndon and Neema Kudva
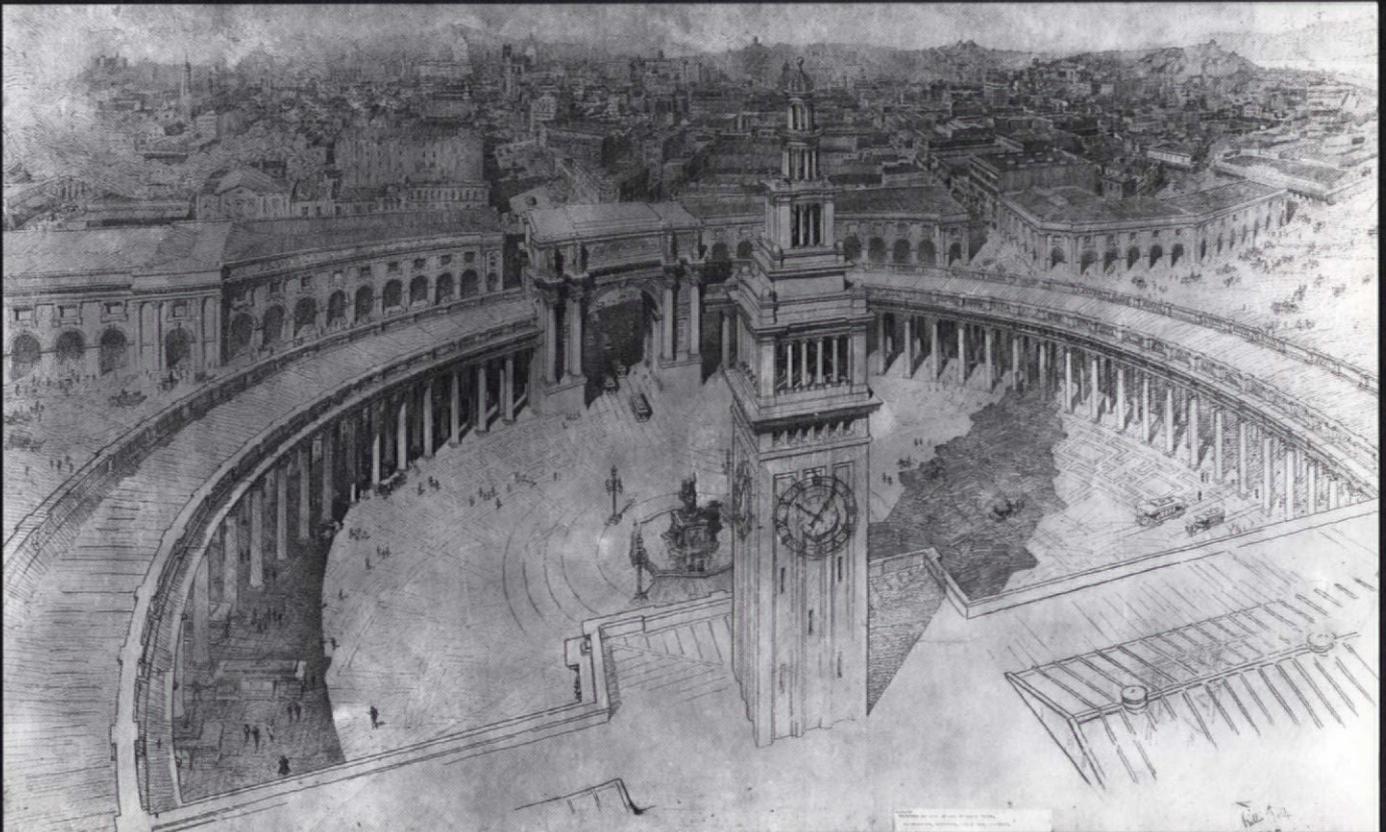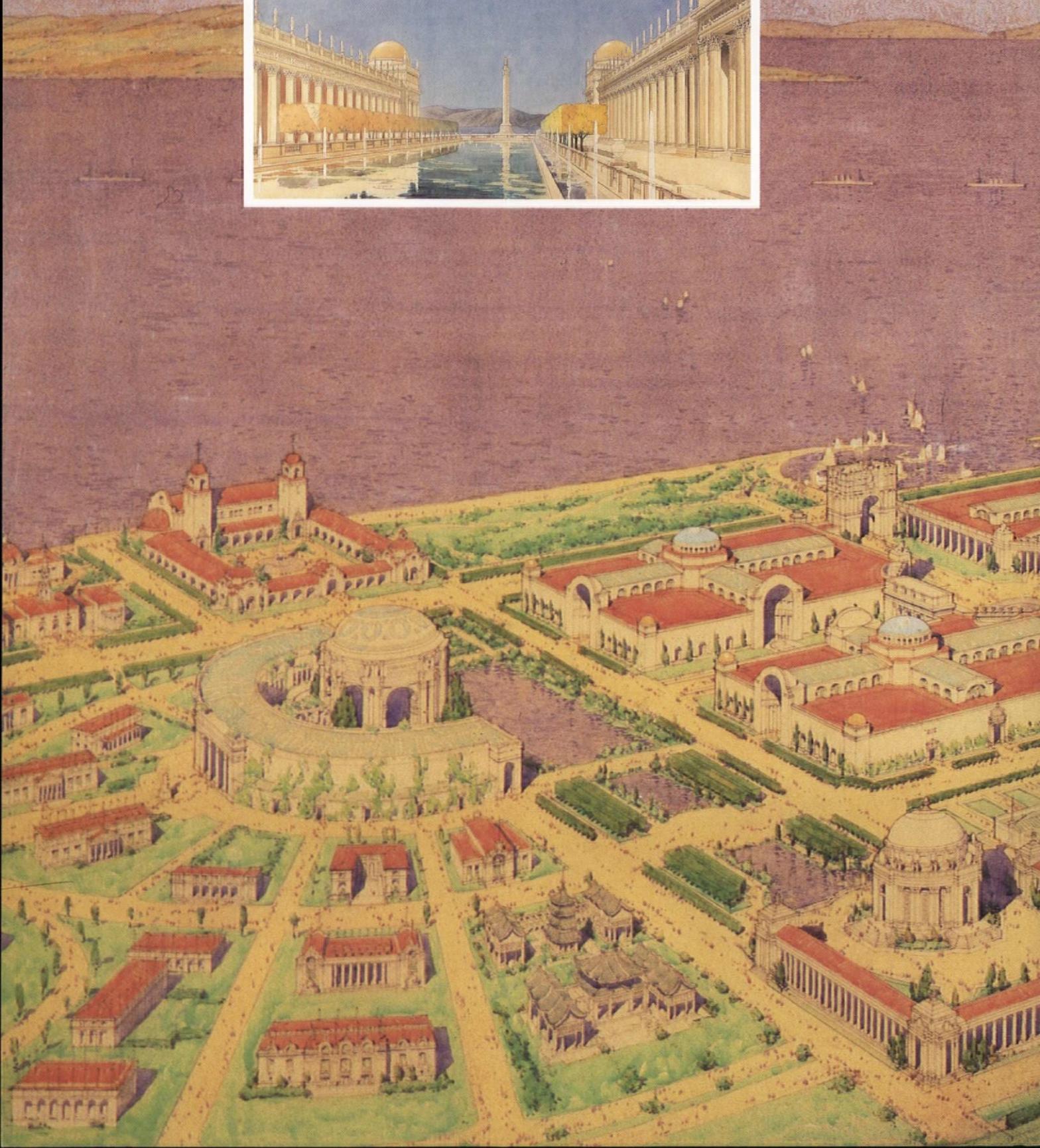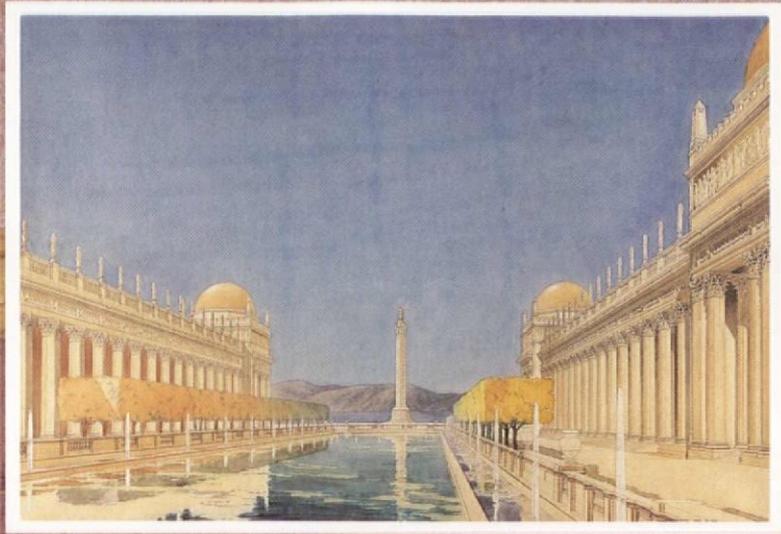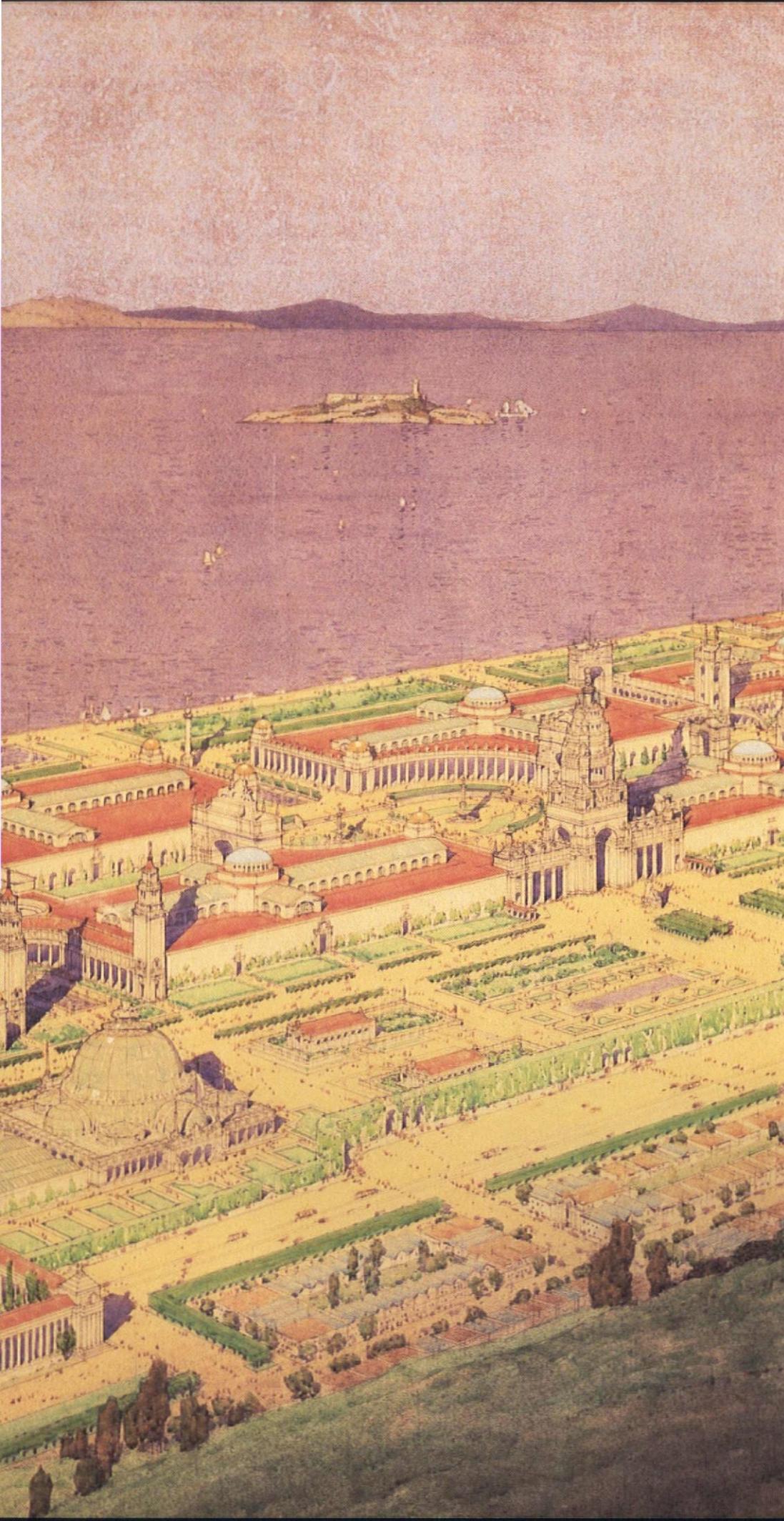
From the splendid, spacious grace of parade grounds to the confined painted green of a Ping-Pong table, the spaces projected in the *Visionary San Francisco* exhibition held at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art are structured by anticipated patterns of movement. Their purposes range from marshalling a social order to prompting an apotheosis of play. The images of these spaces, whatever their subject matter, vary dramatically in their scope — from grand, encompassing visions of purposeful change in the beginning of this century, to insular images of perfectibility within an environment gone to hell (or uncontrollably on its

23

way) as the century closes.

The ways in which these various images, spanning a century of planning for the city, envision patterns of motion in the futures they project provides a telling commentary on the preoccupations of their times.

In the early, grand images derived from the Beaux-Arts tradition, movement is a spectacle, paced to the appreciative eye, measured by the regular cadence of marching columns and rows of trees and contained within spaces that are visibly terminated by landscape features and monuments: known places to go. These measured settings help us to imagine the marchers, strolling gentry, carriages and touring cars. They are places to inhabit at leisure and with enlightenment in mind. The surroundings are full, abundantly elaborated with sculpted forms, framed openings, decorative surfaces and the animating flicker of sun and shadow falling on buildings and landscape.

In Jules Guerin's renderings for the Panama–Pacific International Exposition of 1915, streams of people move from the city's gridded fabric into the Exposition grounds through gates in green walls that separate the grounds from the city. These paths meet the main longitudinal axis and cross

it to move out to the water's edge. While the brooding presence of the Palace of Fine Arts, marking the end of the main axis, remained to become the very symbol of San Francisco, the vistas along the cross-axes were eventually transformed into streets and woven into the more mundane domestic avenues that replaced the Exposition.

In Guerin's watercolors of the courts, columns march along to the rhythms of people's feet. Paths skirt the edges of the courts, moving along colonnades that form a space of transition between the still forms of the buildings and the open ground. The experience of the court is ordered by the placing of paths along edges that counterpoint the axial, structured outlook to San Francisco Bay and its wondrous colors.

In the 1920s the public realm, with its places of celebration and repose, disappears from the drawings. The imagery exalts instead a new type of building that thrusts itself into the sky; the movement of people on the ground becomes secondary to the invisible movement of elevator cabs, shrouded by layers of walls, lifting people into the air. San Francisco's investors had begun a love affair with the skyscraper, which transformed the skyline of their

city. But by the 1970s the affair was rendered mundane, as the proliferating volumes became commonplace and supplanted the hills as the characterizing silhouette of the city. (In 1985 the city, in an attempt to rekindle the flame, passed ordinances requiring that the tops of tall buildings be shapely — that they display at least some signs of infatuation.)

In the middle half of the century, movement (read cars) becomes a critical source of imagery again, but principally as the agent of change, not as a mechanism for enriching peoples' experience in the city. The Motor Car Dealers Association waged a campaign to "tear down the wall" (read "bridge the Bay") that nearly encircles the city, asserting that San Francisco's future lay in its connections to the surrounding region.

The consequences of this were first writ large in the two great bridges (the Golden Gate and Bay bridges) that are such a monumental presence in the city. These vast spans made manifest (as Dan Gregory points out in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition) a new way of seeing the region as a bonded whole, providing visible connections among the region's peninsulas and islands and carrying an increasing number of cars to and from the city.

Perspective study sketches for a skyscraper, 1920s. Timothy Pflueger, J. R. Miller and T. L. Pflueger. Courtesy Butterfield and Butterfield.

As a corollary, the ferries that carried commuters to the city were squeezed out of business and the Ferry Building, conceived to be resplendent at the end of Market Street, lost its role as gateway to the city. In turn, even the wonderful glut of trolleys that carried passengers from the ferry terminal along the Market Street spine were shunted underground and out of sight to create a corridor for cars.

Images of these bridges often depict them proudly as progressive, liberating forces; yet little imagination is lavished on projecting the experience a person would have crossing these exhilarating spans. Nor was movement from the bridges into the city elaborated. Moving off the Bay Bridge into San Francisco required anonymous descent into a warehouse district, or curving on a ramp through a darkened, dismal passage under the Bridge approach viaduct.

The bridges and expanding freeway system gave people the freedom to move out through the region and search for environments less crowded and less puzzling than downtown. As they did, even the city itself was imagined as an uncomplicated blend of buildings and tended landscape, freed (as in Vernon DeMars' prophetic sketches for a Telesis exhibition in 1940) from the jungle of discordant development and conflicting purposes. They pictured a city of agreements, not differences, of free movement and undisturbed repose, of progressive rationality.

Site of the Golden Gate-International Exposition, "A Pageant of the Pacific," 1938. Rendering by E. A. Burbank. Courtesy San Francisco Archives.

Vernon DeMars' 1940 sketches
contrast the jumbled city with
an ordered, tended landscape
of the future.
Drawings courtesy Vernon
DeMars.
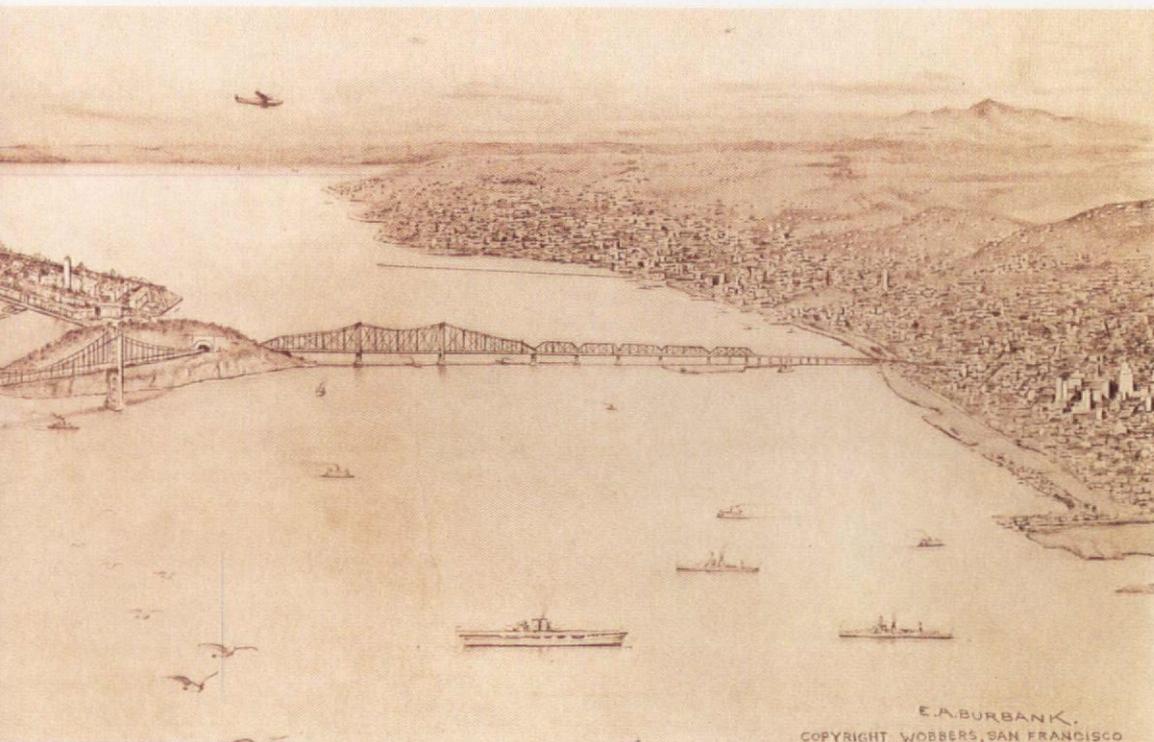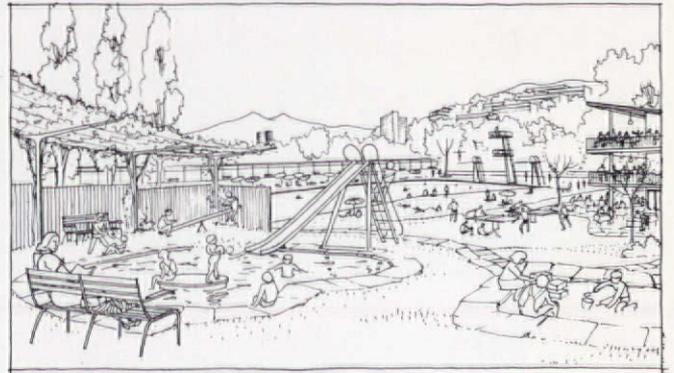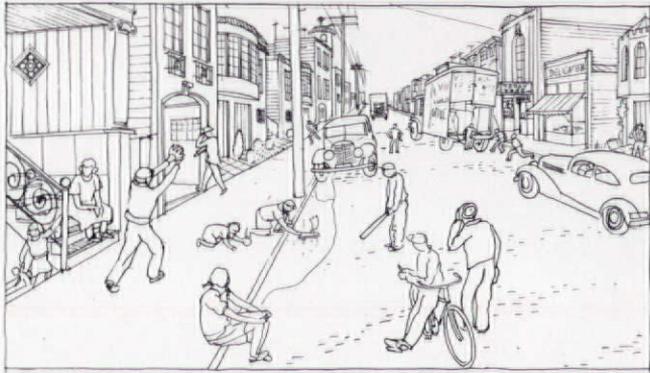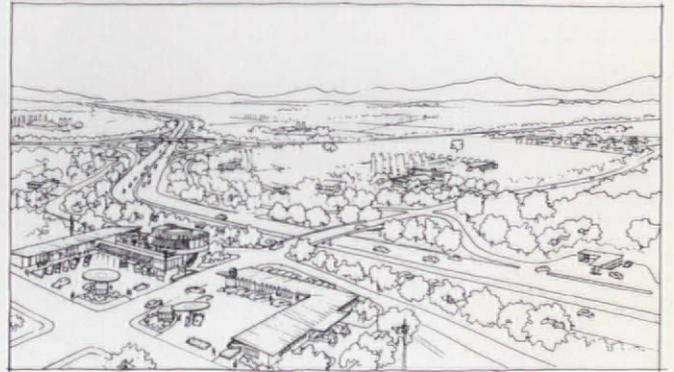
E.A. BURBANK.
COPYRIGHT WOBBERS, SAN FRANCISCO
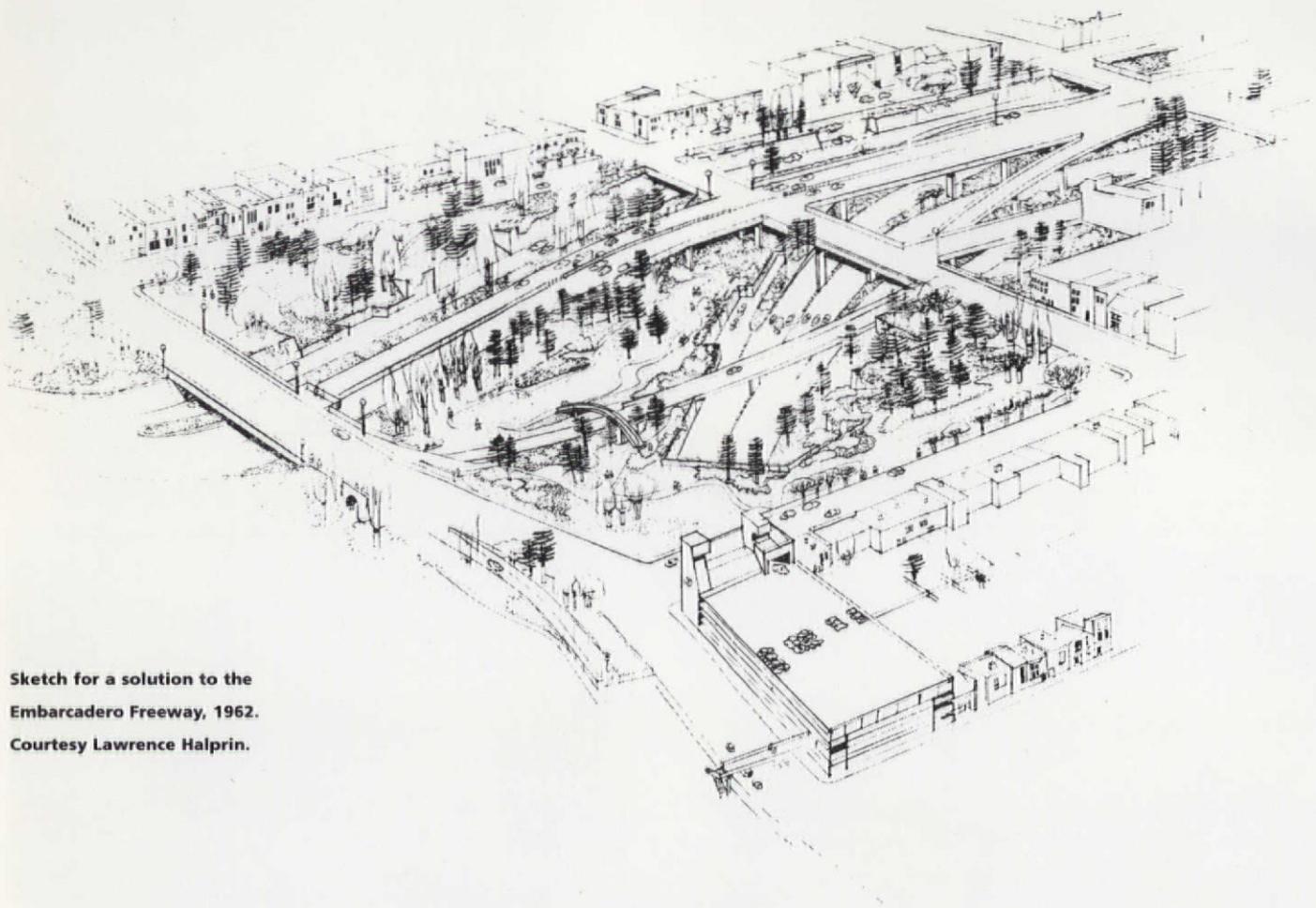
Sketch for a solution to the Embarcadero Freeway, 1962. Courtesy Lawrence Halprin.

But the great structures and channels that allow for all this movement through the region provided ease and utility for some people while threatening to dominate the daily neighborhood experience of others. Efforts to consider both groups were all too seldom fruitful. As freeways were thrust forcibly through neighborhoods, people genuinely committed to their life in the city rose in political protest and forced ingenious design alternatives, such as those proposed by landscape architect Lawrence Halprin.

The most radical alternative, and often the one that prevailed, was no freeway. Now, in the aftermath of the 1989 earthquake, the damaged Embarcadero Freeway is the subject once again of intense debate and visionary proposals. Some people hope to seize the opportunity to demolish a blight along the waterfront but others fear the loss of access to their businesses. The infamous Cypress Structure in Oakland has already been removed, possibly to be replaced by a park.
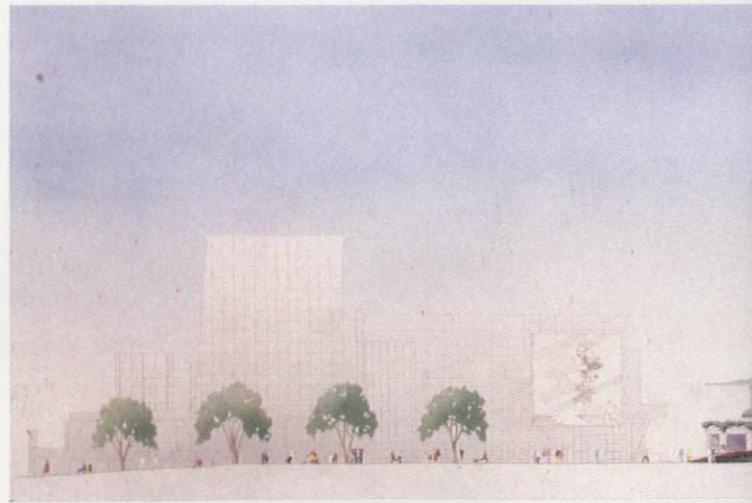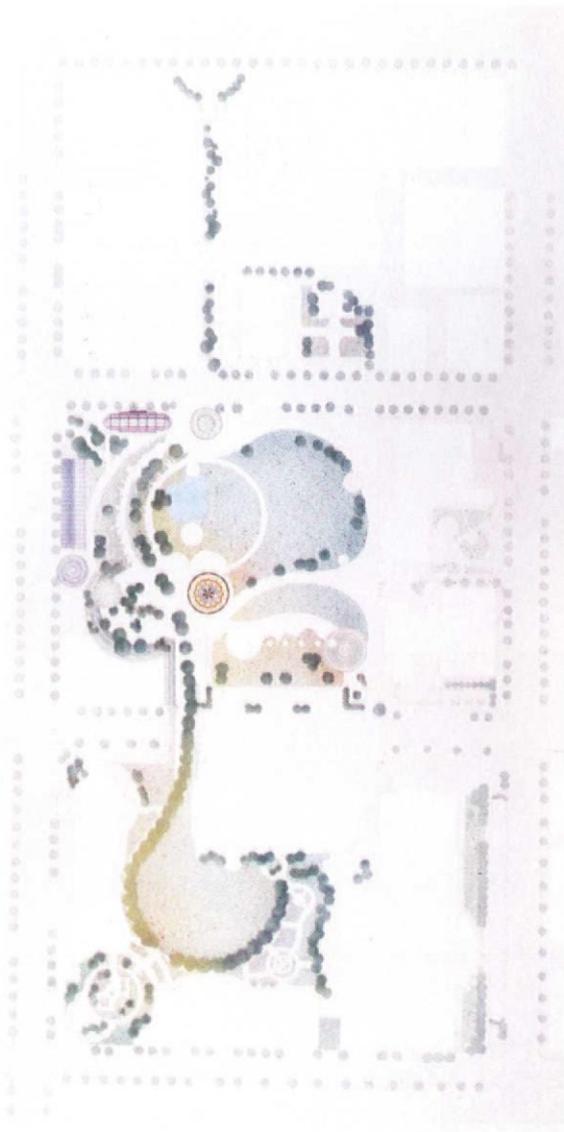
As the end of the century approaches, physical movement no longer seems epic. In the works prepared for the exhibition, movement is rendered as commonplace or as play — the latter symbolized by the giant carousel in Jon Jerde's shopping park for the Yerba Buena project and the tennis courts that structure the green in Barbara Stauffacher Solomon's San Francisco maps.

The Jerde Partnership's drawings for the Yerba Buena garden envision an experience that is varied and allows for a constant (read frivolous?) stimulation of the senses. In the age of the automobile, in which to speed along the freeway is one of the basic experiences, the entire attitude towards interaction with the environment seems changed — the environment is regarded as entertainment, accompanied by music and rolled across the windscreen (or tube). In the marketplace sensory stimulation seems demanded at an accelerated pace. Yerba Buena, self-contained, neatly separating the vehicular from the pedestrian, but keeping the pedestrian precinct as one of constant "interest," seems to epitomize a kind of schizophrenia, a desire for the kinetic experience we have in an automobile crossed with a belief in the basic incompatibility between people and cars.

Plan for Yerba Buena Gardens, East-West Section/Elevation for Yerba Buena Gardens, 1989.

Drawings by The Jerde Partnership, Courtesy Olympia & York.
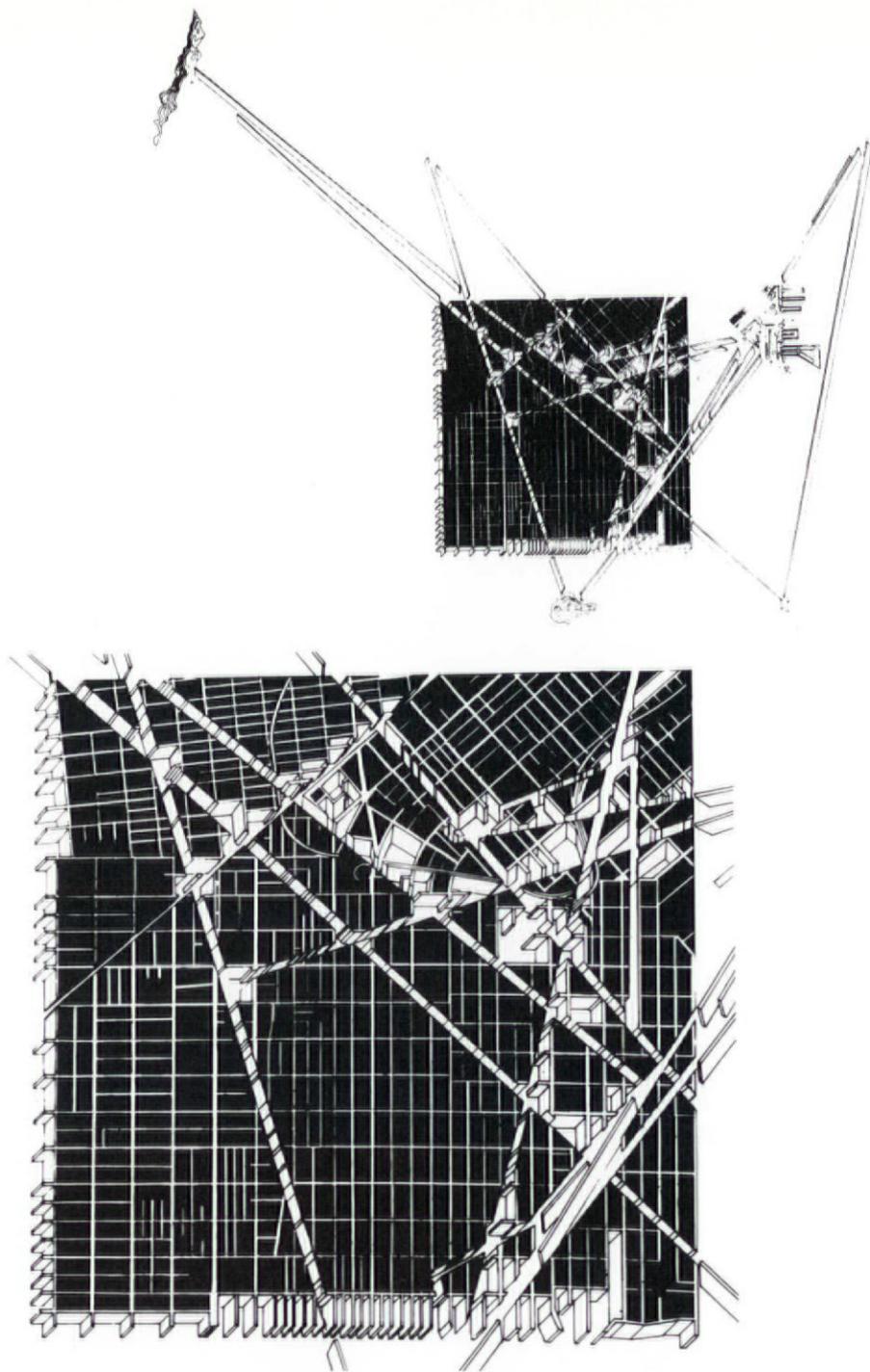
Drawing No. 2: Plot. **By Diana**
Agrest and Mario Gandelsonas.

The exhibition pieces and writings, commissioned by the Museum to extend this historical overview into the future, were offered more as comment and provocation than as proposals. As gallery pieces are wont to do, they set out to direct our attention to concepts and characteristic problems rather than to proposals for change.

They were also fundamentally uninterested in transportation. (Have airplanes sated the lust for motion?)

In the project by Diana Agrest and Mario Gandelsonas, the freeway is casually converted to a housing site, while in William Gibson's story the Bay Bridge is abandoned in favor of high-speed tunnels

in which experience is irrelevant. The Bridge is appropriated by the homeless and becomes a liberated ramshackle city where an aberrant urbanity survives outside the insular high-tech packages of upscale development that are so chillingly portrayed in models prepared by Ming Fung and Craig Hodgetts.

House of Flats. Section, plan and typical furniture. By Sohela Farokhi and Lars Lerup. Courtesy San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.
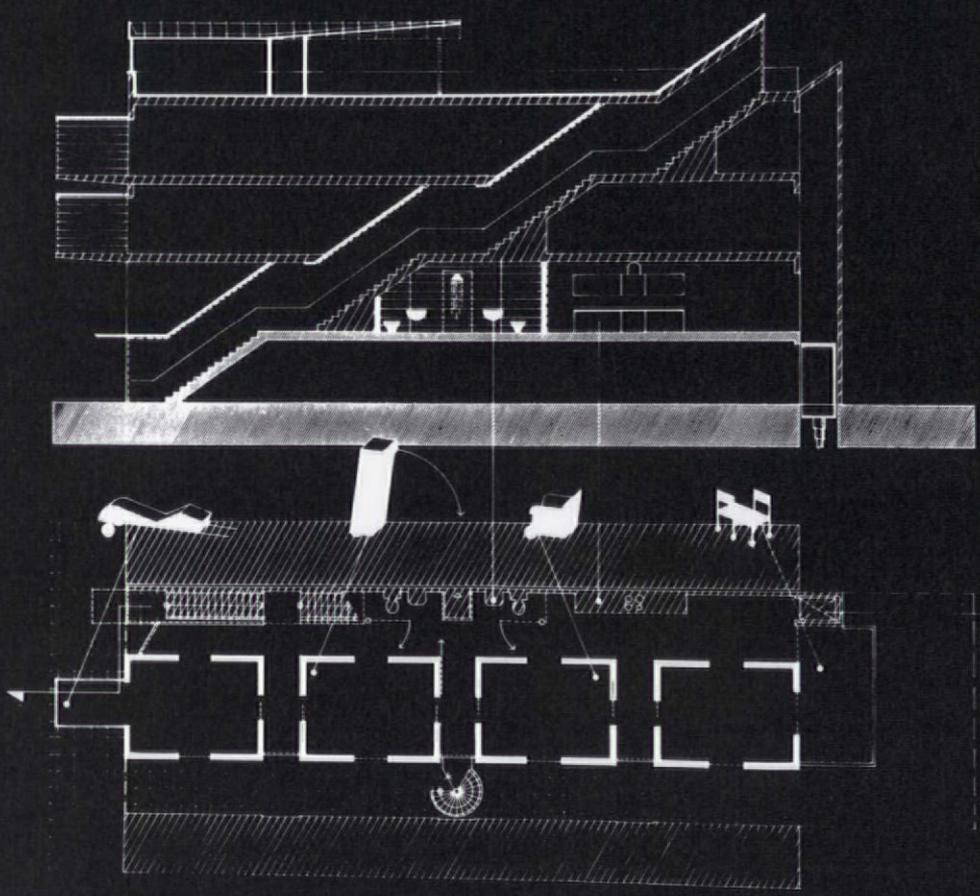
In the exhibit prepared by Sohela Farokhi and Lars Lerup, movement is finally domesticated in a set of wheeled furniture (chairs, lounge chairs and a closet) that offers the secure apartment dweller a semblance of nomadic adventure. In their House of Flats, the spaces of the city are the private spaces of the house, where rooms defy the definition of continued use: Moveable furniture allows you to rename each room as you use it.
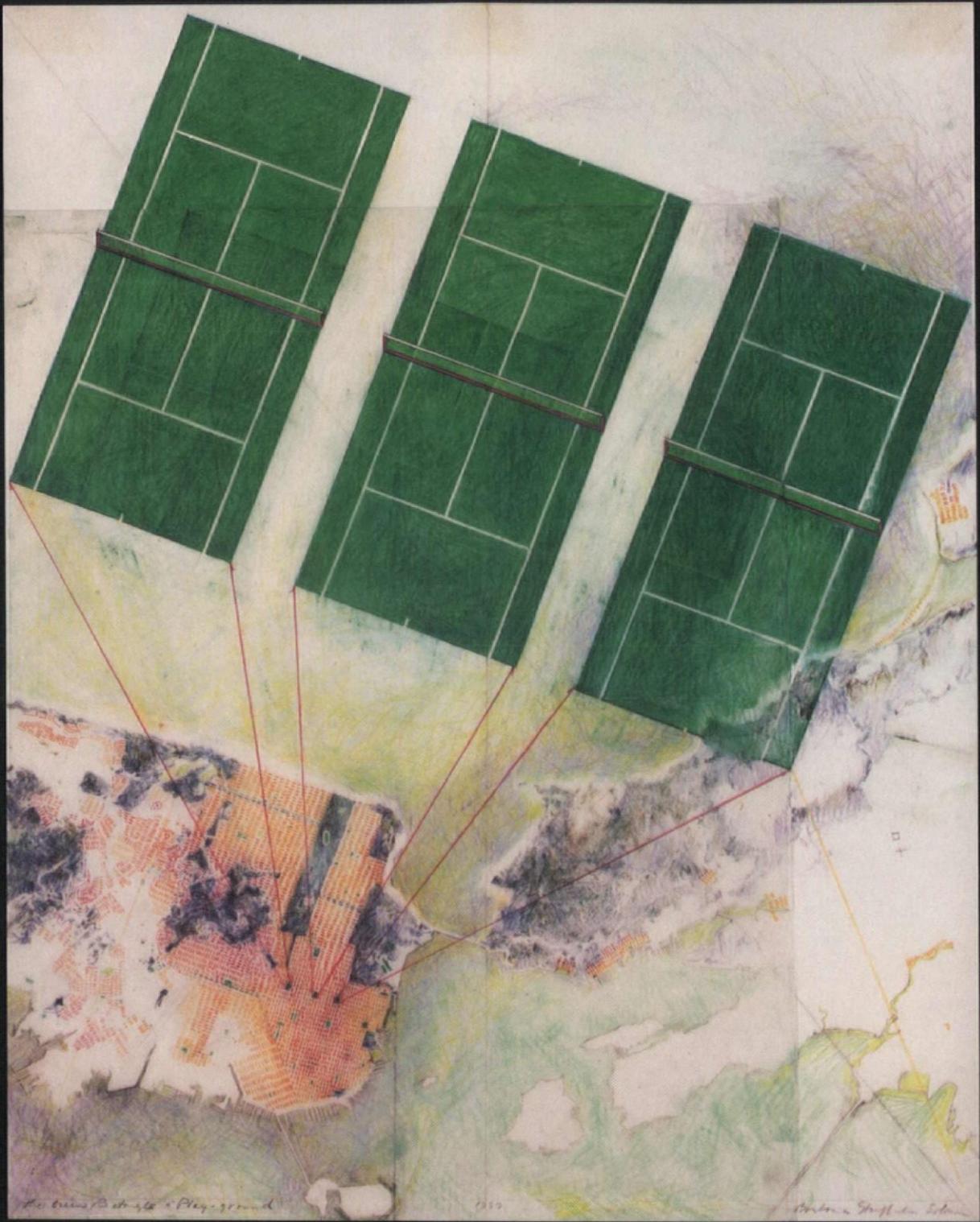
Barbara Stauffacher Playground   1977   Barbara Stauffacher Solomon

Solomon's installation, more a commentary on San Francisco than a vision of the future, captures in its rendering some of the mystery of the city. In Solomon's reading of the city, patches of green occupying parts of the gridiron become areas for play and rejuvenation. Movement is a ritual dance in the only available paradise — courts of play filled with light footfall and the sounds of a racquet hitting a ball. The acts of collective celebration in the spaces of the city are for the most part redefined as the sequestered play of two to four people tracking a ball within a matrix of rules.

In a pessimistic reading these installations are self-absorbed, unconcerned with or dismayed by the collective future. In an optimistic view they can be seen as pointing the way to an abiding concern for how it is to be in a place, rather than to move on. They can prompt us to explore and understand the character of our society and how it fits with the nature of this very special topography and climate.

Yet in these installations, these latter visions, the light of the sun (purveyor of climatic character), rendered so vividly in the early drawings, plays a lesser role. It is irrelevant to the diagrammatic intricacies of the Agrest/Gandelsonas maps, and it appears only as a source of energy for the solar-powered elite insular towers of the Fung/Hodgetts exhibit. In the Farokhi/Lerup installation, the sun as emblem of nature is supplanted by the ominous forces that shake the earth. These, when they appear, are made to sing, through an imagined structure of highly strung tension members that brace their apartment building against earthquakes.

Only in Solomon's misty glowing maps and in the written descriptions of Mark Helprin (published in the exhibition catalogue) does nature resume a benevolent voice: "San Francisco has a golden core — of light, color, proportion, of the feel of the air, the fog and the blue of the bay. These are the steadfast perfections around which human endeavor organizes itself even at times without realizing it. They give a common language to science and art. They provide the real continuity of history. And they are the true builders of cities."

Lisa R. Peattie

Planning and the Image of the City

No vision of reality is neutral. Different ways of knowing make a difference. There are many ways of seeing the world. Every vision of reality comes out of some set of interests in the real world. Every vision of reality suggests a model of acting on reality— even if that model of action is one of letting the reality alone. Ways of looking are tools, parts of making a strategy for action. They identify what's important and what's background. They suggest what is to be changed and what is to be left as it is.

A city can be thought of as built form—buildings, open spaces, passages and barriers. It can be thought of as a system of rules and regulations—taxes, building codes, rules of ownership and tenancy. It can be thought of as an arena of power and of the political arrangements that organize power. It can appear as an economic system— capital investment, supplies of labor, housing and land markets.

In reality any city is all of these. Since each way of looking represents a single aspect of reality, any one of these ways of looking must in the end lead to others. Nevertheless, it makes a difference where one begins.

The architect, for example, sees a world of built forms. The forms are important. For some architects they are so terribly important that in their slide shows you can hardly tell the models from the buildings. But practically all architects want to build big and noble buildings, and they don't worry too much about where the resources come from or who has to make way in the process. People appear in their thinking as "users"—of their schemes.

The developer, conscious of the rules under which building takes place, sees the zoning envelope and the political system to be manipulated. His picture of the city would not be physical buildings at all, but land values and systems of regulation; the developer's task is to produce "packages" of profit.

The community organizer sees the city as distributions of power—some vested in institutions, some brought together in more fragile assemblages of coalitions and community groups, some of them, as it was said once, sometimes "lying in the streets" to be collected and brought to bear as the dam's spillway brings the water's force to turn the wheels in a mill.

Cities today are thought of as economic entities. This conception (along with its architecture?) hides underlying political and institutional interests.
Photos by David Henry.

Each of these visions is different. Each has been important in shaping the world in which we live. The ways that planners have seen cities have been of particular importance because they have helped to direct government actions and make them legitimate.

At the beginning of the 1960s, when I came into the world of planning as the anthropologist in a multidisciplinary team planning a new city in Venezuela, the field was dominated by a vision that one of my colleagues there called "alabaster cities planning." It was a view that you could say came out of the progressive reform era in the U.S., a movement in which well-meaning, well-educated people (the sort of people that you and I are) dedicated themselves to cleaning up messy cities and a good many of the people who inhabited them. The progressive reformers tried to educate the immigrants, tame the political machines, clear slums and develop parks. It was a noble movement. It's easy for people like us to long to reinstate it. I see that longing as misplaced, so I'll try to tell you enough about that experience so you can see why.

In "alabaster cities planning" the city was conceived of mostly as built form, as public architecture, as a great, complex public work. Its creation was properly the work of experts. If the planning were done properly, that is to say expertly, the city would be both useful and inspiring. Other experts would be called on to deal with the "social part"—to plan schools and social services. Social workers would help to develop community spirit.

The project upon which I worked in Venezuela was a good example of this approach since it was backed by a great deal of money and power and deliberately set out to be state-of-the-art by using a wide range of professionals assembled by the MIT–Harvard Joint Center for Urban Studies.

The place where the new city was to grow was already occupied by perhaps fifty thousand people. They thought of themselves as already living in a city. There was a municipal council, a Catholic parish and a Rotary Club. The place was a splendid entrepreneurial disorder of hustling and boosterism, a rapidly growing city of the tropical frontier. But to the planners it was "the site," a kind of canvas on which the experts would paint a finer future.

The Venezuelan agency that was responsible for the project saw it as an industrial growth pole; the project was connected to a huge dam for which the agency hoped to obtain World Bank financing. The economists on the team saw their task as identifying industries —large corporate investors, mostly from the U.S.—that might be attracted there, and projecting statistically the population that would result. Urban design was to do the rest: to translate economic goals into a beautiful, modern city that would be an agreeable place in which to live.

Amidst references to redevelopment in Philadelphia and Italian piazzas, the designers set to work to draw up a city of broad avenues and tree-shaded neighborhoods. It did not seem important to consult the people already living there; after all, the future city would be bigger and different. The people in it would be different people. Anyhow, they had an anthropologist to tell them what they should take into account. The general who was in charge of the agency in any case thought that discussions with the local people could only cause trouble.

Because planning was thought of as design, rather than as institution-building or organizing, it seemed entirely reasonable to do it in Caracas, 350 miles away. From time to time, the experts would fly down and look about them. Often, on these trips, the designers would climb a local hill where they could have the benefit of seeing the city from a distance.

The city has not turned out much as the designers hoped. In fact, it has not very much to recommend it; it is inefficient and unpleasant, with rich and poor so sharply separated on either side of a river that most people think of it as two cities. The designers meant well, but in all their utopian visions of the alabaster city they never confronted the basic economics. The average Venezuelan cannot afford a ready-built modern house, but starts with a shack and improves it slowly as circumstances permit. Since shacks didn't fit in the modern alabaster city, people didn't either; now three-quarters of the population lives in shanty settlements with few or no services, while across the river rise the pricy condominiums of the modern city.

You can imagine that this situation has generated a great deal of ill feeling. It has indeed. No amount of social planning or anthropologizing can do much about that.

Finally, I must bring up a more serious problem in this alabaster cities model as it appeared in Venezuela. I came to see the urban designers and their visions of the city beautiful as window-dressing, as a way of advertising and making respectable a project that was, in essence, one of reorganizing the environment for large corporations. The conception of city as built form, as the alabaster city, had hidden conflicts of material interest and the search for economic advantage by particular groups.

I'll give you an example. The urban designers made plans for a new city center on the ridge at the western end of the existing city. Here would be the central headquarters of the planning

agency and a modern shopping center with Sears, Roebuck as a prime tenant. A new avenue from the just-completed bridge would bring traffic straight into the new center, bypassing the existing commercial district with its disorderly clutter of auto-parts stores, dress shops and bars.

The designers saw this work as creation in the public interest. The local businessmen with interests in the existing commercial area saw it as distribution in the interest of Sears; they saw that their customers were being carried away from them. They demanded a road connection to the new avenue. Several of the designers expressed great indignation at this pushing of special interests against the plan; they thought of the plan as representing general welfare, of which Sears was somehow the instrument.

Back home in the U.S., planners would not have had things quite so much their own way. They would have had to reckon with local politics and already established interests. But through the 1950s they would generally have regarded these local interests as impediments to the realization of their vision. And, as in Venezuela, they would have seen planning largely as design, physical improvement. Indeed, there was an established legal and political tradition that held that slum clearance, the removal of substandard dwelling stock, was inherently a desirable social objective.

The alabaster city conception of the city is not what now dominates planning. We do see it sometimes, especially in Third World countries out to build modern capitals for the glorification of the recently independent states. But here in the U.S., in the struggles over urban renewal and the highway problem of the 1960s, citizens learned to read through the beautification and the city improvement rhetoric
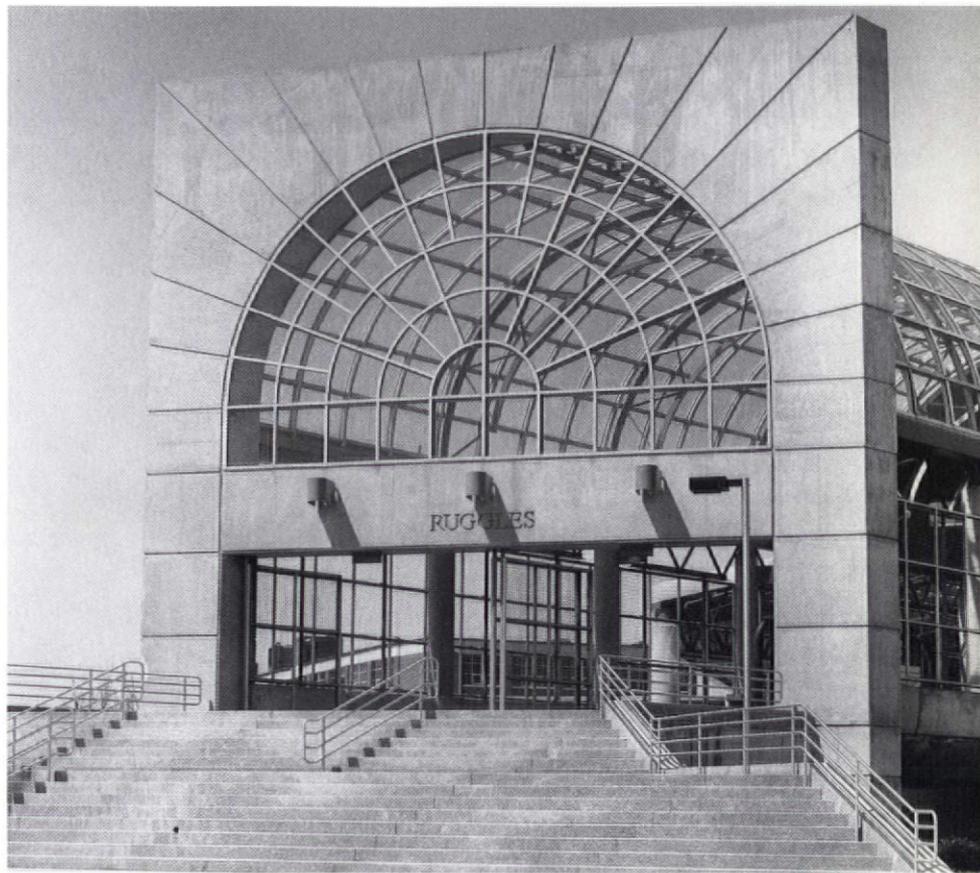
and look for the interests at stake, and to defend theirs.

In those days, I worked with a community group opposing a highway (successfully, by the way) under the slogan "Cambridge is a city, not a highway"; blacks shouted that "urban renewal is Negro removal" and in neighborhood after neighborhood people came out in front of bulldozers and said that the slums were their homes. The planner as expert reformer has lost legitimacy—one of the casualties of the 1960s and one that I do not really regret.

But the model of the city that now dominates our perception and our thinking seems hardly an improvement. It is, in a sense, the mirror image of the alabaster cities vision of the city. That one had the city as the product of political will and skillful

Another way of thinking of cities is as built form, as great public works. This conception, embodied in the turn-of-the-century City Beautiful movement, retains its appeal today, shaping projects such as Boston's new subway stations.

In the conception of the city
as an economic entity, people
are sorted out on the basis of
their value to the economy.

technique, with economic interests repressed from the scene. The model currently in favor seems to be of the city as an economic system, an arena for development projects carried out by a "public-private partnership" between government and profit-making entities. Perhaps this is not exactly the way to put it, for government, too, in this vision, is at least trying to be a profit-making entity. Tax revenues are said to be what makes this necessary.

does not really treat them as citizens, true members of the city.

The economic model, like the alabaster city one, hides the rest of the system. Just as the alabaster city vision hid economic interest, so the economic model hides the institutional and political interests that shape the economics. In the economic vision, cities consist of a set of interlocking markets, especially for land; capital flows freely on the basis of relative profitableness.

In this vision, the whole city comes to be appraised as to its profit-making potential. Slums are still being cleared, but not because they are unsightly or in the interests of social reform. Rather, they are converted into upscale condominiums in "the logic of the market," a logic that is seen as though it were as much a given as gravity. In the process of ordering the city according to the vision of the market, people, too, get sorted out on the basis of their economic value. If you can't cut the mustard economically, you become a kind of human waste, to blow along the street with yesterday's newspaper or to be picked up and placed by some human sanitation department in an appropriate shelter. Welfare recipients, the homeless — we may feel that we have to do something about them, but this current vision

Here is urban decline: Capital flows out and with it the very physical elements of the neighborhood. Window boxes come off, panes break, pipes and sinks get stolen, buildings disperse into vacant lots. There a rising market draws capital and brick row houses, only a short time ago cheap-rooming houses or abandoned buildings, seem to draw carriage lamps, shutters and hanging plants. This is all seen as in the order of nature.

But anyone in real estate could tell you differently. These markets are neighborhoods, and their economic strength or weakness is very largely dependent on activities of government — street lights, police protection, schools — as well as the investment policies of banks. A large development project is a major political undertaking, mobilizing support that produces

tax forgiveness, zoning variances and permits. What the economic model of the city sees as "market forces" is the economic aspect of a complex system of power and vested interests.

This system is represented in zoning, code enforcement and tax policy, in the school system with good schools and inferior schools, and in all the social machinery that shapes the prices the economic model calls to our attention. This social machinery is a human construction. The models of the city, too, are human constructions, just as much as the cities themselves. They are not given by the nature of things. We can make and unmake them.

I would like to see us move towards a model that would join the economic and the political in a conception of the city as a human community. We would then treat both the physical form of the city and the economic arrangements that structure our relationships to each other as aspects of the creation of a social world for us all.

In housing, for example, we would reject the alabaster city view, which saw the dwellings of the poor as "unsightly slums," as well as the economic view, which sees the "logic of the market" as inevitably closing over those who can't cut it in the labor market. We would see housing policy as a vehicle for citizenship — and notice, then, the way in which shelters and "welfare hotels" constitute a class of persons whose housing brings with it a place as a kind of non-citizen category.

Such a vision of the city would be a proper framework within which we might focus our practice as designers and planners about some lessons that rise from experience in projects like the Venezuelan city.

A city is not properly thought of as a work of art; it has to be a collective creation, more like a party than a building. As in a party, there are things

that can be done to shape the outcome. As the hostess in the party plans and lays out the food and drink, finds the appropriate music and adjusts the lighting, the city planners and designers deal with the transportation system, parks and open space; the city government has its building code and enforcement mechanisms. But beyond that, the city must grow as a social, collective invention, a work of politics in the broad Aristotelean sense.

"The plan" is not a template; it is important but only as a part of the planning process. It must be thought of that way from the very beginning.

The key to the urban economy is diversity and linkages. So the physical setting must serve diversity and linkages. The passion for formal order that characterized alabaster city planning must give way to a commitment to functional order, which often looks messy on the ground.

The people of the city need living places in which they can afford to live. If there are poor people in the city, and if society is not prepared to provide them with the housing they cannot afford via subsidy, there must be for them housing that the lucky rest of us will see as substandard. There will then be a part of the housing stock that shocks the "alabaster city." The alternatives are worse. They are putting the slums out of sight, as in Brasilia; the poor house or shelter; homelessness. We must maintain what some may call slums and care for these neighborhoods with the good city services that citizens everywhere have a right to expect.

We professionals might all come to agree on these general principles, but we would have trouble putting them into practice. We lack, for starters, some of the simplest professional tools. If the urban economy is characterized by diversity and linkages, how

do we replace the old land use plan, with its assumption of homogeneity, by a way of representing diversity and linkages? The invisible structures of law and regulation are critical; how do we show these? How do we represent process and institution? How do we design for neighborhood stability over time and through change?

These technical tasks are nothing compared to the task of building the appropriate social and political environment for this kind of planning and design. Planning and design are the tool of power, or they are a kind of science fiction. Architecture is frozen music, maybe; but surely a city as built environment is frozen political economics or economic politics.

To think of the city in this way, however, is not to propose that we await what is sometimes called the "political will" for reform. Planning and urban design are part of those processes that shape the city, both the parts we see as built form and the rules, the centers of power, the visions that we may infer from the forms. If we want an inclusive sense of citizenship, or community, we have to go beyond the notion of "needs" to a more difficult and interesting vision of participatory institution building.

When you're alone — and life is making you lonely — you can always go — downtown.

LOOKING FOR LIFE IN THE HEART OF THE CITY

I am watching a little black kid, maybe two years old, chase a pigeon around the fountains in front of the Wake County Courthouse. His patient, amused mother follows him with eyes bright with pleasure. Watching bird, boy and mother in this moment of relative abandon, I feel my eyes shine, too. It is maybe 75 degrees out, sunny with a slight breeze at 11:45 on this Tuesday morning. The fountains — concrete aggregate pools each with a trio of bubblers — flank the axis that runs out the front door of the courthouse, across the mall to the front door of Belks, Raleigh's premier department store. The courthouse, mall and fountains are the result of planning. The pigeons remain in spite of planning, for little effort has been spared in the attempt to make them leave the center of the city.

And then what would the old man who just spilled peanuts for them onto the pavement have done?

At 11:30 there are still few enough people on this block of the mall for me to count without trying. As we coast toward noon the number is rising. A woman stops to ask if I am interested in reading the latest issue of *The Watch Tower* magazine; now she is approaching another who has perched on a corner of one of the fountain pools to read in the sun. The smell of cigarette smoke and cologne is also on the rise as people pop from office building doorways in growing numbers. The surf of voices is high enough to compete with the hum of the ever-present air conditioning compressors and the growl of the not-too-distant cranes. Snatches of conversation. Laughter.

By now there are too many people to count. Belks, behind me, is a major destination (it has a superb cafeteria on its fourth floor), but most people are just passing through this block. The hot dog stand — long opposed by local merchants — is doing business, if maybe less than it would like, and Ron's luncheonette down on the corner is busy, but the block is dominated by institutions like the courthouse, its annex, the post office, a couple of banks and an International-style office building crammed with lawyers and advertising firms.

After lunch the hot dog stand will close. Belks will close its cafeteria line at 2:30. Ron's will close at 3:00. Then there will be no place on this block of the pedes-

Photos by Denis Wood.

trian mall in the heart of downtown Raleigh — county seat, state capital — to get a Coke, much less a cup of coffee. Shortly afterwards there will be no one on this block at all except the pigeons.

But for now, for a moment, there is the sense that this is a place, there is the buzz of life, folk hailing one another, the sound of feet, the purposeful staccato of the Florsheim-shod lawyer with his two briefcases, the shuffle of the slippers of the old lady from the Sir Walter Apartments nearby. There is the smell of food and perfume, birdsong in the trees, the flap of pigeon wings, the shrill of the occasional cicada, "How ya' doing?" "All right," laughter, shifting light, the high voices of kids, the boom–slap of the halyard on the flag poles.

plus a scattering of elderly from the Sir Walter Apartments and a streetperson or two. There will be a major flurry when the high schools get out and a very brief one at five when the suits and secretaries run for their cars.

Mostly, though, it's like this: empty. Across from where I'm sitting the night guard has let a cleaning lady out of the courthouse. It is 9:45 in the evening but my block of the mall has been just like it is now for all of four hours, ever since the laggards descended from their offices to find their cars and zoom off to home, that is, *to somewhere else*. The old folks have retreated to the safety of their apartment building. The shelters for the street people lock up awfully early, or perhaps something else explains their

The sunlight is slipping across the mall. Secretaries in their fashionably long dresses, construction workers in their shirts cut off above the navel, lawyers in their tailored suits, clerks in their long-sleeved white shirts, delivery men in the matte brown or matte blue of their uniforms, loungers like me in jeans and jackets, a streetperson in her mismatched sweater, knit cap and overcoat. Raleigh for a moment is present in its bewildering diversity of ages and sexes and classes, come together for a moment to eat and be in the sun and the presence of each other.

The moment slips away so fast. It is not yet 1:30 and already again I can count the people on the mall. The number is not small — there are maybe 130 people on this block — but the flood of folk is over, and without continuous rejuvenation the number shrinks rapidly, though not as rapidly as the diversity does. The construction workers and delivery men are back at work; so are the secretaries and clerks. Mainly here now are white males in suits, every now and then with a gym bag in hand — suits,

absence. But there is *no one here* from 5:30 in the afternoon until 6:30 the next morning, no one at all, not even a cop, not even a pigeon. The fountains run though, the vacuity of the bubblers painfully evident now that theirs is the most evident sound on the mall, a vacuity marked in this silence by a singular absence of purpose, even for a fountain.

Whoa! Here comes a couple, the first in 17 minutes to pass my bench, and

whoa! whoa! the last bus from the outer malls has just stopped on its way to the housing projects where live so many people who serve at the Hardees and McDonald's and Chick-Filets and Dunkin' Donuts out at Crabtreee Valley Mall and North Hills Fashion Mall and the Celebration at Six Forks or wherever they're coming from — a sudden, poignant *peakette*, eleven people slipping down my block of the mall, one couple stopping, sitting on the edge of a fountain, talking, looking each other in the eyes. At this tail end of summer there are still insect voices — rasps, shrills, clicks — and the noise of the water, and the halyards on the flagpoles, and now these voices, snatches of their conversation floating over.

block, then, too, it is a lively place and you feel good about living in Raleigh — even if most everybody you meet *is* a lawyer or a banker or politician.

A mockingbird breaks the palpable silence of the mall with his crazy call. I have been lucky in my birds, watching the urbanite pigeon at noon lead the children on and drive the planner crazy, and now listening to a mockingbird sound the dearth of song. I remember when I was much younger, and less disappointed, hearing on the radio Petula Clark singing *Downtown*; oh, it was a stirring promise...

Just listen to the music of the traffic in the city — linger on the sidewalks where the neon signs are

And then they too leave.

You have to be a geographer to want to stay. The surfaces are hard or heavily planted (under the trees there are flowers of twiggy things) and there is no place to stretch out. With the harsh, bright street lights for keeping the criminals at bay, who'd want to? It is so bright that I can write without strain. Who would come here? Everyone has worked with the best of will to make this a place for people. Cars have been excluded (oh, how the merchants screamed — and fled to the outer malls), the paving is interesting and varied, benches are numerous and provided with backs, trees and flowers and fountains have been thoughtfully arranged in little nooks and angles, giving the sense of an outdoor room. The landscape architect worked closely with the city's planners to incorporate the very best advice, and at noon, when the sun is out and the breeze blowing and little kids are chasing the pigeons, it almost works, for an hour, maybe two. And one night in December, when there are choirs and groups of bell-ringers five or six to a

But there is no need for the mockingbird; the mall mocks well enough the lively promise of the song's words: When you're alone downtown is the *last* place to go, not really bright but harshly lighted and void of life. The only beat here is that of the pump forever recirculating the waters of the fountains, unheard by anyone.

Was Petula Clark lying? Or was there once a time when you could go downtown? Or, for that matter, anywhere? Shopping malls, even if livelier until a later hour, are closed at 9:00 and there is no place to go but out on the highway to an all-night McDonald's if you want to talk about a late film over a cup of coffee.

But it is not just a problem late at night. Where do you go *anytime*?

It is Wednesday, about 10:00 in the morning. I am sitting in Raleigh's Pullen Park, with a nineteenth-century carousel in it, a miniature train and a lake with paddle boats. The operator of the carousel is unlocking its gate. A mother and three children are down by the swings. A couple strolls along the walk

Raleigh can I go and sit outdoors and be served a cup of coffee, much less coffee in a ceramic cup. At the moment it may be that there is no place I can go and sit outdoors and be served ... *anything*.

One of the problems is the way we have separated everything. Why doesn't anybody read the daily paper in the park? Because no one lives within walking distance of it; the park is surrounded not by homes but by institutions, though even the parks near homes are rarely used this way.

The density of housing is so low that most people live too far to walk to the parks, which invariably are large and stocked with *things*: basketball courts, swimming pools, tennis courts — everything but benches on a walk under a tree

an hour a day, *every* day, eight to ten hours a week on the road — it's like a whole other work day.

Finally, folk in Raleigh are in school, younger and younger every year, *hours* a day. The magnitude of the day care problem indicates exactly the numbers of children both of whose parents are working. So it is hardly hyperbole to say that the activity outdoors in Raleigh most of the time has got to be no more than this mindless shuffling. I must be out of my mind to expect to find people in a park on a weekday, sitting outside at a table reading the paper, or on a bench

pretty. — How can you lose? — The lights are much brighter there — you can forget all your troubles —
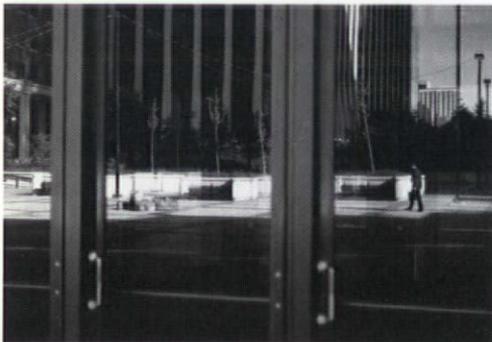
by the lake. I have to imagine there are more people somewhere in this park's 90 acres, but in fact there probably are not. Usually there *are* more mothers and kids, but except in the summer and on weekends, not really all that many. Rarely do I meet anyone here that I know, and when I ride the carousel I am alone or with someone I have brought to share the experience. No one reads the daily paper here, or comes as a matter of course, except the college kids who park in its lot and cross it to get to school.

A woman has just opened the refreshment stand. She can sell me hot dogs and soft drinks in wax paper cups and candy and cigarettes. Nowhere in

where a couple, out for a stroll, might sit to rest or to admire the view or the passing scene.

We have separated our homes from everything else, just as we have separated sitting and having a cup of coffee from the strenuous recreational activities that we associate with parks, just as we have separated work from play and both from dwelling.

Where *is* everyone all the time in Raleigh? They are mostly at home, in freestanding private, isolated single-family houses, often on streets without sidewalks in subdivisions so exclusively residential that to do *anything* but be at home requires the use of a car.

Another place where folks in Raleigh are is at work. Severe traffic problems make it perfectly evident that Raleigh residents largely work at *the same time*, everybody lemminglike starting together and stopping together and being home together except when they're in their car together migrating *en masse* from one to the other.

This is the third place Raleighites are, on the road, one per car, more than

talking, or taking in the scene. What scene? There is no scene. Everybody is at work. Or at home. Or at school. Or in his car.

I think of San Cristobal, a town in southern Mexico of some 30,000 residents, of the way that as the shutters begin to go up on the stores at day's end, folk begin to appear in the Zocalo, strolling, sitting on benches, while the lights come on, the sky turns red and darkness drops on the town like a baby's blanket. Down on the corner a woman selling roast corn on the cob is doing a brisk business. *Little* kids are out at the hands of their mothers, young kids are chasing each other, older ones are plying the shoe-shine and evening-paper trades or flirting. Men chat about politics while their fathers sit on the benches with their hands cupped over the heads of their canes.

And only slowly does this beautiful moment dissolve, the young families leaving first, then the older folks, last of all the older students, the young adults, some of whom can still be found here in the city's center hours later arguing pol-

itics or sex or aesthetics over a beer or a cup of coffee in the kiosk in the center of the square.

In Raleigh (But why pick on Raleigh? In the *U.S.*) it is another story. At day's end folk descend to garages or parking lots, where they enter their cars. *And if we wished to stay, if we wished to savor the day's end on the mall?* We would be alone, there would be no lady selling tortillas, no cafe along the sidewalk, no intercourse of families, nothing but a McDonald's box scraping along the gutter. It is, of course, a chicken or egg problem: Why *shouldn't* I get into my car? There is nothing to keep me here. But, if I don't stay, why should there ever be anything here? And what would I stay for?

attention distracted by the cosmos not even these.

There are those who will not share with me my admiration for San Cristobal. I recall interviewing a very senior executive of America's largest brokerage house. He commuted an hour and a half each way from his home in suburban Philadelphia to his office in suburban New Jersey. Wasn't that a lot of time in the car? I asked.

"Not at all," he answered. What, after all, did he *do* at home? He sat in the lounge chair in his den and listened to his collection of classical records. What did he do in his car? Sat in his ergonomically designed seat and listened on a superior audio system to his collection of classical discs.

I think again of San Cristobal. What do those people gain, strolling around the square? Why do they linger? Because this is what one lives for, this participation in a human community, this sharing of gossip, news, opinion, with one's fellow citizens. This is what it is all about, this is the point, the end of it all. It is like this all day in San Cristobal, just as all day in the U.S. the parks and pedestrian malls and sidewalks are mostly empty.

We seem to lack faith in the fellowship of community, and consequently we experience no more than the anomie that comes from getting one's news about the world — but not about the neighborhood — from televised evening news broadcasts from Los Angeles or New York. Not even from there, actually, for there is nothing of L.A. or New York on the news either; the correspondents are from everywhere, from anywhere, that is, from no *where* at all.

We cannot encompass *every*where. We can barely, with all the good will in the world, deal with our immediate environment or close friends, and with our

Where does this man *live?* He spends at least a day a week — 15, 16 hours — on the road. He spends some time sleeping. *What is left for where he lives* — his putative community — especially if we acknowledge the hours in the den with his headphones on? Evidently he lives … *in his head.* He has no community, not even at the office, where, like others at his level, he moves from job to job or position to position as challenged or paid. Are his children in a different situation? Leonard Bowden once argued that neighborhoods are knit together by 11-year-old prepubescent males. No longer. These kids are as likely as their parents to spend three hours a day on the road en route to their exclusive schools (if they don't board) or the public schools where busing attempts to overcome for children the differences their parents' lives create.

This is a caricature, but no one in this country is free of these energies that *work against* the possibility — even if desired — of having in our communities an experience like that of the residents of San Cristobal.

What would it take? We delude ourselves when we imagine that what is at stake here is a matter of benches and trees, grass and pedestrian precincts. When we talk about planning for a sense of place we are really talking about ourselves, about the silly lives we lead, and it is these that will have to change before any other kind of change can have effect.

The pedestrian mall *has* benches and trees, fountains and a breeze, and those who pass through on their way to their cars think it's just dandy and what a nice thing it is to have. But these people are walking five, six, miles per hour and even when a friend hails, even here in the friendly, slow-paced South, nothing more than a slight slowing takes place, because the rush hour's a bitch, and

heavily in this block, which two or three years ago was a green haven for winos and panhandlers. To the west the city has constructed a nine-story parking deck–bus transfer facility with lots and lots of brick, fountains with cascades, young street trees, bollards, clock towers and heavy wrought-iron chains. Just in front of this is the city-supported Gallery of Contemporary Art, a classy venue for traveling shows of serious painting and sculpture. To the north is the site of a future children's museum. Across the park is the old city market, now a food court ("Charlotte's Gourmet Sandwiches"), and Greenshield's Pub, one of those trendy bars that brew their own on the premises, much brass in evidence, dark green carpet and the air of

Wood" that and Mr. Coats always had an apple for Randall, even after he'd gotten too big for his stroller. On cool mornings there would be a couple of braziers out and the sunlight would lace the smoke like something from heaven and there was about the market that sense of place that vanished — in a day — when the city took over to "revitalize" things.

I'm sure more money changes hands at Greenshield's in a night than ever did in the market in a week, but there's no *there* at Greenshield's, no sense of Raleigh or Wake County or North Carolina or even the South, just a sense of the new and the everywhere.

Why don't these kinds of efforts pay off with a sense of place? Because even

besides, one might miss *All Things Considered* on the radio.

It is going to be very hard to change this, to relocate the sense of importance now lodged in the national and international to the local, to the very local. We complain that Americans don't know where the Pacific is. In fact, they don't know the names of the streets in their own neighborhood.

In what we are pleased to call communities little is done but sleep, and that neither deeply nor undisturbed. To recognize this is to recognize a lack of something we almost uniformly possessed until the very recent past: a sense of place.

When designers talk about a sense of place they always show you slides. There are always lots of bollards in these slides, cobblestone paving, awnings, window-boxes overflowing with flowers, and alleys, benches and balloons. But a sense of place is something you can't photograph, it's something you have to live.

I am now sitting in Moore Square, the heart of Raleigh's downtown revitalization efforts. The city has invested

the well-fed and comfortable. Mostly empty storefronts await the mandatory quota of antique shops, candy boutiques and hairdressers. The second floors await their young lawyers and computer software specialists.

Ten years ago there was a real local market in the old market, mostly Wake County farmers selling their own produce, but also a couple of retailers who'd been to the big wholesale market really early in the morning. You could get fresh greens there every week of the year, fresh sausage and souse meat, homemade liver pudding and country cakes, preserves and pickles, and in season, vegetables and fruits and flowers. It was always "Mrs. Wood" this and "Mr.

in the best of cases — Portland, Oregon, — the cancer that killed the downtown originally rages unchecked. We don't really care *to be* with each other, we have too little to say to each other, we cannot imagine any longer what it would be like to live in a real community of our fellows unmediated by the events programming of jazz concerts, '50s sock hops, sidewalk art shows and ethnic food fairs. These we know how to handle. The bunting goes up, the Budweiser booth rolls out, the public address system is plugged in, yes! The moment has been certified ... *an official event*, we have something to consume, our time will not have been wasted. (At least we can give a name to what we did. We did not just hang around.)

But simply to sit in the park or on the mall for the sake of being among others, of sharing, even if wordlessly, each other's presence, this, this has become inexplicable. "What do I do?" my acquaintances want to know, and when I say "just sit around" or "walk around" they presume me afflicted by an insufficiency of things to do, unmention-

able perversions, nostalgia for the gutter, or the need to flirt with danger.

The city will revitalize downtown, but it will be for the eyes only. (When I need to urinate, I am reminded how little of the rest of the body was kept in mind.) It will look like a page from an architecture magazine and it will be no more real. There will be no people, or only those with money to spend in the pub. There will be no smells, or only that of the exhaust from the automobiles taking the pub's patrons back to the suburbs. There will be no sound, except for that of a bill slipping from a wallet.

And even these are exaggerations, downtown really *is* for the eyes alone, as conceptualized at the desk of designers who will *draw* in birds for local color,

Raleigh's Radisson Plaza Hotel; above to the right are the 22 stories of the Center Plaza Building with its restaurant-club and the 16 stories of Hanover One. Behind me is the Raleigh Civic and Convention Center where workers are in the process of installing a show.

This should be *it*. People should be sitting on these benches laughing and talking. There should be a vendor handing a customer a cup of coffee or a hot pretzel. The sidewalk cafe beside the hotel should have people at its tables, a lunatic with a guitar should be soliciting coins for his recently concluded performance, and over there beneath the arcade a young man should be holding a young woman and whispering sweet nothings in her eager ear.

— whoops, someone is crossing the plaza — and out on the highways — *hold it, an actual couple, and I thought for a second they were even going to sit on a bench, and...they have!!!* — and, as I was saying, out on the highways there are all-night gas stations and fast-food franchises. But mostly it is a stony silence punctuated by the wail of sirens.

If we are ever to turn this around it will not be with bollards and granite pavers. It will not be with the service of the design and planning professionals who have come to imagine their function as one of specifying to manufacturers and contractors the nature of the hardware they imagine that we, in our desperation, have called for. We don't need hardware. What we need is ... *to get*

but loathe them underfoot. When the fountains on the mall were first installed it was discovered that under moderate winds the water was whipped everywhere (that is, people got wet). An anemometer linked to the pumps soon solved that problem. Like well-bred children, fountains are to be seen (and, if the ambient noise level allows, heard) but not otherwise experienced. The water, like everything else, is for the eyes.

So are the little white Christmas tree lights festooning the trees in the plaza that terminates the mall. They are very pretty and there is always enough of a breeze to make them twinkle among the branches and the leaves. But what are they for? They bespeak a festivity that is rarely here.

I alone command at 9:00 on a balmy night this enormous space. Within eyesight are 18 benches long enough for six people apiece, and there must be twice the number in the space as a whole, to say nothing of steps, stairs, planters edges, railings and the vast paved interior. Before me stretches the mall, but above to my left reach the 16 stories of

Where are they? Are there so many other places to be doing these things? Tonight, in any case, I can assure you they're not happening at Nash Square or Moore Square or in the shadow of the capitol in Union Square. The parking deck–bus transfer facility is deserted. I saw a cop in his golf cart on the second block of the mall, but the bus from the outer loop has yet to disgorge its fund of flesh, so no one's here either. I know without checking that there's no one on the state government mall, which is deserted even in the daytime. The shopping malls on the belt road are closed (it's after 9:00). Where is everybody?

In front of their televisions, I guess, watching *Jake and the Fat Man*, or in bed already, resting up for another day of driving, working and going to bed.

Do I hyperbolize? Probably. But not about these downtown spaces, spaces identical to those in downtown Portland and Louisville and Atlanta and Cleveland and St. Louis and Spokane. There are pockets of life, of course. Out across from the university a strip of eateries remains clogged by students and

together. If we do, physics alone will insure the presence of a place. It is not a lack of place that keeps us apart, but our apartness that keeps us without a place.

The problem cannot be solved by design, but only by a thousand individual acts of will. We are going to have to lean over, turn off the TV, get off our butts, walk out of our air-conditioned condos and ... *hang around*. Soon enough we'll be joined by others. When we start to talk we'll have begun construction of the only kind of place that's *ever* mattered.

In the 1980s, the Toronto region experienced a problem common to many metropolitan areas in North America — it could not build enough housing at low enough cost to keep up with its rapid population growth. One of the consequences, just as elsewhere, was that a large amount of farmland was converted into spread-out, low-density suburbs.

By the end of the decade, it was evident that Toronto was overlooking an opportunity to provide new, affordable housing and strengthen its urban character: intensifying development along the network of main streets that overlays the city and its older suburbs. These main streets are the commercial and social centers of the neighborhoods through which they pass and carry public transit and utility trunk lines, yet buildings along them are typically of a relatively low density, perhaps one or two times the lot size. Development along main streets has been slow because of complex housing and zoning regulations and because much of the property is owned by people who operate small businesses there and have little desire to rebuild.

Proponents of the idea argue that

HOUSING ON

putting more housing on main streets would reduce the demand for developing farmland, require minimal investment in infrastructure and provide opportunities for small builders and design firms. They also believe such a strategy would reinforce the urban community by concentrating more population — and a greater mix of income groups and household types — along these very public, very social streets.

The challenge is creating regulatory reforms and financial incentives that are strong enough to encourage a modest amount of housing development, but not so strong as to precipitate the wholesale, irrevocable redevelopment of these streets. Similarly, Toronto must determine what design regulations will support both the public nature of main streets and the private nature of housing.

Last year Toronto's planning and

TORONTO'S

development department staged a competition to find prototypes for what new housing on main streets could look like, to gather ideas about regulatory reform and to gauge public reaction to the concept. This special report presents the results of that competition and comments from competition jurors on the architectural and urban design questions that the Housing on Main Streets program raises.

Few cities have a network of main streets that is as extensive, or as important to the city's social and economic life, as Toronto does. But the questions Toronto is trying to answer provide a starting point for any community that is trying to cope with growth or plan for new growth within already-developed areas.

Can Toronto attain its vision

MAIN STREETS

through a succession of small scale

steps — each of which expresses the vision and investment of individual citizens, owners and designers? Can Toronto assert the values of urban community, of human interaction, of diversity, within a program for new development? Within Toronto's vision, can the art of architecture co-exist with the mechanics of community building?

It is these questions around which the jurors' comments are framed. Toronto's answers may be visible before long. The city's planning and development department is preparing a set of zoning revisions for consideration by the city council and has started working with public, private, for-profit and not-for profit developers on the realization of several prototype Housing on Main Streets projects.

— *Todd W. Bressi*
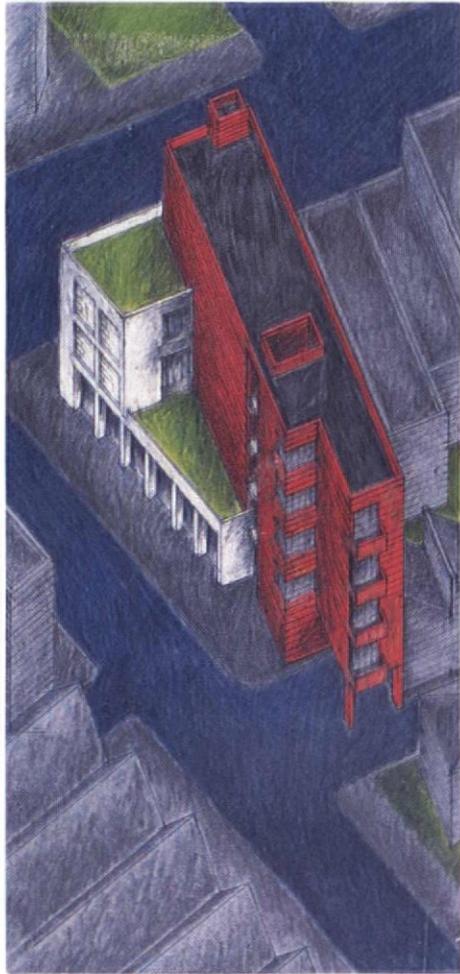
Jane Jacobs

Putting

Toronto's

Best Self

Forward

A good basic precept is be yourself. Another good precept is become your best self. That isn't quite as basic, because if you don't accept and have some understanding of yourself, and some self-esteem, you can't become your best self.

It is the same with cities. That's what the Housing on Main Streets competition was about—Toronto being itself and becoming its best self, instead of working at cross purposes to its nature.

It wasn't many years ago that Toronto, like other cities, was in a kind of delayed adolescent dither about its identity, in which it asked, "What's my type? Am I the homey kind or the svelte sophisticated type?"

You can still see results of the planning fashions the city tried on: Among the more unfortunate are relics of attempts to expunge linear main streets in favor of commercial nodes. You can see here and there these sad little places, dreary corner parking lots with dismal little sprawls behind them—so different from streets with vitality and dignity.

A few years ago this attitude changed; planners began to observe, acknowledge and admire Toronto's main streets and to consider the advantages of adding housing to them.

Toronto is not different from other cities in having main streets, but those streets are especially important here, being part of the most basic "self" of the city. The city has many selves, as we acknowledge when we speak of the neighborhoods, the downtown and the waterfront. But what holds them together is the structure of the city, the grid upon which the city is built, with the main streets occurring every so often in both directions.

There are historical reasons why Toronto was laid out as a grid and why particular streets on this grid became main streets. But it isn't for historical reasons that these main streets retain their importance and vitality. They provide a congenial form for the city; if they hadn't, they would have disintegrated. They would have blurred. But they remain the bones of the city and have much to do with its personality.

One reason the main streets are so congenial and resilient is their easy adaptability, not only over time but also place. You can board a main street's streetcar or bus and pass through an encyclopedia of neighborhoods. The street takes on different nuances as it passes through different places, adapting to what is around it. This is a large part of the secret of these streets' vitality.

Another asset is their enduring hospitality to small land owners and small enterprises, important to the success that so many immigrants have attained after arriving in Toronto. These streets have been vital in giving commercial opportunities to immigrants and also giving to others the opportunity to share in what immigrants bring.

Another characteristic is that they are predominantly low-rise. Think how different they would be if they had walls of skyscrapers throwing great shadows on the neighborhoods behind them. But as it is, they don't blight their neighborhoods either with gratuitous shadows or with impersonal scale. They fit very well. It's surprising how you can turn the corner from a more serene residential street to a main street and be at ease with the change to commerce and bustle.

The main streets are also very democratic places. Everybody uses them. All kinds of activities take place along them. At their best they contain no end of conveniences and surprises in compact, short spaces.

Another virtue is their long continuity, which makes different parts of the city so accessible to all. There is a romantic notion that a city ought to be a series of insular villages. You don't really have a village if you attempt that, and you lose the advantages of being in a city. One can so easily share in the whole life of the city by traveling these streets.
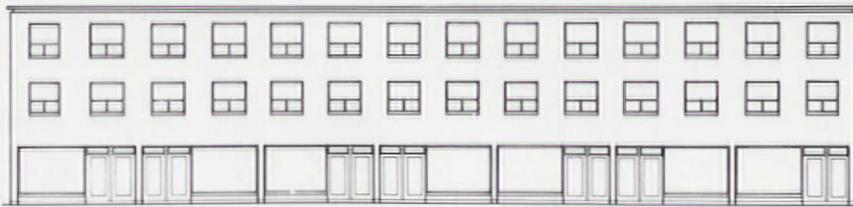
Late nineteenth century.

Early twentieth century.

1930s

1960s

For these streets to be at their best, they clearly need help in places; they need intensification, in particular. While they should be kept low-rise because that has so much to do with their human scale, hospitality to small enterprises, convenience and other characteristics, they are too low-scale and thin in many instances. A single story is not high enough. And a gap in which nothing is built is too low-scale, even if it has some automobiles on it. If you look, you see many stretches of continuous four- and five-story buildings, and in some cases six-story buildings, that retain excellent human scale, work well and express all the other assets of these streets.

We should begin filling in the missing teeth with four- or five-story buildings, with retail on the first floor and housing up above, because that is the nature of our main streets.

People who have never lived on busy streets seem to be frightened of two things: noise and parking. Let me try to lay those fears to rest. I lived in a three-story house on a street in New York, with more noise, more traffic and more dirt than anything you can imagine in Toronto. I can vouch that this house was not noisy (the street was terribly noisy) because the building itself, as long as the front windows were closed, was a buffer against the noise. This is why the gardens and courtyards behind buildings on main streets are typically so serene, surprising and delightful.

The other bugaboo is parking. It has become the practice, when a city falls into a dither about what kind of city it will be, to decide that, "I will be a city that solves the automobile problem." Well, solving the parking problem, I assure you, is never going to solve the automobile problem. There is no way that parking can deal with the many issues and difficulties of automobiles in the city. If we try to put the burden of solving the whole business of transport on providing parking places, we are going to be lost.

One of the many good decisions the organizers of this competition made was not mandating numbers of parking spaces per units of housing. One of their objectives, instead, was to explore anew the changes in zoning and other laws that may be advisable, including those respecting parking.

It is difficult, when regulations are already in place, to know what better solutions they may be blocking, hence, to know which are worth keeping and which are in our way. One of the advantages of this competition can be the guidance it affords toward re-evaluating, re-assessing and remaking zoning laws and other regulations so the main streets can be helped, not hampered, in fulfilling their best potential. In the process, can provide very much needed housing in a form that saves energy, farmlands and long commuting times.

The streetscape of Toronto's main streets is an ecclectic mix of styles that were prevalent during the last century.

Melvin Charney
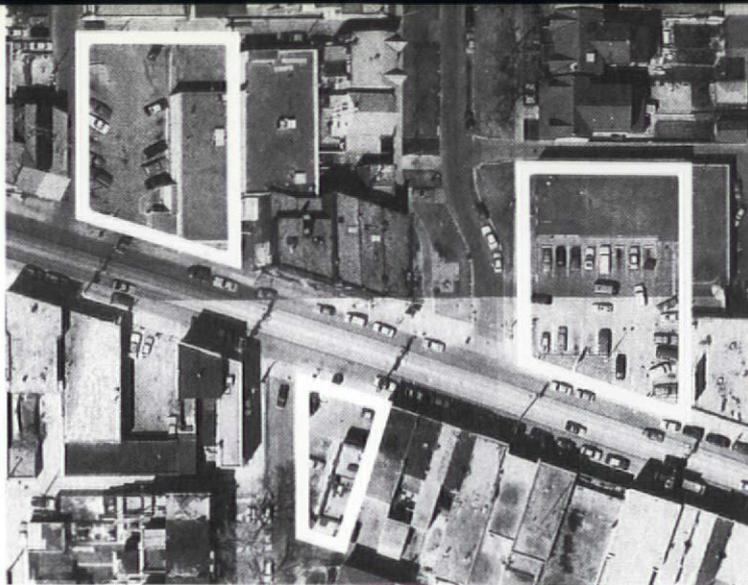
# City Structure as the Generator of Architectural Form

The Grand Award proposals are not easy to understand, particularly by those unfamiliar with or unable to assimilate the 20-year-old discourse about contemporary urban architecture. One has to study the drawings. They comprise three proposals, one for each category of sites, that were made by the same team. We lumped them together into one award because the underlying premises were similar.

There are two points I will make. The first is about the nature of the proposals and their premises, and the second is about the content of the proposals as city architecture, an architecture that can sustain both private and public urban content.

As you look at proposals such as these, the first task is to establish in your mind a distinction between analytic and synthetic formulations in architecture. Architects use several types of drawings, although this is not always clear to people looking at them.

The Grand Award submission includes proposals for this site, which consists of three parking lots scattered along congested Dundas Street. The conceptual sketch (right) shows a prototype building form adapted to the site shown below.
**Drawing courtesy Alain Carle, Denise Gauthier and Nicolas Roquet.**
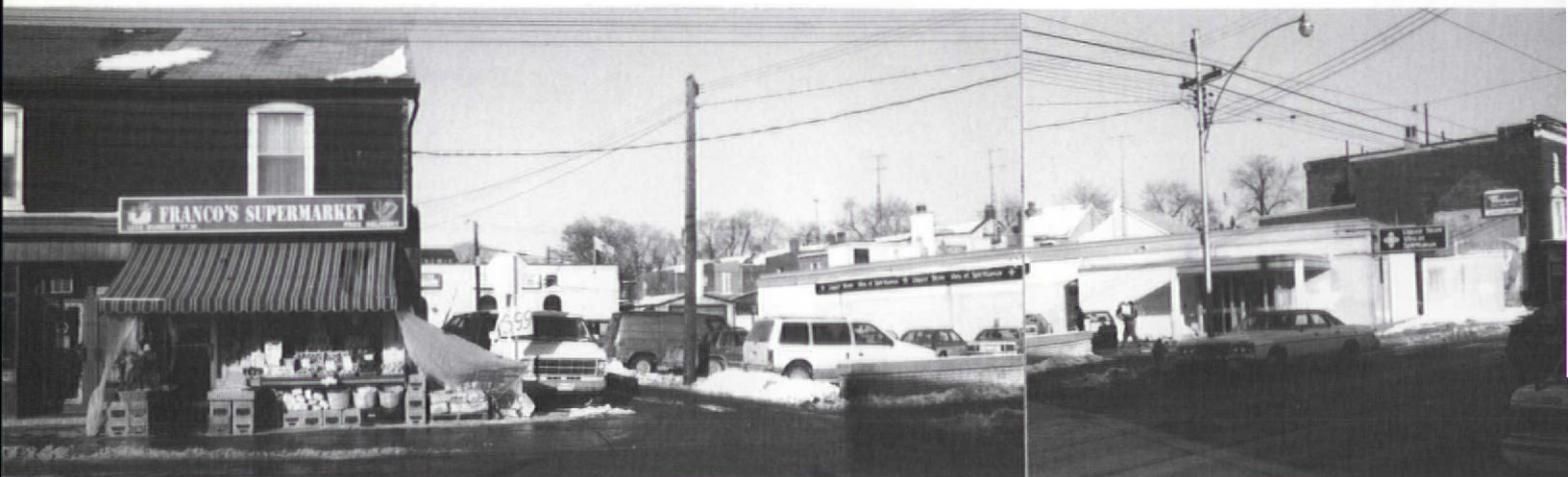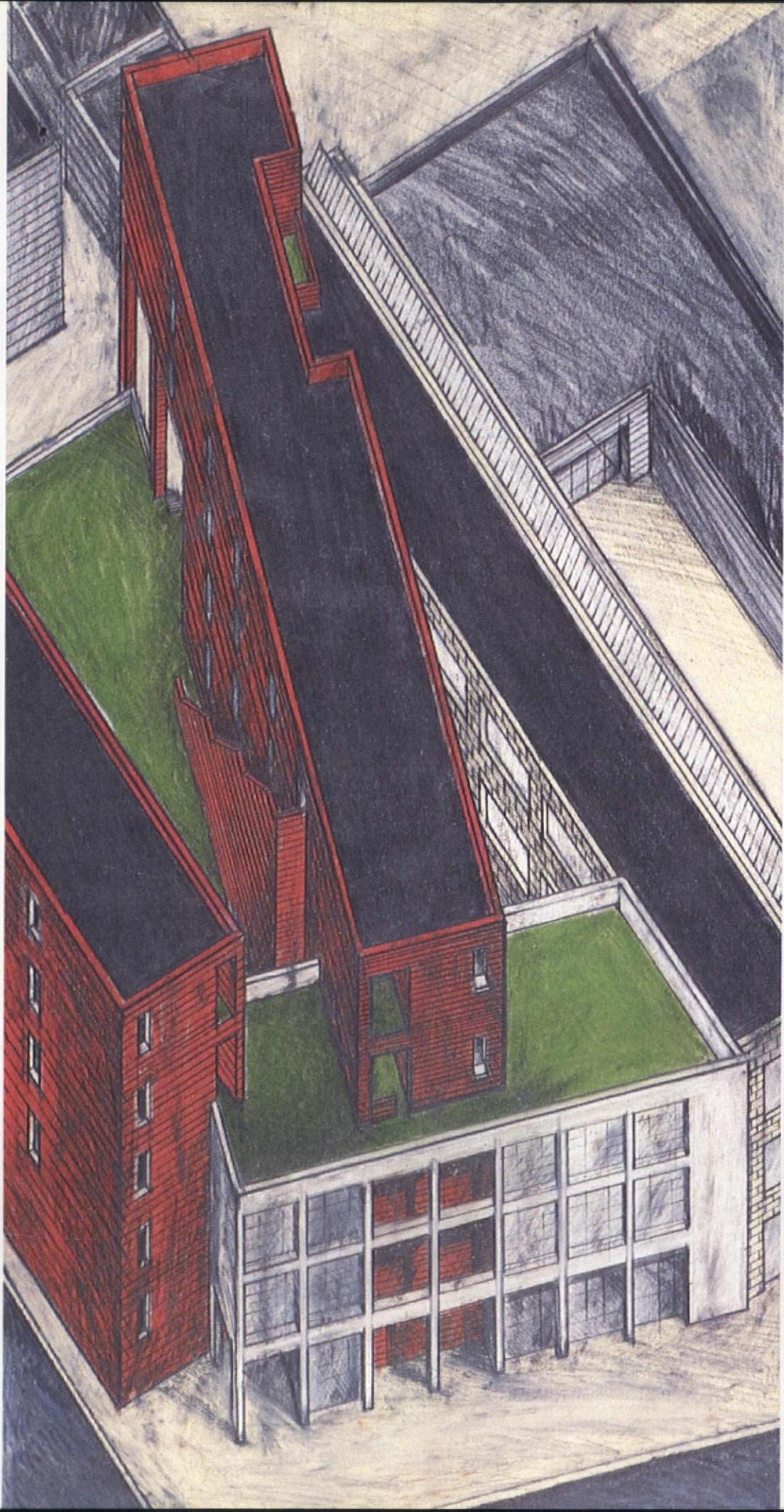
Topography, Main Street, Ravine and Lake

The city itself is the genesis of the project: a mythical geography in which lake, ravine and main street are the specific actors. At this territorial scale, Toronto's main streets appear as an autonomous system in the city.

Beyond the limits of downtown, main streets propose an alternative model for the construction of the city: They constitute a linear and sequential public space for display and parade. They are a public equipment irrigating the neighborhoods through which they pass. They compound individual and collective uses. They are both homes, therefore, permanent, and stage sets for consuming, therefore, ephemeral.

The main street is stripped down to its essential elements and translated into a conceptual model. Projected onto the existing city, it acts as a catalyst.
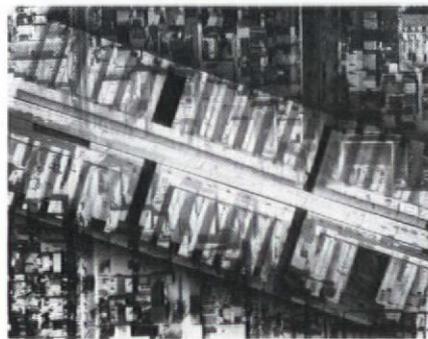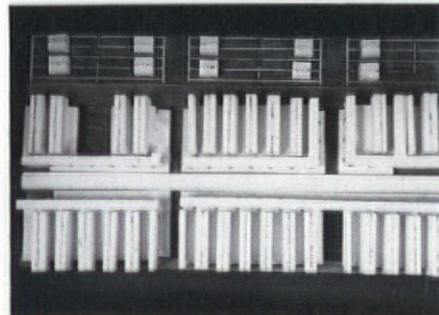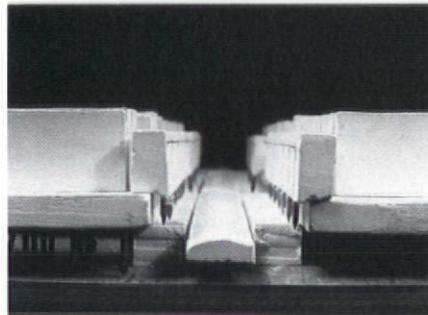
Toronto's grid of main streets and its pattern of small lots are reduced to a conceptual model, and a prototype building form is extrapolated. This form can be superimposed at will along main streets, just as building lots extend repetitively from the streets. Drawings and photos courtesy Alain Carle, Denise Gauthier and Nicolas Roquet.
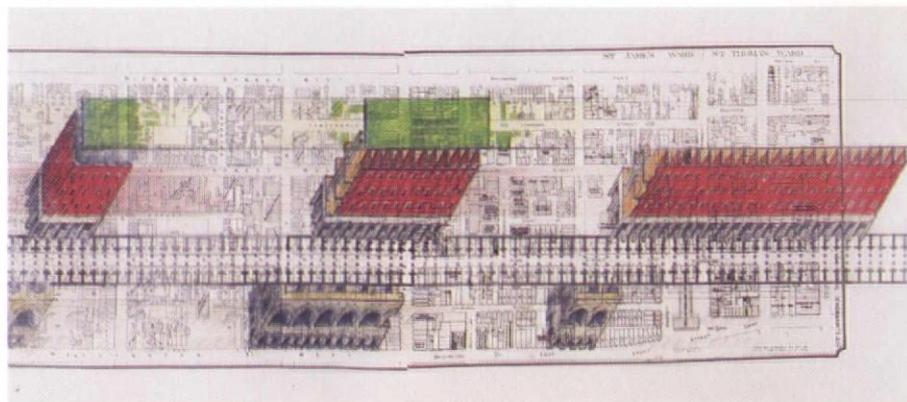
We use *analytic* drawings, which examine what exists and try to grasp, through the drawing process itself, what is inherent in the urban form with which we are dealing.

We use *analogic* drawings, which have to do with the unknown: You don't know how to describe something, so you say it is like something else. This type of drawing is difficult, at first, for the viewer to grasp. The Grand Award proposals include analogic drawings, and the jurors had to be careful not to interpret the analogies as actual proposals.

Finally, we use *synthetic* drawings, which suggest propositions. In the Grand Award proposals there are also drawings that show how these propositions could be and are responses to specific sites.

At first the jury was fascinated by a drawing called "Topography, Main Street, Ravine and Lake," which was the departure point for each of the three proposals (it was positioned on the upper left hand corner of the first board of each proposal). This drawing, an overlay of both analysis and analogy, helps clarify issues. It does not say what is to be built.

An accompanying text explains that the city itself is the genesis of the proposals and that an appreciation of Toronto rests upon the recognition of a paradigmatic construct in which main street, ravine and lake are the principal elements. Toronto's main street grid is thus taken to be as autonomous a construct as the geographic formations of its site. The propositions that follow draw out that autonomy. Main street is the main frame of Toronto; street car lines and bus routes, nourishment and distraction, are all on main street.

These drawings establish a potential for revitalization: the validation of main street as a frame and support for the city. Few of the other proposals took this approach.

The caption for another set of drawings was "The Memory of a Site is Construction." It suggests that the specificity of "Toronto" is rooted in the physical traces of constructions engraved in people's memories; the city can no longer be moved kilometers to the east or west without it affecting our conception of its urban form. Collective memory now serves as a point of departure.

This idea of collective memory suggests, furthermore, that there may be a coming of age in the architecture that we see here. Culturally, society comes of age when it recognizes where it lives and transforms that recognition into its art, be it painting, literature, or architecture. If one considers English–Canadian culture, it is not the architects who have recognized this. If you read Canadian authors, you know exactly where you are (even though you are reading their work in the *New Yorker* or a Paris journal). This coming of age happened in the culture of the U.S. at the turn of the century. Frank Lloyd Wright's buildings knew exactly where they were.

Walt Whitman's poetry was dedicated to a love of his country's landscape.

For those jurors who could not grasp the analytic and analogic nature of some of the Grand Award drawings, the drawings at first seemed to be proposing totalitarian architecture. "Stalinist, East Berlin revisited," said one of the jurors. But what the authors are getting at is something else: The drawing of a repetition of blocks superimposed on the city plan signifies the return to the city block and the potential development of the city within the block. There is no nostalgia in these proposals. They simply deal with the city as it is, including the traces of a Modern city.

It is interesting to look at the specificity of the insertions, for example, at Avenue Road and Eglinton Avenue. One starts with a low block that maintains the street front. Set in relation to the low block, and as a transformation of this lower block, is a taller building block, derived from the long plan of railroad flats, and set perpendicular to the street. Examine this transformation closely and you will find it is both precise in formal terms, and in terms of a highly "useful" (that is, adaptable) urban dwelling. Most important, this transformation sustains a differentiation of the "self," a differentiation between the public and private city.

My second series of points has to do with the Grand Award proposals as city architecture. Urban architecture is presented as a conscious, generative process, in which there is a generic derivation of a series of pertinent insertions. Every time we looked at other projects we seemed to be thrust back upon these proposals because they seemed to get behind what the other projects were doing in very straightforward and, sometimes, very conceptual ways. We could evaluate other proposals on the basis of whether the ideas behind the Grand Award proposals sustained them through their analysis and propositions.

One of the jurors put it very well, saying that she found in the Grand Award submission an articulation of the unspoken. In science, you can perform an experiment in a laboratory, implicating a tacit level of knowledge, and then spend years working out the mathematical formulae behind the experiment; major breakthroughs occur in that painstaking way. In urban architecture, we do things the same way. The city preceded zoning. Only after we lived in cities for some 10,000 years did zoning come about, and zoning is still a rather crude instrument for guiding what has always been shaped by the tacit understanding and regulation of a city's physical form.

We found in these proposals something about that tacit understanding that was rendered conscious. We could, therefore, look in a more comprehensive way at the nasty problem of urban intensification.
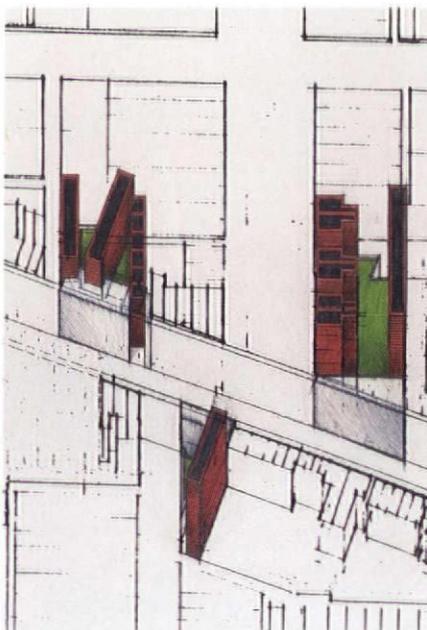
Another jury member pointed out that a problem one must deal with when considering urban intensification is the failure of the superblock, so dear to the Modern movement. For years we have been trying to break the idea of the superblock and get back to the basic building unit of the city: the city block. Streets and blocks restore the democratic process by restoring one's right as a citizen to be in the street.

Even though we've known this in principle, it has been very difficult to know how to execute specific projects. The Grand Award proposals provide, in a direct way, the elements of how to get back to the city block as a formative device. The authors came to grips with what generates urban form.

To focus on the city block, one must do more than define the edge of the street. If you have lived in Paris, you know how the buildings there work into the depth of a site. The richness of Paris or Montreal, for example, is the richness of the streets in juxtaposition to the interior development of blocks. In the Grand Prize submissions, the building that is used to maintain the definition of the street is situated in a dialectic relationship to a second building that penetrates the inside of the block. Moreover, horizontal surfaces, shown in green on the drawings, signify the penetration of "front lawns," so dear to Toronto, into the interior of the block in the form of terraces or roofs adaptable for appropriate use.

As a footnote, I would like to pose a question that preoccupied me during the four days of judging: Why did so many competitors propose a neo-Modern style in Toronto?

It struck me that this may have had to do with the history of Modern architecture in this city. It can be said that while proto-Modern, if not Modern, buildings were invented in North America (including some that can be found in the industrial fragments of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Toronto), the basic discourse of the Modern movement was institutionalized in the *ateliers* of Europe. After World War II, many refugees came to North America, and a kind of Modernism was implanted, to me in a very uncomfortable way. I had to grow up with it, and I rejected it totally.

Now one is thrust back upon its presence in this city and upon a continuity that has to do with what is intrinsic to our North American experience. I was touched by the number of solutions that came to this competition and clearly espoused an attempt to express a certain "critical Modernism," including the buildings proposed in the Grand Award. I found in those, too, a certain coming of age. But it is not clear whether the desired critical edge can ever cut deep enough to come to terms with a profoundly anti-urban architecture that has decimated our cities.
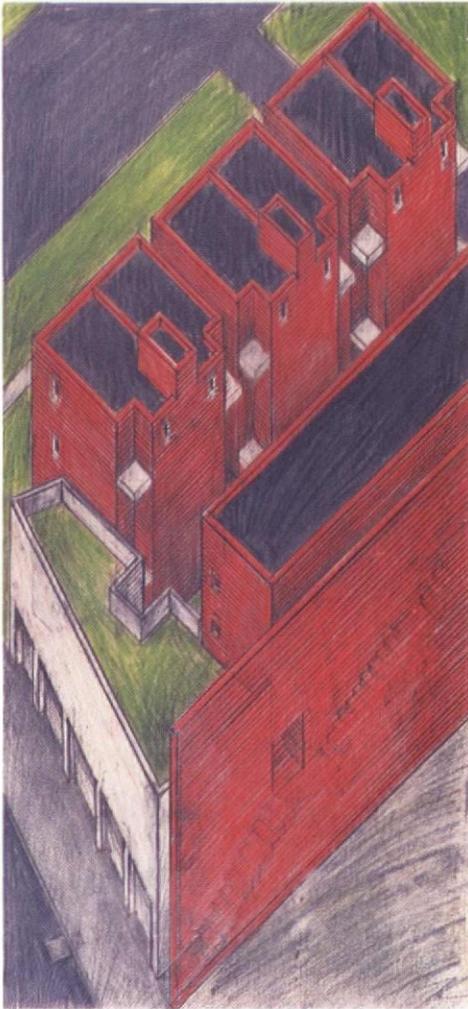
Housing

The traditional main street apartment is extended to its limits. In this way, the housing unit is a representation of the street: a passageway slung from room to room.

The exaggeration in scale encourages a collective appropriation of the flat.

Without eliminating traditional uses, the multiplication of single, private rooms allows independent individuals to cohabit.

The facade negotiates the variable conditions of the main street and acts as a public extension to the flats behind.
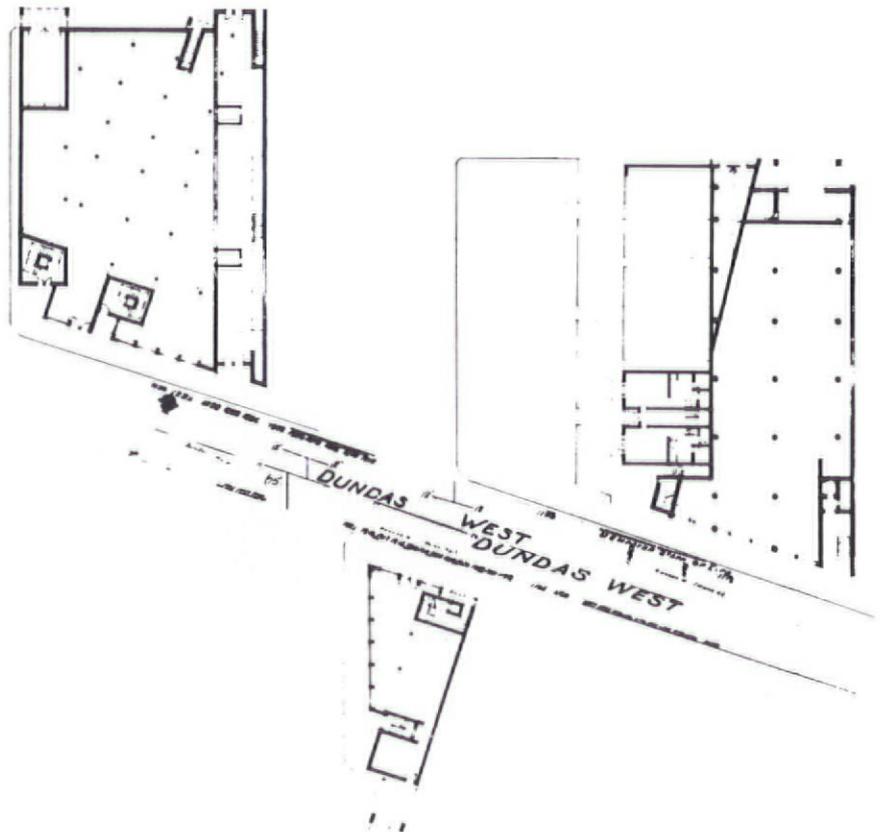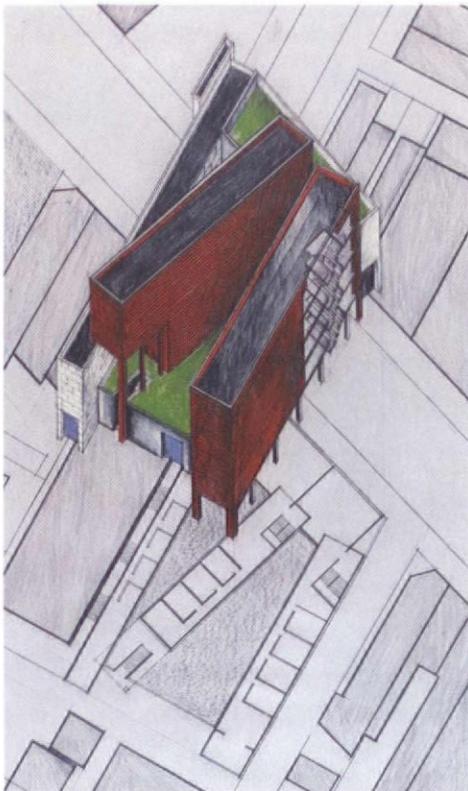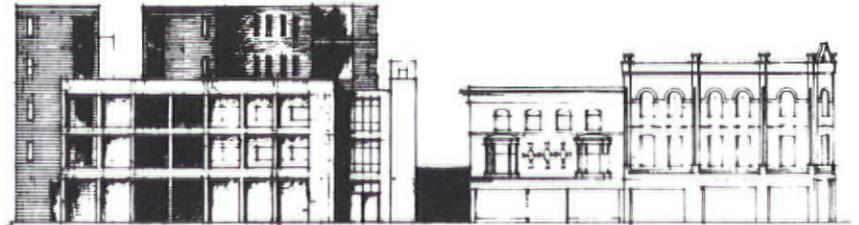
Anne Vernez Moudon

Finding Buildings to Fit Main Street

What fascinated me about the competition is that when jury members began looking for so-called "building types," we realized that we had no common definition of what a building type is. In general, we were looking for buildings that could be built along main streets, that would contain housing and commercial activity of the sort that is typical along main streets, and that would provide somewhat more density than is usual now. More specifically, we were looking for parameters that would reveal how to build these structures over a wide range of sites along main streets.

This approach transcends most planning processes. Toronto's Housing on Main Streets office, which is part of the city planning department, sponsored the competition because its staff is trying to deal with some of the shortcomings of regular city planning techniques, which focus on land use. When a problem like Toronto's housing shortage arises, land use planning methods are

This car dealer occupies the irregularly shaped, block-long site shown above.
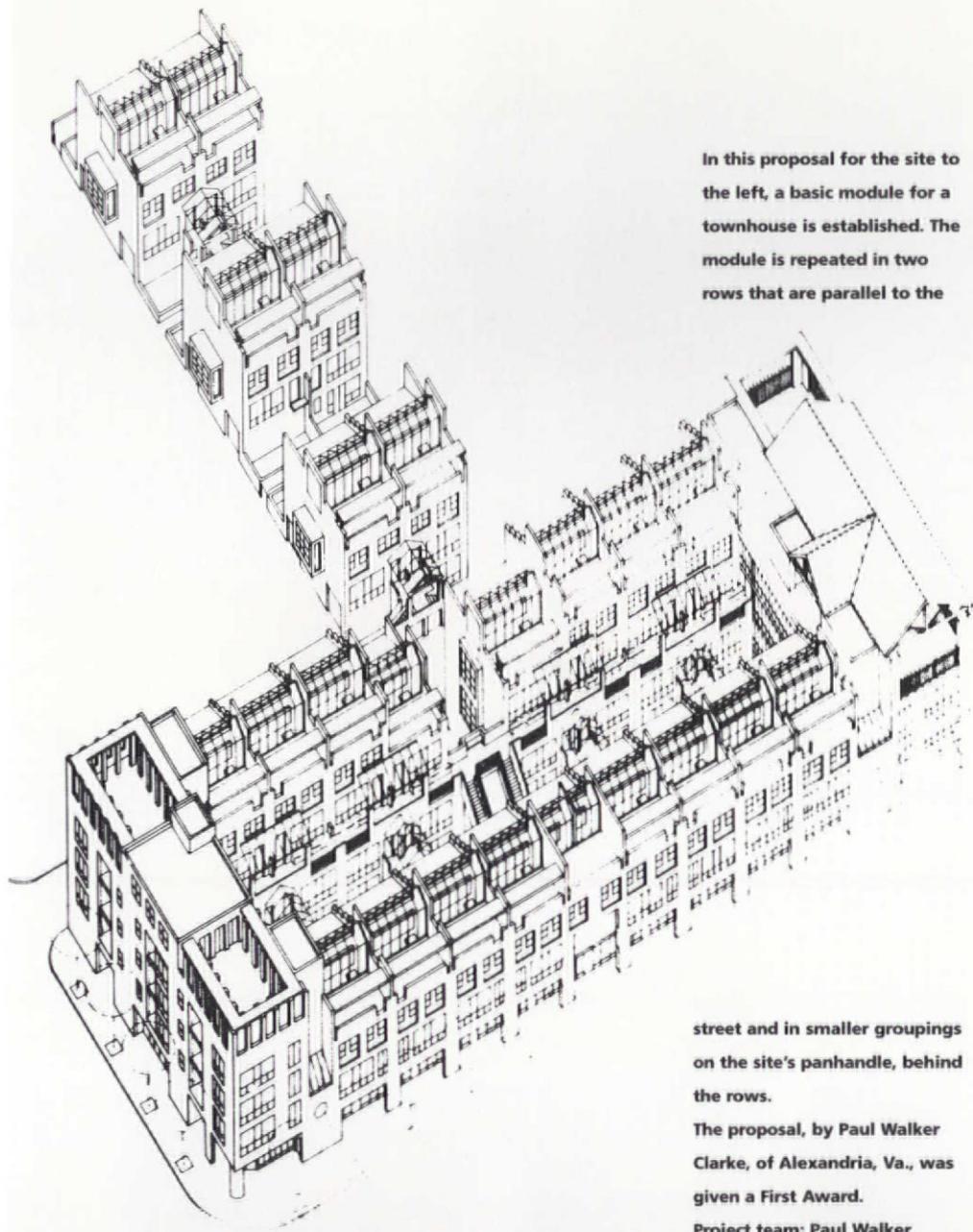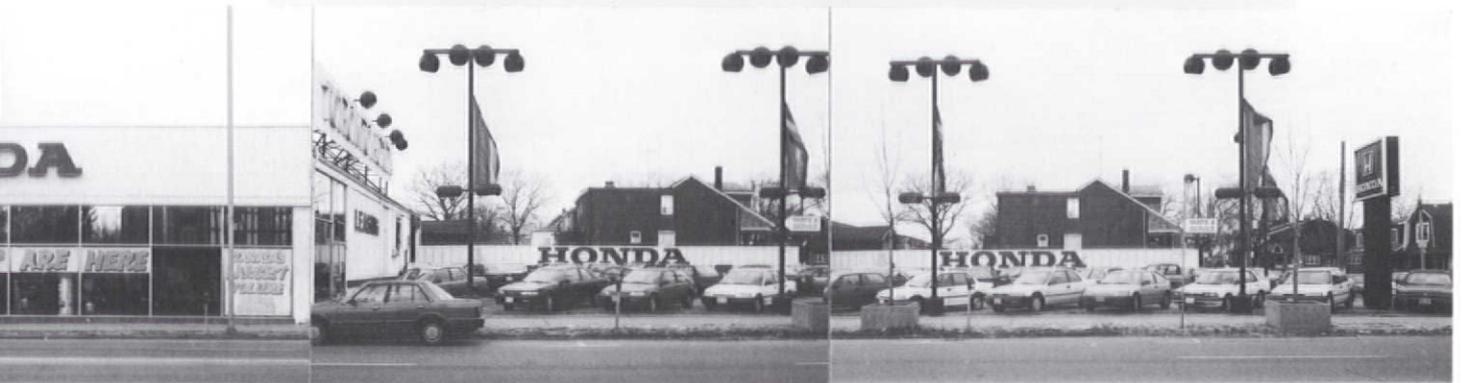
In this proposal for the site to the left, a basic module for a townhouse is established. The module is repeated in two rows that are parallel to the street and in smaller groupings on the site's panhandle, behind the rows.

The proposal, by Paul Walker Clarke, of Alexandria, Va., was given a First Award.

Project team: Paul Walker Clarke, Lipo Chen, Meredith A. Wirsching.

In this proposal for the same site, an "inner block" of studios is fit between the traditional rows of homes that line the existing streets, one of which is shown below. An existing lane provides access to the "inner block," in which space is also set aside for allotment gardens.

The submission, by Bill McIlroy and Denis Pieprz, of Alexandria, Va., was given a First Award.

Typical Floor Plan (raised courtyard level)   1:200
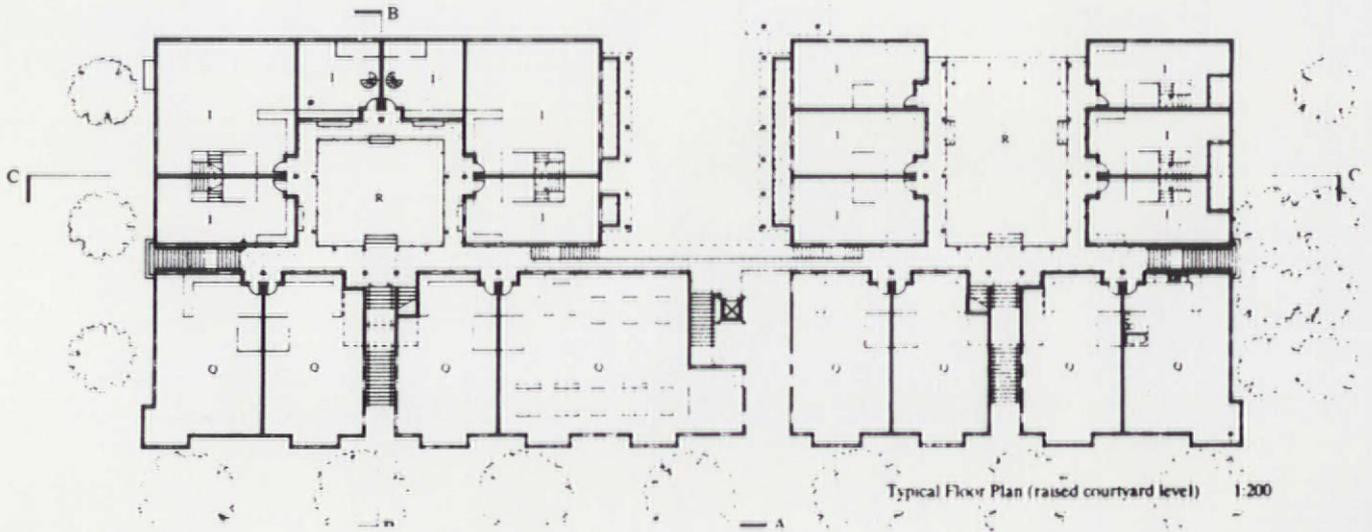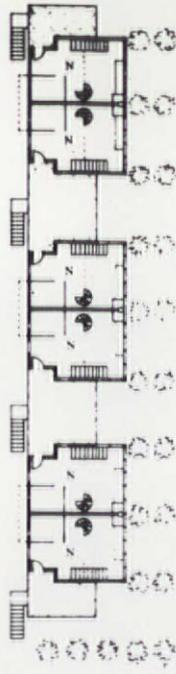
applied to analyze and solve it. The land use planner looks for areas that could be rezoned for high-density housing, and that is where one tower after another will be put.

The idea behind the Housing on Main Streets competition was different: to see what can be accomplished by focusing directly on where people live, how they live and what types of buildings they live in, rather than planning the city through abstract zoning. In one sense this approach is not innovative because this is the way cities have traditionally been built. What is innovative is that city planners are interested in the type of building that is erected.

The basic premise of the competition was to address the issue of affordable housing by looking for these spines of collective life in the city and relating those spines to the very specific places where people live their lives — such as homes, work places and shopping areas.

The competition accomplished this by focusing on the street, which is the common element of the city. Everybody can remember different cities by their streets, particularly grand streets like Champs Elysées, Broadway, or Fifth Avenue. Each of us has memories of streets on which we have lived; that is how we remember the places from which we come.

The street is different from monuments or special buildings that you might recognize in the city because it is a collective, shared space. It is formed by many individual buildings, all responding to the nature of the collective space. The problem the competition posed was designing building types that would be appropriate, in function, form and style, for the selected streets. By focusing on the street, one is forced to be a pluralist and must accept different points of view.

When you compare a map that reveals the property lines along Toronto's main streets with the sketches presented by the Grand Award winners, you can begin to see a similarity between the two.

The sides of the main streets are lined with a series of properties, or lots, that abut the street, usually along their narrow end. One after another, these lots extend back from the street, and the pattern is repetitive. The Grand Award winners are presenting the same idea; the building type is like the lot along the street. A building type can be used in many different ways and can be reinterpreted on different sites, just as every building on the lots along the street is used, interpreted and built to very different tastes and attitudes.

The other proposals provided something more concrete: specific examples that could be fitted upon specific sites chosen for the competition. You might like or dislike these proposals, but each could be built along these streets.

The small number of "generic" proposals, generic in the sense of suggesting possible adaption to different programs and sites, was disappointing. While some proposals seemed to be designed for replicability, very few did that explicitly. This was especially surprising in that the competition organizers had been careful to select a range of sites explicitly covering conditions that were generic and typical: corner sites, mid-block sites, small sites and medium-scale sites.

view east on Danforth
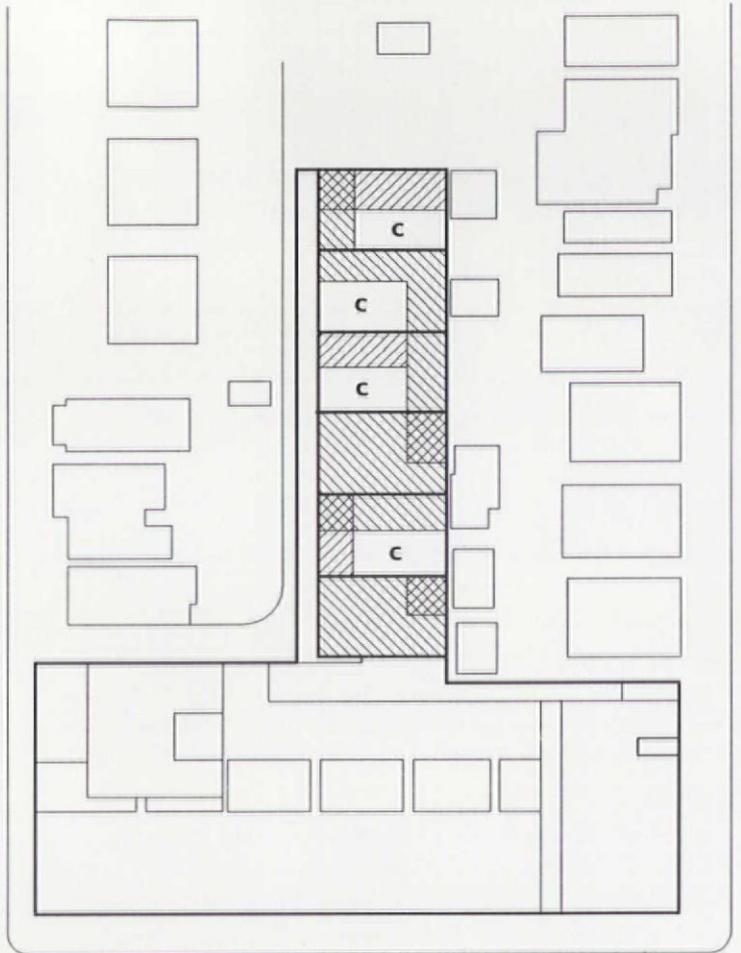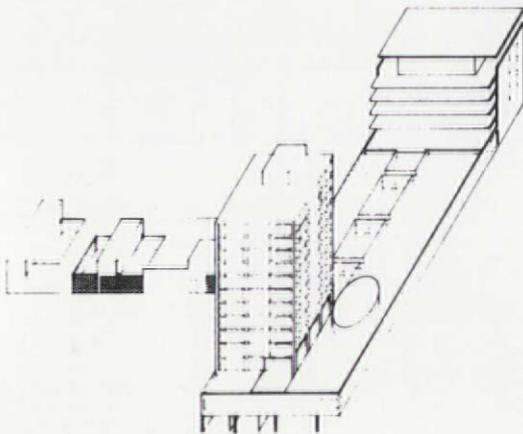
Variations on a Courtyard House

 Second story cantilevered over ground-level courtyard

 One story tall

 Two stories tall

C Open courtyard

Another submission for the same site proposed two apartment blocks and several con-figurations of courtyard/studio housing on the rear of the lot.

The submission, by M. Kohn Architect/Val Rynnimeri, of Toronto, was given an Honorable Mention. Project team: Sydney Browne, Alison Hahn, Martin Kohn, Val Rynnimeri.

These results seem to suggest that designers and planners are ill-equipped to deal with the small urban site, and especially the very common small urban lot. It may be that planners know only how to focus on large areas, treating lots within them as two-dimensional entities to be developed according to general formulas that are applicable by the simplest-minded plan checker. Architects, on the other hand, are trained to design special, signature types of buildings that help them to project a design image and to attract a personal market.

Thus, if planners do too little about the environment of small sites, architects tend to do too much. Only developers are left to shape the small-site environment with common buildings — yet their training and general outlook on the city is often not adequate for generating sophisticated solutions.

Solutions for the problems raised by small urban sites do not appear to be in the vocabulary of designers and planners. These problems are important because, as the competition assumed, most built-up or buildable sites in cities are small. Large pieces of land in single ownership are rare; most of the lots available for houses, shops and even apartment buildings are rarely wider than 100 feet.

We dealt with a number of issues when trying to understand what the proposals revealed about building type. The first issue is that the way a particular building is used can change through time. In Toronto, as in many other cities, you find many buildings that date from the nineteenth century and have been used and re-used in different ways. We decided to focus more on building form than on building function because we believed that if buildings have a good form, then people can inhabit and use them differently over time, making them suitable no matter what their needs.

We considered how all three dimensions of the building responded to the lot size. The older structures along the main streets are typically built on very narrow lots, only 22 feet wide; nowadays buildable lots tend to be wider. Most of the lots we were looking at in the competition were 66 or 88 feet

wide; or if they were large lots they were almost a block long, up to 200 feet long. Deep buildings, similar to the old ones, were also acceptable as long as some usable open space was provided for the residents away from the busy streets.

Another issue we considered was density, which is quite important in terms of addressing the intensification and rejuvenation of main streets. There are examples of old buildings along main streets that have four or five stories and work well. You see some examples at that density in the award winners.

Another thing we see along very ordinary Toronto streets is that different types of buildings were built at different times. There are actually different generations of buildings. So we were looking for the 1990 generation of buildings, which in some instances will clash, but in other instances will fit into the urban fabric. The 1990 generation should not only continue the rhythm of shops along the streets, but also include affordable and comfortable residences above. Such buildings are likely to stand taller than their neighbors, in response to new demands for urban residential quarters.

The architectural style of the facade is another issue. We agreed that if a building were well designed, any style would do. We were open to a main street with different styles; yet, we had certain conditions. If the buildings surrounding the site were historic, the new building would have to fit into that context. (We had fights about what would fit.)

Finally, the last issue of building type that arose repeatedly was to what extent were we looking for an ordinary, background building, a building that you don't notice very much and fits in. We were looking for a building type that could be manipulated and interpreted and changed by different designers, but which was respectful of all the collective aspects of the street, including the facade and the commercial space on the ground floor. Once in a while we accepted that a very special building, like a tower, could be put on the back of a lot. Special buildings, signature buildings, could appear here and there, but we were looking for ordinary types of construction.

# Urban Design for Architectural Diversity

Kees Christiaanse

My conception of urban design can be characterized best as follows: Urban design as the organizer of the common realm has to have a degree of neutrality towards architecture. Urban design is about the creation of freedom; it should comprise a minimal set of rules that guarantees a maximum freedom to individual users.

I discovered this idea about urban design as a result of our first studies into American cities, in which the neutrality of the street grid generates an enormous variety in the third dimension. What amazed me in the Toronto competition was that some participants had ignored this basic characteristic of the American city and based their designs on older, European concepts.

The view of urban design that I just described is extremely relevant to Toronto's main streets, along which buildings are generally organized in rows with ground floors dedicated to public

This mid-block site, which terminates the view from a residential side street, is used for automobile storage.

SITE SECTION
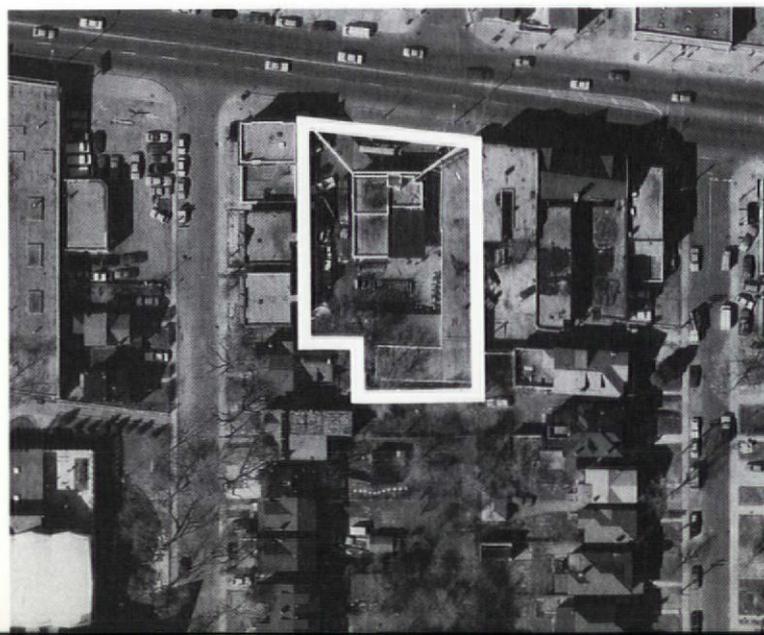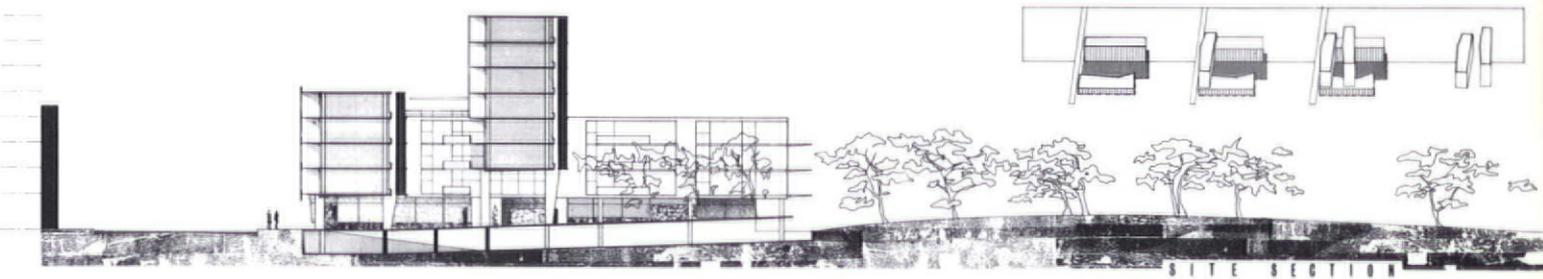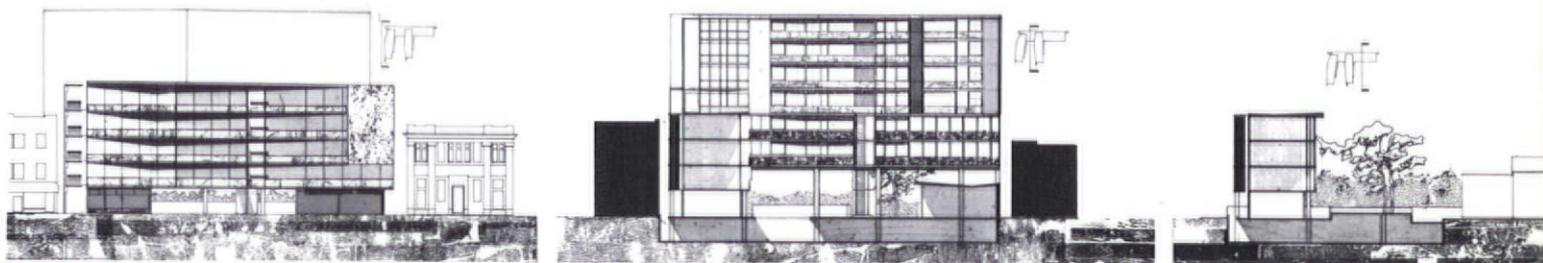
This proposal uses Modern idioms of rectangular building volumes, horizontal bands of windows and cantilevered upper stories as a departure point. It attempts to set apartment slabs, which are usually built on isolated sites, into an urban context. The submission, by Brown & Storey Architects, of Toronto, was awarded an Honorable Mention.
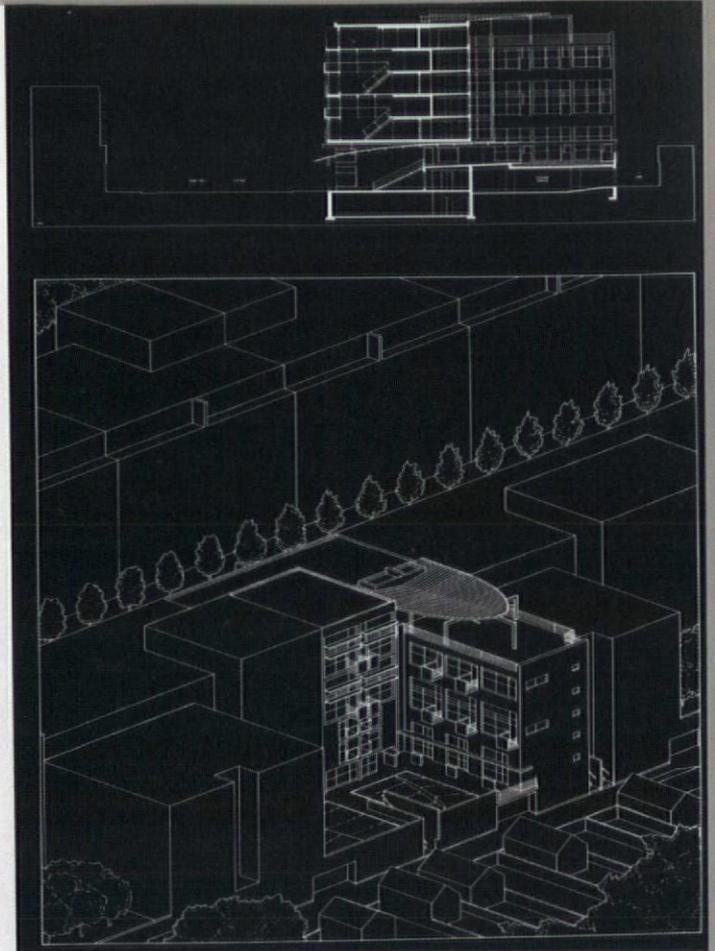
Project team: James Brown, Kim Storey, Derek Hardy, Eric Lee, Anthony Chong, Bernard Jin, Ian Panabaker, Anna Reason.

Drawings courtesy Brown & Storey Architects.
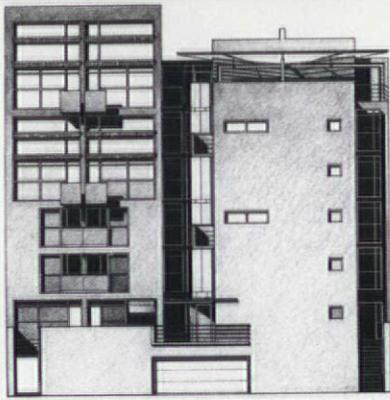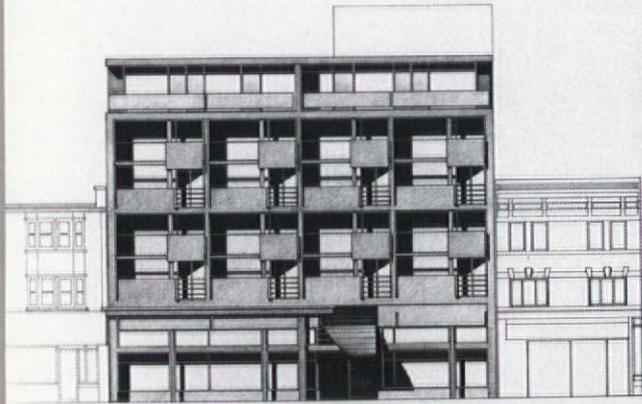
SOUTH ELEVATION

NORTH ELEVATION

This proposal, for another mid-block site, contains duplex units, each of which is reflected as a single visual element on the facade. Although the height of each story is similar to that in adjacent buildings, the vertical scale expressed on the exterior is different.

The submission, by Sterling & James Architects, of Toronto, was awarded an Honorable Mention.

Project team: Maxim James, Mary Lou Lobsinger, Jon Soules, Mark Sterling, Rohan Walters.

functions. In the early days many of these buildings were of Victorian or Georgian style; today they are in every possible style and non-style imaginable. Buildings of different ages stand side by side, reflecting the diversity of population in Toronto and in Canada. Buildings from different epochs contribute to the image of the street and show that the city is a live organism. The co-existence of various cultures and subcultures is the most important base for the attractiveness and liveliness of the main street and needs to be guaranteed in future zoning regulations.

This doesn't mean that a neutral, identical regulations should be imposed in an undifferentiated manner, just like the grid, on the city. Urban designers should extrapolate specific characteristics of an urban area and incorporate them into specific regulations for that area.

What can these regulations be? For a main street, the zoning regulations will be different and more specific from the general zoning regulations in the entire district. First, a maximum lot size must be enforced to prevent large-scale development. Second, the ground floor must contain only shops or public functions. Third, the upper stories must contain mixed use in sufficient density, and they must be able to support different configurations of housing units.

The regulations should deal exclusively with functional and organizing principles, such as the type and scale of functions, access, circulation, daylight and dimensions. Any regulations that deal with subjective issues, such as architectural style, use of materials, or ornamentation, should be avoided. This approach would guarantee a certain quality in terms of urban spaces and a certain diversity.

It was surprising that few of the entries tried to develop new concepts or typologies for the regulations that guide construction along main streets. Instead, there were many specific proposals for specific sites. The main reason that the grand prize winner was chosen was that it tried to explore zoning typologies in a very conceptual, almost metaphorical way. It should not be taken too literally; it is an intention that needs further elaboration.

In allocating honorable mentions, jury members could award interesting projects that were controversial in the jury or showed shortcomings in certain respects. I concentrated on projects that reserved the ground floor for public functions and explored, on the upper levels, different configurations of housing that resulted from various densities, distances between the building and the streetline, and other elements.

These projects included townhouses that propose a new elevation on the street; a combination of concentration and distribution of flats and a deck containing courtyard housing; a court behind a building with an arched entry; the idea of

making a setback that explores a combination of greater height and a setback from the street line; and the alternation of mass and void for terraces and good views from apartments.

By chance or not by chance, the projects I chose were all Modernistic; however, the jury attempted to look more deeply at the projects than simply responding to the idiom in which they were drawn. We evaluated the urbanistic concept (Is there an idea that can help the city formulate an operational policy that is applicable to those kinds of sites?), the architectural concept (How is the idea translated into an architectural proposal for the site?) and architectural elaboration (Is the design really operational on a practical level?). The projects that were given awards constitute a clear urban concept and a great concern for the basics of program and function.

Many of the modern projects that won awards appear to have been conceived by young architects from Toronto. I don't know if they represent a group or a school, but these people deserve to be involved in the further discussion about the shaping of Toronto and its main streets, and deserve to be taken seriously.
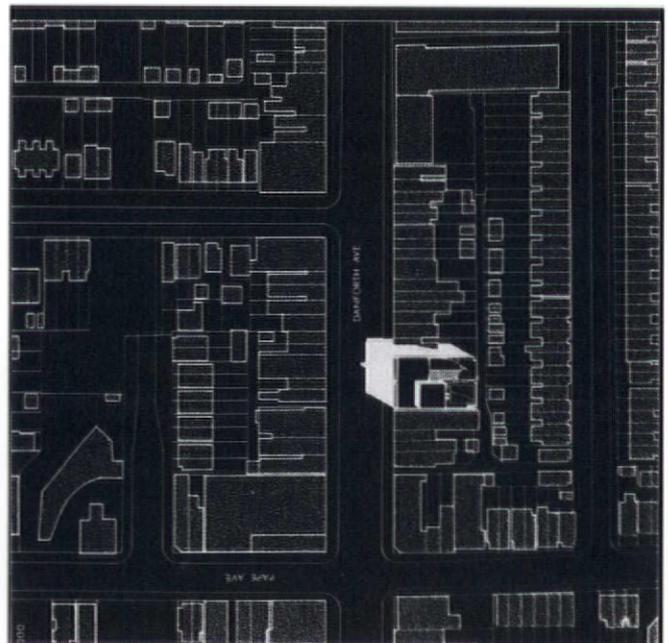
The proposal at left is for a site on a block of narrow buildings that rise one to three stories. Should design regulations address issues such as the height and bulk of new buildings, or architectural style?

Ken Greenberg

The Re-emergence of the Courtyard

Ideas in architecture and urban design seem to re-appear periodically, as if they were advanced by a swinging pendulum. Earlier in this century, the Modern movement rejected not only the traditional pattern of streets and blocks as a way of organizing cities, but also the types of buildings — which often incorporated interior courts within the block — that traditionally lined streets. In the quest to provide residents with light, views and privacy, the slab, the tower and the free-standing villa emerged victorious, as objects in open space.

But this typology turned out to be a severe case of overreaction. Another generation of architects, planners and citizens has discovered that it is difficult to compose workable, animated and viable public spaces with such constituent elements. As the idea of the street has been rehabilitated and restored to its appropriate place as a key element in the composition of cities, so has the idea of the interior court, its historical and logical companion.

This mid-block site, a "missing tooth" in an otherwise complete block of buildings, abuts a group of high-density, high-rise residential buildings.
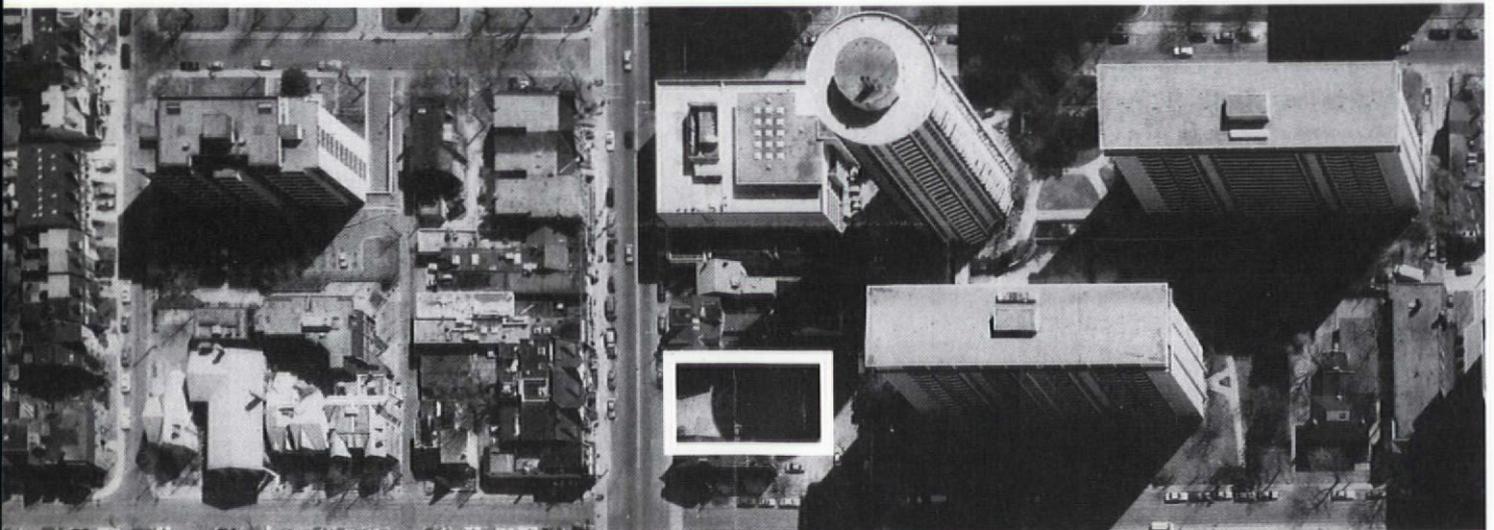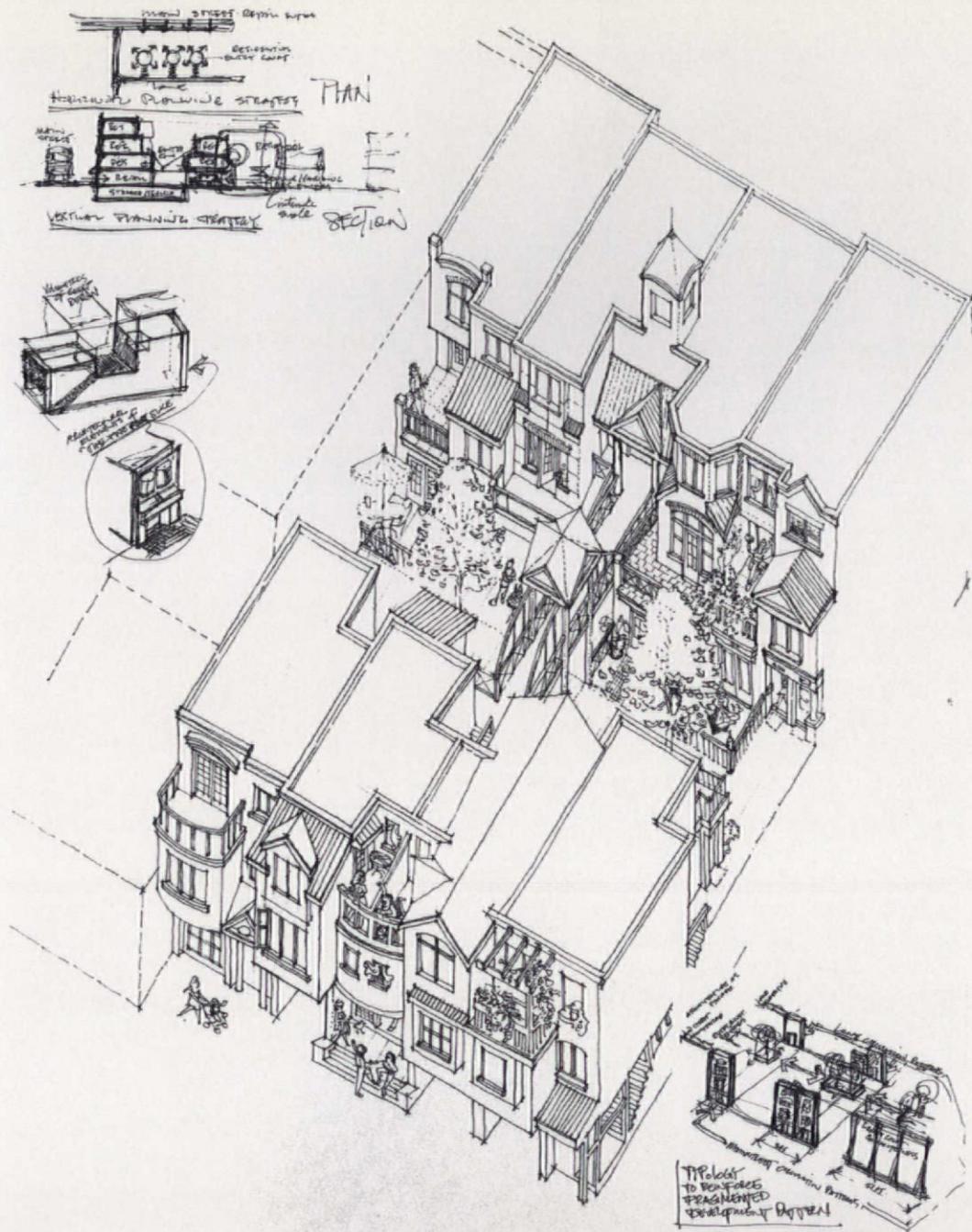
In this proposal, two rows of housing sit on a podium above retail space, which faces the main street, and parking, which faces the lane behind the lot. The housing is entered either from the lane or from a courtyard between the two rows of housing. The proposal, by James Colizza, Jacques Belleau and Jacques Hamel, of Ottawa, was given an Honorable Mention.

This proposal would keep most of the two- and three-story buildings already on the site and erect townhouses behind them. The residents would share a courtyard between the two rows of buildings.

The proposal, by Mandel Sprachman Architects, of Toronto, was awarded an Honorable Mention.
Project team: Mandel Sprachman, Ernesto Bianco, Mark Brooker, Robert Trowell.
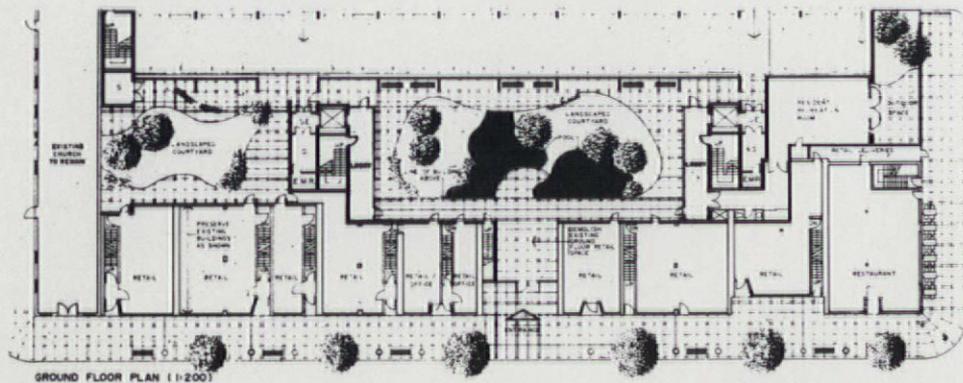
GROUND FLOOR PLAN (1:200)
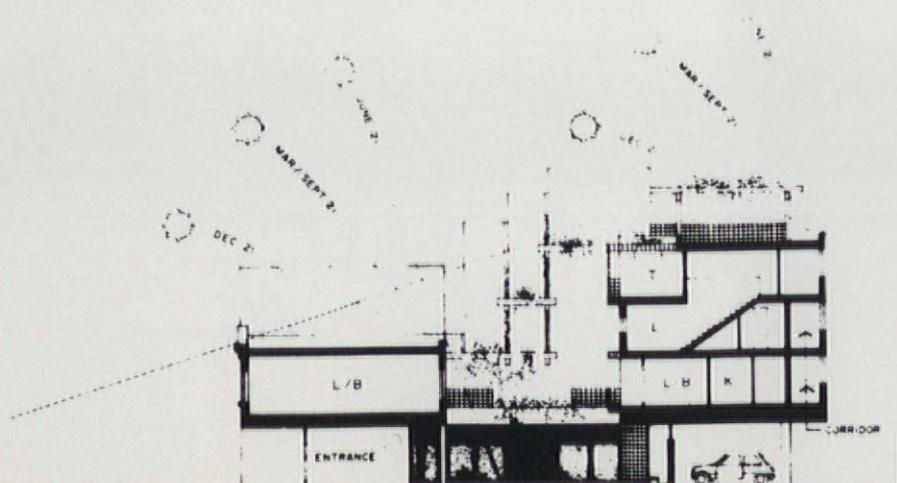
A type of space that cities—particularly those in North America—have failed to produce in recent decades, the interior court is a private or semi-private outdoor space that enables people living very close to highly public areas to withdraw either by themselves or with others who share their dwelling place.

The interior court can be found in ancient cities (for example, courtyard houses in Rome), and has been carried forward in many urban traditions, especially in Latin countries. Present in the early stages of Toronto's growth (though rarely as part of any coherent and widely utilized building types), it now appears to be making a comeback.

This kind of intermediate space can compensate those people living in the areas with increased density that we are seeking in Toronto, letting them enjoy a kind of shared privacy that is rarely attainable in much current urban housing stock.

There were many ideas generated by this competition, and because they were so diverse it is hard to characterize them in an economical way.

Many of the individual prize winners, as well as the Grand Prize winner, displayed considerable ingenuity in utilizing the depth of the parcels. Rather than think of a main street as a single facade fronted by a linear wall of building, a great number of the designers were able to distribute units and building mass perpendicular to the street facade, vastly expanding the amount of exposed wall area while at the same time creating very congenial interior court spaces shared by smaller numbers of people. The winners also clearly demonstrated the almost infinite variety of interesting ways of breaking down simple building forms into more complex parts.

The principles demonstrated by these schemes will be very challenging for the city to evaluate and, where desirable, codify in new zoning ordinances. What makes them both interesting and at the same time difficult to deal with in a regulatory sense is that they are highly dependent on the quality of the architecture and the open spaces produced. Their very tightness as design paradigms means that they have to be executed with the greatest of skill.

Another theme that emerged in the competition was that of a "multiplicity of styles," or a diverse means of architectural expression, ranging from various forms of vernacular to a number of historically inspired styles including different periods of Modernism.

The non-architect members of the jury and some of the architects tended to view any of the schemes that seemed to suggest a Modernist revival with a certain hostility and skepticism. There was a tendency to impute guilt by association, that is, to suppose that Modernist schemes must also be exhibiting the anti-urban tendencies of much early Modern work. Yet in Toronto, a large number of younger practitioners and architectural students are working in Modernist idioms and are actively trying to redeem the more appealing qualities of Modernist expression and to imbue them with a new urban sensibility. In many cases they have been quite successful.

Some of us jury members began to refer to such schemes as exhibiting a "critical Modernism." Others insisted that such schemes be examined seriously and not rejected *a priori*. All the jurors considered a diversity of architectural expression — rather than imposing a single aesthetic — highly desirable and an appropriate symbol that the intensification of main streets should involve many land owners and many architects working independently on relatively small parcels.

Richard Gilbert

The Imperative for Housing on Main Streets

I am the true black sheep here, the true non-architect, puzzled, for example, why architects use the four-syllable word "typology" when the simple "type" will do. What I have learned in the past four days is that architecture is a much more difficult and complex process than I had ever imagined. It is hard getting buildings to look nice, but getting them to work, too, presents some profoundly difficult problems, especially when space is limited. These were problems about which I had thought little before this competition.

The original "Housing on Main Streets" proposal, put together in 1987, had two goals. One was to add more housing in the city. It came directly out of my experience as a municipal politician who was frequently frustrated by neighborhood opposition to housing projects. I found adding housing to main streets was of less concern to neighborhood activists. At that time, the goal of more housing was less concerned with intensifying the city as with meeting the strong demand for increased residential space per person. This demand was causing housing shortages, and the city's population was declining, even though the overall amount of residential space had been increasing steadily for several decades.

The second goal was to do something about the appearance and function of our main streets. Jane Jacobs wrote a book in 1960 (*The Death and Life of Great American Cities*) that opened my eyes to what I experienced while growing up in London: the vitality and dignity of main streets. I wanted not only to add housing to Toronto's main streets, but also to add it in a way that achieved that vitality and dignity. In Jane's terms, I wanted to use main streets to unite neighborhoods, rather than to divide them.

Today there is a more urgent goal: to intensify our entire metropolitan fabric. In the last three years we have learned that we must huddle together to use less fossil fuel and help prevent global warming. Intensifying development along main streets is not simply a matter of housing people more cheaply and using infrastructure more efficiently and making main streets more vital: It is now almost a matter of life and death.

As an amateur among the gifted, I looked for very simple things in judging the competition. I cast my votes for ways of putting lots of density on a site in a package that was physically appealing and wouldn't upset the neighbors too much. I looked for designs that were elegant, stylish and conservative, and appeared to provide comfortable, congenial living arrangements. Whether my choices were good architecture I still do not know. But neighbors would like them, and, perhaps, so would the people who would live in them.

Joe Berridge: *[We] professionals who are not in the public sector [have] been rather derelict in our duty, believing that the debate is essentially one between the public sector and the owner of land. There is a third interest, an interest that speaks for the city, the city as an organism, the city as a piece of sculpture, the city as a place to live in. We've all come to the point at which we know that that interest is not adequately protected by the other two corners of that triad.*

Donald Schmidt: *[The Main Streets program] has a significant benefit in terms of the architectural and neighborhood quality of the city. Because it's a more fragmented and more complex notion about how the city is built, it engages a much broader range of the architectural and planning communities, and of the community as a whole, in the kinds of decisions about what the physical form of the city will be. [They can] present a very catholic and broad range of styles, positions and attitudes that can be accessible to a very broad range of architects, operating from the smallest to the largest practice. It holds within it the possibility of more accurately mirroring the complexity of an urban condition.*

John Ferguson: *It's assumed in this whole process that the execrable 24 story towers of the past 20 years will be replaced by marvelous six-story main street buildings. That's not necessarily so; it's quite possible a city of execrable six-story buildings could result. The architect is not [only] bearing the burden of regulations; he is also bearing the burdens of aesthetics and the emotions of the city. That cannot be forgotten.*

Dan Solomon

Lessons From California

What I've learned about Toronto is that there seems to be a shared perception of an economic manifest destiny that is propelling you towards a massive change, and that at this moment you perceive that you are at a very important crossroads.

There is one road that is easy, smooth, broad and clearly marked — all the lines and signs are in place. It is the road to decentralization of the workplace, commerce and dwelling, and the privatization of transportation. It's the road that takes the minimum amount of public intervention, has the minimal need for political consensus and requires the least obligation that you all agree with one another.

In the short term, this is probably the road to maximum private gain, in terms of profit, privacy, mobility and luxury. But if you travel down that road all the way to the very end, you'll discover that you're in California.

What California has been through in the last 25 years, you are now heading into. If you want to see what the broad, easy road is like, come pay a visit. I'll take you to Irvine, Sun City and the suburbs of Sacramento. I don't think many people from Toronto would like these places. I don't think you would like what they do to the landscape, or to very young people, very old people, or women. I don't think you'd like what these places do to the environment, to resources, or to agriculture.

If you visit, and you can get through the traffic and see through the smog, you'll see where the easy, smooth road collapses — in alienation and in lost culture — and where it undergoes a complete physical breakdown.

Most cities in North America are subject to the same pressures. Toronto, because of its extraordinary urban structure, because of its streets and because of very fortuitous and probably far-sighted public policy of the past, is in a unique position to resist the pressures of decentralization and privatization.

If Toronto is to accommodate two million new people in the next 25 years, and do so without the collapse that we have experienced in California (which grew by 700,000 people in 1989), Toronto needs to take the difficult road. It needs to think big thoughts and to make big moves. It needs to do it in a way in which only three cities, that I know of, have in recent times. It's the way that Paris has launched its *grands projets*; it's the way that Barcelona, with incredible grace, has undertaken

improvements to its public spaces, and it's the way that Berlin has strengthened its residential fabric.

What you must do is create subtle, supple, small-scale instruments and interventions, a new generation of urban renewal that is a scalpel and not an axe. You must make ways not of assembling large-scale aggregations of land but the small sites, slightly larger than a single parcel, that the main streets competition typologies require. You must codify building type and structure in a way that makes private investment in private property the building block of a revitalized public world.

You are in a position to discard the errors of land use planning and zoning law and the bad, bad urbanism that came in the box with Modern architecture. You are in a position to show that it is possible to make a reasonable accommodation to the automobile without completely abandoning urban life. In fact, you are in a very powerful and enviable position, one that can provide a venue for the doing of great things.

Joe Berridge: *[Architects] have to understand that what they are doing operates within a public context. At the same time that regulations have created this knot of impossibility, there's been an extraordinary internalization on the part of the architectural profession to not come out and engage. Architecture is not purely an art; it is a social art and it is a public art.*

Nicholas Roquet:
Comments that regulation is the issue and architecture is not avoid one of the basic premises of the competition, *which is to consolidate Toronto's main streets as the city's basic and essential public space. The conditions that spurred this regulation are still present and there is still no consensus on how to build main streets, on their form and on their pattern of use. You have shown the necessity for deregulation but you have not shown what will replace it. We may just keep calling forth a similar malaise and making the same mistakes.*

These comments are edited from a transcript of a public meeting held last October to discuss the Housing on Main Streets initiative.

Setting the Stage for Main Street Housing

Lorne Cappe

For several years Toronto has experienced an acute shortage of affordable housing, the result of a period of great economic growth and the influx of large numbers of migrants from the rest of Canada and from other countries. Toronto's Housing on Main Streets initiative is an effort to encourage the development of more housing along the city's main streets while enhancing the quality of space and public life on those streets — the principal public realm of the city.

Toronto's main streets constitute a highly imageable and important component of the city's fabric. They form a network of major transportation arteries, act as centers for surrounding residential communities and form the public face of these neighborhoods and the city as a whole.

Along main streets, traditional lot sizes are narrow, from 18 to 25 feet wide. Buildings, typically two or three stories tall, are built right to the street-line with stores directly accessible from the sidewalk. Upper floors accommodate offices or apartments (which used to serve as residences for the owners of shops below). There is a general level of consistency in the scale and architectural character of buildings, although the architectural styles are ecclectic.

Assuming that new development were to result in buildings between four to six stories tall, it could produce thousands of new housing units and additional retail, office and studio space. Such a modest increase in the intensity of development along these streets would optimize the use of the city's existing services and infrastructure. The main streets are well served by public transit, parks, community centers, libraries and other social and recreational facilities, and by sewers and other utilities.

The full potential of an increase in density could be realized with a minimal effect on the quality of life in any of the adjacent residential neighborhoods. Growth would occur in increments, on both small and large parcels. No one area would be overburdened — the resulting development would likely be distributed evenly over the city's arterial network. New projects would likely be initiated by both private and public investment, as well as a mix of the two.

What is Impeding Housing on Main Streets?

With such a clear need for affordable housing and such a clear opportunity to develop it along main streets, one might wonder why more of it isn't being built. Much of the problem is directly attributable to the many well-intentioned regulations and policies that have been issued by various levels of government.

The way that main streets have been treated, from a policy perspective, has changed significantly (and several times) over the past few decades. The basic format for zoning on main streets is a product of the early 1950s, when the ideas of separating land uses and planning to accomodate automobiles were popular. The inner city was viewed as a place for commerce and a somewhat sub-standard place for housing.

About 1960, zoning policies were changed to enhance the character of main streets as retail strips. Less than a decade later, policies were adopted to discourage unlimited commercial strip development and concentrate commercial uses at designated business centers, mostly near subway stops and transit nodes. And by the late 1970s, with freeway revolts and a neighborhood preservation movement building steam, new plans for the central city and outlying neighborhoods sought to encourage the traditional mixed commercial-residential use.

The zoning that exists now is a patchwork left over from these different initiatives. It sets forth a confusing vision for development along main streets, and in some cases has resulted in conflicting regulations that make it difficult to build to the allowable commercial and residential densities. The Housing on Main Streets program has identified the following constraints encumbering property owners and developers from building housing along main streets:

Project Density. Commercial development is allowed along most of the main streets, at densities of up to three times the lot area (a "floor-area ratio" or FAR of three). Housing is also permitted, either in buildings that consist solely of housing or in mixed-use buildings that have residential units in the upper floors. However, the floor

space devoted to residential uses cannot exceed one FAR.

Although developers would like to provide commercial space above the first floor of buildings on main streets, there does not appear to be an overwhelming demand for it: Retailers do not like to locate above ground level, and office uses seem to be consolidating in the center of the city and at specified activity and transportation nodes. The amount of commercial space that is permitted under the current zoning is greatly in excess of that which is needed.

Building Height. Along many main streets, there are few height restrictions on buildings that are solely commercial; when there is a height limit, it generally is 45 feet or 4 1/2 stories. But on most streets the height of buildings that include housing must not exceed three stories. This prevents developers of mixed-use projects from realizing the full allowable commercial and residential density.

Along some of the city's wider streets, it may be more appropriate to have taller buildings — and therefore room for more housing units. In economic terms, the more units in a building, the more feasible it becomes.

Setbacks and Lot Coverage. Along many main streets, zoning allows first-floor commercial space to cover the entire lot. But residential floors can cover only 60 percent of the lot. Along other main streets, zoning requires a 20-foot setback from the rear property line. These regulations constrain the building envelope, prohibiting the design of buildings that would use more of the site and provide more space for housing.

Along some main streets, a 25-foot setback from a side property line is required if the adjacent building is residential. The purpose is to allow light to reach residential buildings. But
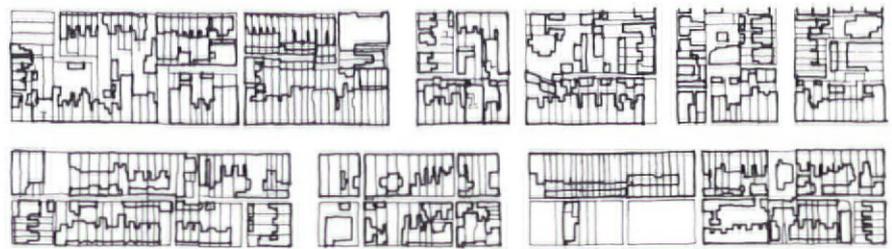
1890

1988

The pattern of lots along main streets has changed remarkably little in the last century, providing opportunities for small-scale reinvestment.

since the basic lot width in Toronto is 22 feet, this requirement prevents new development on many lots that have not been assembled into larger parcels.

Parking. Generally one parking space per apartment unit, plus visitor parking, is required for housing along main streets. On small lots, it often is impossible to provide all the parking spaces required in the current bylaws.

Surface parking can be provided behind a building if there is a rear alley (which is typical, but not always the case). On a mid-block site with no rear alley, the only access to parking can be from the street, requiring a curb cut. But an entrance to underground parking would create a large gap in the retail frontage, and the interruption of the pedestrian environment by cars is not acceptable in most cases. Also, constructing underground parking can cost $13,000 (U.S.) per space, an expense that can prevent the development of affordable housing.

The submission, by Brown & Storey Architects, of Toronto, was given an Honorable Mention.
Project team: James Brown, Kim Storey, Derek Hardy, Eric Lee, Anthony Chong, Bernard Jin, Ian Panabaker, Anna Reason.
Drawings courtesy Brown & Storey Architects.

The requirement does not necessarily relate to the needs of people who choose to live above stores along main streets, many of whom are not dependent on cars and therefore do not need parking spaces. Moreover, main streets are well served by public transit, which alone might justify a reduction in the parking requirement.

Recreation Space. Both private and communal recreation space must now be provided for apartment dwellings. For example, a two-bedroom apartment has a requirement of 100 s.f. of total recreation space, a third of which should be incorporated into the unit.

Experience shows that these spaces do not often function well. And it is important to re-examine how changing lifestyles and demographics affect the use of recreation space. A large amount of such space already exists within city neighborhoods, in the form of places like parks, community centers, streets and cafes.

Garbage and Loading. The city requires larger projects to provide access for garbage trucks to an off-street storage area, where the trucks must be able to load garbage and leave the site without changing direction. Generally the most practical way to provide this access is off a back lane. However, this requires an inordinate amount of space. And, not all blocks in Toronto have alleys.
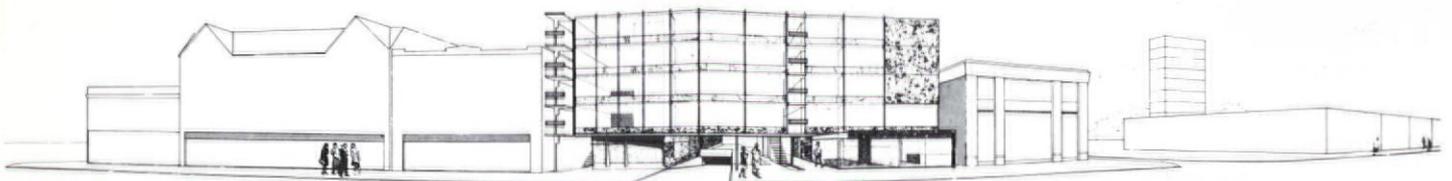
The Difficulty and Danger of Land Assemblage

A factor that has slowed development of housing on main streets — and helped to preserve the character of the streets — is the difficulty of assembling sites large enough for development. This results, in part, from the traditionally small lot sizes along main streets, the high cost of land and the propensity of successful small businesses to want to stay where they are and avoid the turmoil of construction.

The width of typical properties along main streets ranges from 18 to 25 feet. Some developers feel that, in order to develop a mixed-use building, a frontage of at least 50 feet is required. In most cases, at least two small properties must be assembled or developed jointly to accomodate residential uses above.

Many land owners prefer to have a one-story commercial outlet on their property. With a successful business such as a convenience store or fast food outlet, an owner has little economic incentive to build housing. The business often provides enough cash flow of its own to make the existing situation worthwhile. And most commercial property owners do not want to be residential landlords, especially given the various rental housing protection laws.

The city would like to make it easier for landowners to build to the currently allowable density while not encouraging large land assemblages, which would lead to speculation, drive up land prices and further reduce the probability of building affordable housing. Also, larger projects can change the character of the streets, which consist of a series of small, individual buildings built incrementally over a number of years, each building with its own character.

How to Put Housing on Main Streets

Toronto has taken several steps to determine what changes in legislation or city policy are needed so that housing will be built on main streets. It has launched a study of the economic feasability of housing on main streets, a study of automobile use patterns of current residents of main streets, a community outreach program to hear the concerns of potential consumers of housing as well as residents of the surrounding neighborhoods, and the design competition. The competition was about prototypes and ideas, that, hopefully, would show how city policies and regulations could be changed to allow appropriate ways of living in the city in a variety of site and neighborhood conditions.

First, we would like to change the most cumbersome of the regulations described above and build several prototype projects. We are considering changing density rules to allow one FAR of commercial and two FAR of residential; allowing buildings of four to six stories (with actual limits set on an area-by-area basis); cutting parking requirements in half and, perhaps, by more for smaller lots; and reducing recreation space and setback standards.

Ultimately, the competition suggested a broader range of issues to consider: how to design housing around courtyards; how to design residential entries in mixed-use buildings; whether to consider terraces, roof gardens and common spaces as recreational space; incorporating uses such as allotment gardens, day care and other community facilities; what massing and height relationships would respect neighborhood character; the relationship between public and private space; the treatment of corner buildings; how to design new buildings in historic contexts; and what types of unit layout are appropriate for our changing population.

We hope to take the information generated by the studies, the competition and community input and implement a new zoning strategy that promotes housing on main streets and reinforces the character of those streets in a comprehensive way.

The Place of Imagination

"There is a hillside from which we could see our whole town, but private houses now claim the view."

"A rushing, bounding brook runs through my town, but I can't sit on its banks because there is no public access."

*"A wonderful old building I have photographed for years is being razed for a convenience store."*

We all have such places in our lives, but we have come to accept their loss as a matter of course. We leave planning, whether constructive or destructive, to planners and developers, thinking the issues too complex for our lay minds. Against a background of environmental degradation, historical amnesia, the decline of community and the absence of spiritual values, the loss of these small places seems minor and inevitable.

Or so we have come to believe.

There are people who believe otherwise. They believe the responsibility for our landscapes lies best in the hands of those who live in them and care about them. They believe the quality of our ordinary, daily environment is crucial to our sense of well-being. They believe that the economic health of a community is strengthened by a sense of history and a sense of place.

At the Brattleboro Museum and Art Center in Brattleboro, Vermont, a group of citizens, volunteers and staff gathered some of these people together in a project called *Our Town*. The project was a creative response to the

The *Our Town* program offered Brattleboro residents opportunities to explore their feelings about the town and their experiences in it. Photo by Clemens Kalischer.
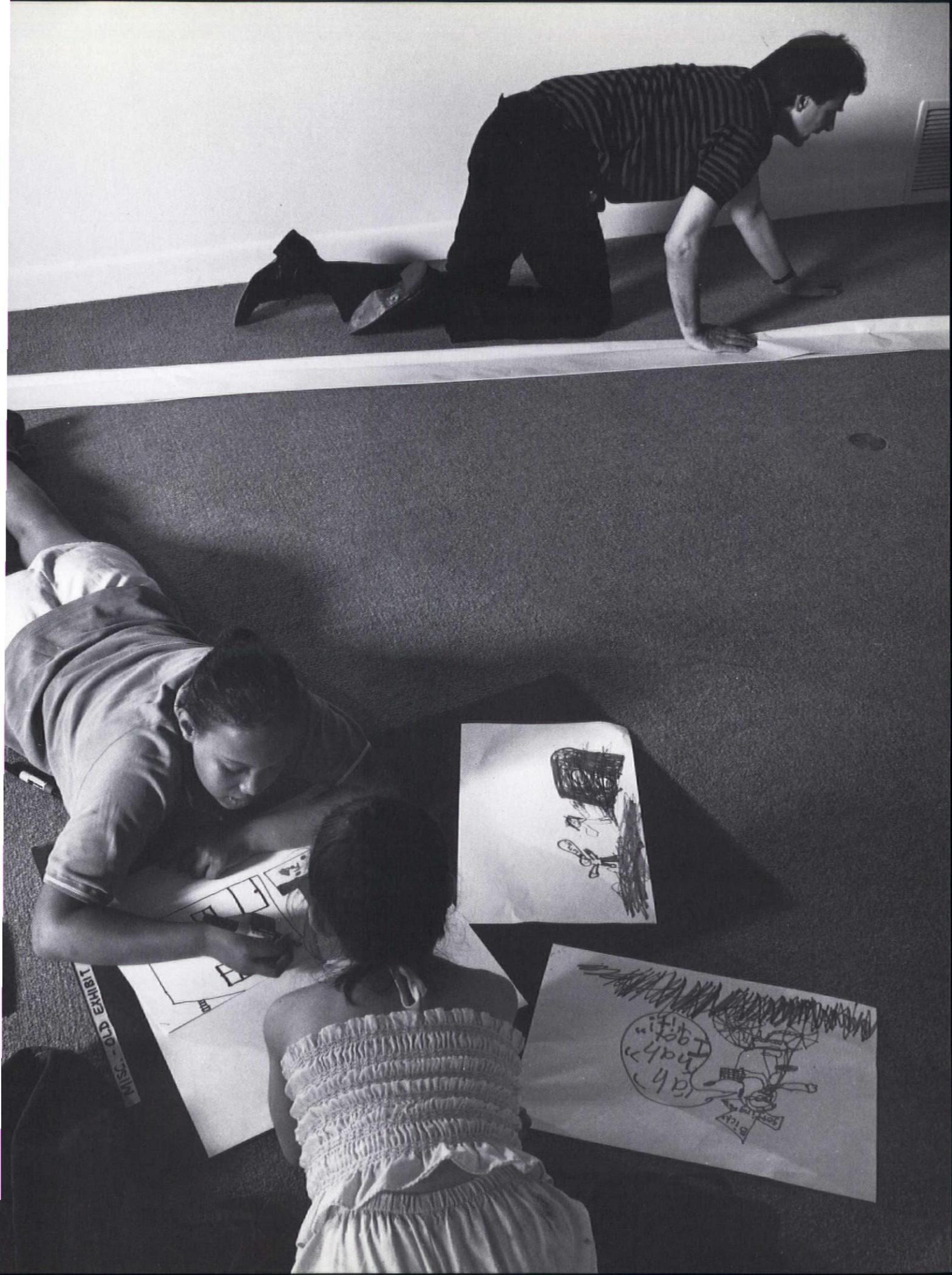
There was really no choice about where I would head: to Flat Street. Flat Street is the way I go to work. But as I was walking toward it today it occurred to me — really for the first time — that there were several other ways I could go to work: down High and right on Main, or down Eliot and Green or even down Eliot and right on School. But I always take Flat Street. I realized that Flat Street is not only the way as in a path to work, but the way as in how to work. I mean, in Brattleboro, it is the street where the real men work. These are the guys who make something: Dunklees, Brattleboro Kiln Dry. Today as I was walking out it I was flooded with vivid memories of my father going off to work — to do the thing he passionately loved to do. I almost always wanted to go with him, especially on Saturdays, when instead I had to go off to *shul* with my grandfather, who was an Orthodox Jew. He was no less passionately involved in this activity than my father was in his. My father's plant was about a half-hour drive from our house, located on the Cuyahoga River. This was the industrial area of Cleveland, the area known as the Flats. This was the first time the association of names had ever occurred to me, although I had been aware of the sources of my interest in these kinds of work places.

—Norton Garber

problems Brattleboro, like many New England towns, is now facing: transformation of agricultural land into building lots; suburban commercial development sapping the vitality of the town center; a main street that turns its back to the river; a river's edge claimed by industry, making it inaccessible to people; increasing traffic congestion; the need for decent, affordable housing; declining water quality and uncontrolled growth.

The Brattleboro Planning Commission is as overworked as most planning boards and spends its time responding to crises rather than planning for the future. When the Vermont Legislature passed a law in 1988 requiring that towns write new plans and include citizens in the process, the Brattleboro Planning Commission and the Windham Regional Commission looked to the *Our Town* project sponsors for assistance.

The two commissions had conceived a series of public discussions to elicit participation by townspeople, but the organizers of *Our Town* wished to go further. The organizers hoped to draw people who are not usually involved in the planning process, perhaps because they feel powerless, overwhelmed, intimidated, indifferent, or just too busy. The organizers wanted to take people back

to the beginning, to help them remember why they like living in Brattleboro.

Our Town was designed to encourage people to discover and articulate the meaning of place in their lives and in their communities. The project organizers believed that developing this personal sense of place is a neces-

sary first step in the process of linking personal perception to public policy. This belief is articulated by planner Robert Yaro:
[G]iven the right setting, the right evocation, the right stimulus, many of those people who put themselves in the "don't know" column turn out to be very articulate and outspoken concerning the special qualities they care about in their own communities. People can become vehicles for places.[1]

Yaro, senior vice president for plan development at the Regional Plan Association in New York City,

is an innovative planner who can say from direct experience, "Stewardship springs from connectedness — it gives people back a sense of thinking responsibly on behalf of the whole community."

Our Town sought to evoke the proprietary feelings people have for the particular places in which

they live, work and create a sense of self. *Our Town* workshops offered people opportunities to acknowledge and amplify their connections with these places so the claim they have on a place (and the claim the place has on them) would become more visible, more deeply felt and more important.

Artist and environmentalist Alan Gussow has written:
...as humans we also require support for our spirits, and this is what certain kinds of places provide. The catalyst that converts any physical

location — any environment, if you will — into a place, is the process of experiencing deeply. A place is a piece of the whole environment that has been claimed by feelings.[2]

The key to unlocking these feelings, which we all have, lies in the realm of the imagination: memories, images, fantasies, associations, sensations, symbols, dreams and stories. We begin with the language of the heart, a language that underlies all others. We can make powerful connections between ourselves and our environment by tapping into this dimension of experience. Sharing these findings with others can be equally powerful.

In recognition of the diversity of people's perceptions and modes of expression, *Our Town* offered a wide range of ways for people to explore their communities and their feelings and to give shape to their experiences. During the spring, summer and fall of 1989, the Brattleboro Museum offered a series of exhibitions, lectures and workshops led by geographers, planners, architects, psychologists and artists. Some of these workshops are described here; all of the activities in these workshops could be used in any community by any group or individual wishing to understand, celebrate or influence their environment.

The *Our Town* work-
shops began with a deft
evocation of childhood
memories of place. Roger
Hart, director of the
Center for Human
Environments at City
University of New York,
asked participants to recall
a place they liked and a
place they disliked from
their childhood and ado-
lescence, and then to draw
pictures of these places. As
each person shared his
story with the others,
deeply held feelings
emerged and personal
mythologies unfolded.

An African-American
woman who grew up in
Roxbury remembered
standing by the railroad
tracks, imagining with
pleasure the destinations of
the train travelers; her spe-
cial place carried her
beyond her circumstances.
A woman who grew up in
Vermont had a secret spot
in a shed from which she
watched the rest of her
family; she was free to
observe but not be
engaged. Several people

had played in little wild
pockets of nature, creating
rooms, forts, houses, or
other types of imaginary
spaces and worlds.

People's most disliked
places were too often
school playgrounds with
sterile, blank surfaces and
desultory play equipment
that had provided no pur-
chase for the imagination.
Their favorite places tend-
ed to be ignored by adults:
overgrown, abandoned, or
forbidden places, in-
between places where they
had been able to create
their own worlds with
found materials and their
imaginations.

Hart deplored the
increasing rationalizing
and sanitizing of our land-

scapes, processes that
starve the need growing
children have for explo-
ration, discovery, inven-
tion, risk, privacy,
creativity and interaction
with natural forces. In the
deep experience of their
own places, children devel-
op a connection with the
environment that forms a
basis for future responsibil-
ity to the environment.

The workshop partici-
pants, infused with the
potency of childhood per-
ception, could return to
their communities with the
eyes and bodies of children
and determine whether
those environments served
or betrayed the children
growing up in them.

**Sharing childhood memo-
ries can uncover deeply
held feelings and personal
mythologies.
Drawings courtesy Brattleboro
Museum and Art Center.**
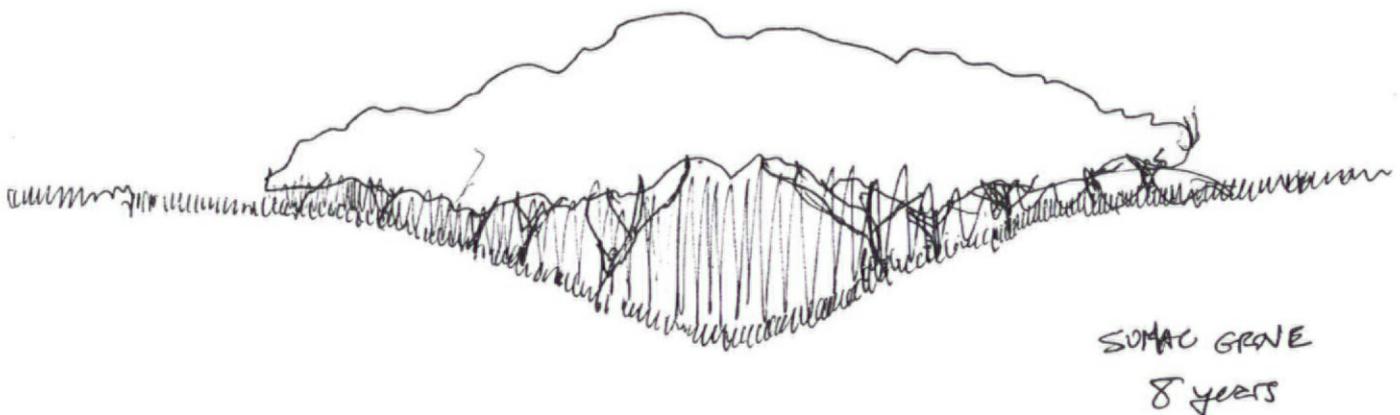
SUMAC GROVE
8 years
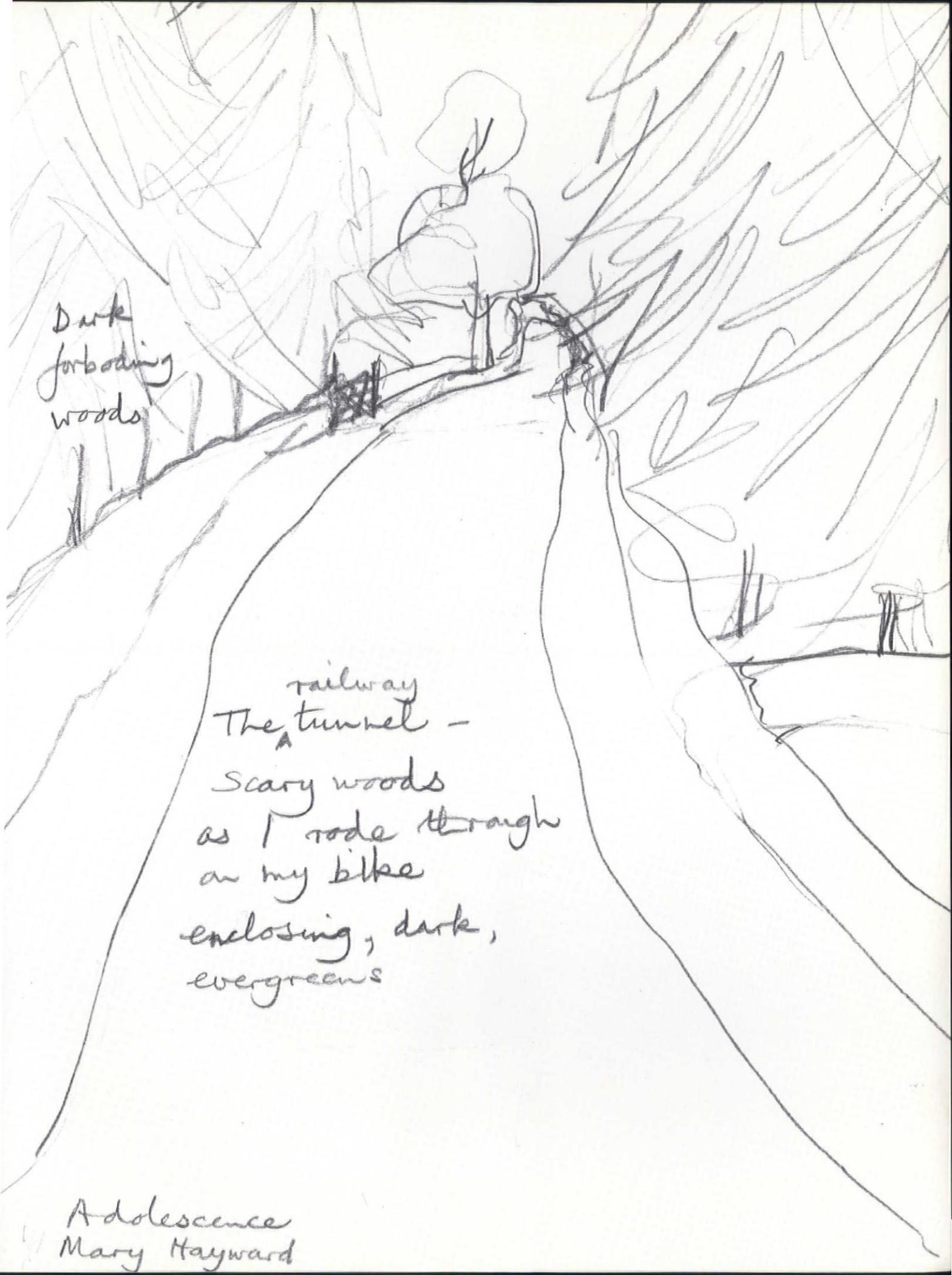
Dark
forboding
woods

railway
The ʌ tunnel –
Scary woods
as I rode through
on my bike
enclosing, dark,
evergreens

Adolescence
Mary Hayward

While most of us tend to discount our perceptions of place as too private, personal, or singular to be of interest to others, David Dunlap, an artist from the University of Iowa, is keenly interested in these personal perceptions. He invited participants to share images and stories about special places and their relationships to those places. Dunlap made a room-sized map of the area and asked people to indicate on the map, by drawing or by writing, an association with a particular place.

Dunlap's challenge to participants was to make a bridge between the personal and the public realms, a crucial link if we are to sustain and develop our sense of public spaces. Some of the inscriptions on the map read: "Kippy is buried here. I love you." "There is a path that follows this shoreline. There are rocks to sit on and birds to see." "Dunkin Donuts is in the very middle of town. It isn't beautiful but it is important to many people. It stays open 24 hours a day. In winter

people keep warm there through the night."

Dunlap also asked people to lay claim to their favorite places in town by posting a small sign that read "Town of Brattleboro Permit." The act of marking a place, publicly and symbolically, made people's personal sense of connection with those places specific and vivid.

John Anderson, an architect from Burlington, Vermont, suggested that participants imagine a place stripped of its ordinary, practical reality and reduced to its essential qualities. By seeing its essence, one could then imagine how to clarify, augment, or change its actual character to forge it into a stronger, more powerfully evocative place.

Anderson encouraged people to imagine changes that extend beyond the possible into the visionary and to think in unrealistic but creative directions. He suggested that people's ideas would be richer for the excursion into the impossible. (Most planning projects assume the limitations of practical reality from the start and cannot imagine fresh solutions.)

For example, Anderson said he felt the need for a center to the town, so he drew one in the middle of Main Street, a stone circle with a pool of quiet water in the middle. One woman thought the layout of the

town was too confusing, unclear and multi-leveled, so she drew a tower from which one could see the whole pattern.

Working together, Anderson and Dunlap sent everyone out to explore the town through the lens of metaphor. Seeking to lift vision out of the ordinary, they suggested viewing the town as body, poem, mandala, sculpture: any evocative image.

One woman, climbing into the rocky stream along which she walked to work, discovered that it held for her the same

essential qualities as the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon. She was able to translate the vast dimensions of the Canyon into this small, familiar site, thus joining what were for her the experiences of the sacred and the mundane.

Pariticpants bridged the personal and public realms by making a map that recorded their personal perceptions of Brattleboro.
Top: Photo by Clemens Kalischer.
Other photos courtesy Brattleboro Museum and Art Center.
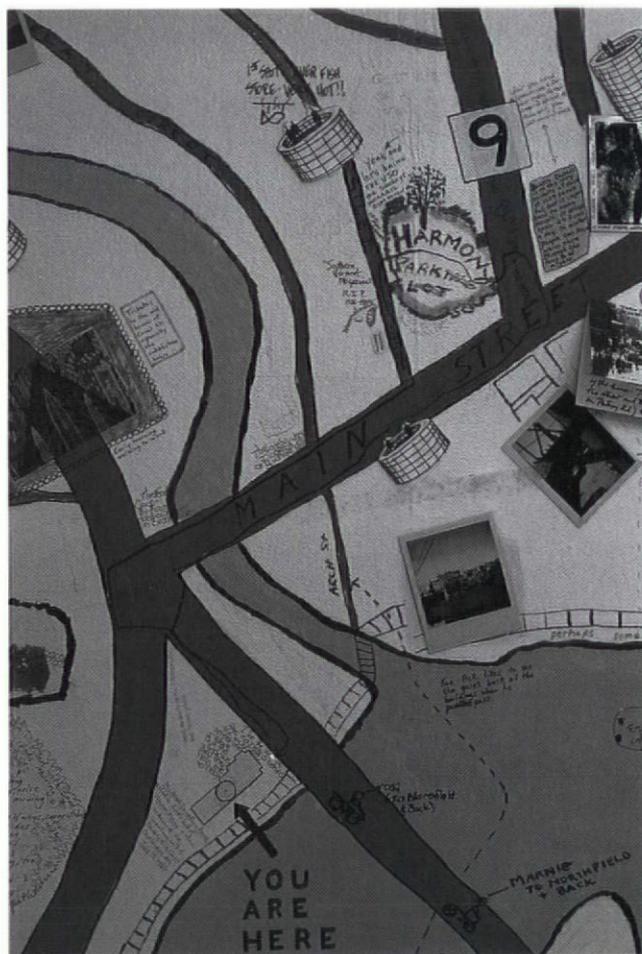
One man plumbed his fascination with a nearby cemetery, finding that the tombstones' hints of the lives buried below evoked for him all the mystery of unconscious process. Another man realized that his affection for an area called Flat Street could be traced back to special moments with his father at his father's workplace in a part of Cleveland called the Flats, thus merging present and past in his experience of this place and in his personal history. This activity gave participants confidence to approach places that are familiar and ordinary from a deeper, more playful and more personally truthful perspective.

Tom Greeves from the Common Ground Trust in England helped participants further explore the relationship between imagination and place. Common Ground complements efforts to conserve rare, exotic and endangered places by turning people's attention to the places in which they live. It seeks to balance scientific rationales for conservation by honoring the emotional bond people have with their places. It uses the arts as a catalyst in this process.

Greeves asked participants to explore Brattleboro as an emotional landscape, to be responsive to the aspects of it that they liked, disliked, or felt curious about. People then drew colorful, subjective maps, incorporating bits of found materials, serendipitous discoveries and long-cherished spots.

Alan Weisman, a writer, and Jay Dusard, a photographer, came from Arizona, where they had worked together investigating and documenting life along the Mexican–American border (published as *La Frontera*). Weisman explained the political and social dimensions of the landscape, teaching ways to interpret environments, to interview people with curiosity and without judgment, to divine lines of authority and networks of power, and to see every encounter as a mine of information about the entire community. Dusard offered participants guidelines for becoming aware of their whole field of vision, so that every element in a photograph contributes to the story being told. He encouraged people to treat a photographic encounter with a person or a landscape as an act of intense engagement and exchange.

Participants then went into the community in pairs, each pair with a camera. One pair spoke with and photographed the owner of a gun and archery shop, a place they had never entered but which revealed a culture of greater complexity and subtlety than they had
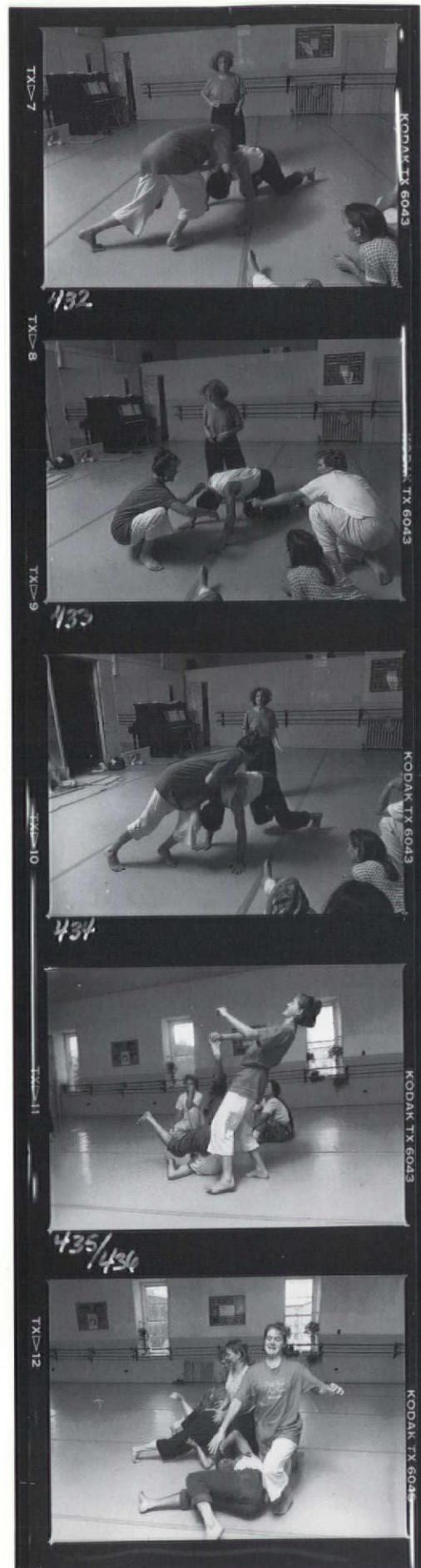
assumed; they saw the tensions between serious hunters and conservationists in a new light. Another pair talked with a mother and two children about the difficulties of living next to a bar in a rough neighborhood, which explained the broken windows on one side of the house and the tangle of weeds in the yard, which they had let grow wild not out of

neglect but to protect the flowers hidden within. Their story spoke of the indifference of police and town government to their problems. For the participants in this workshop, places were newly understood as subject to many forces, often conflicting.

One workshop allowed participants to express their thoughts and emotions about the town through dance. Photos by Clemens Kalischer.

For people who experience the world kinesthetically, *Our Town* offered a movement workshop taught by Simone Forti, a dancer and choreographer from New York and Vermont. Forti is fascinated by the kinesthetic experience of ordinary realities, especially of places, and weaves movement, story, word and image into a sensuous extension of our thoughts and impulses.

Forti sent participants into the town to explore its surfaces, levels, structures
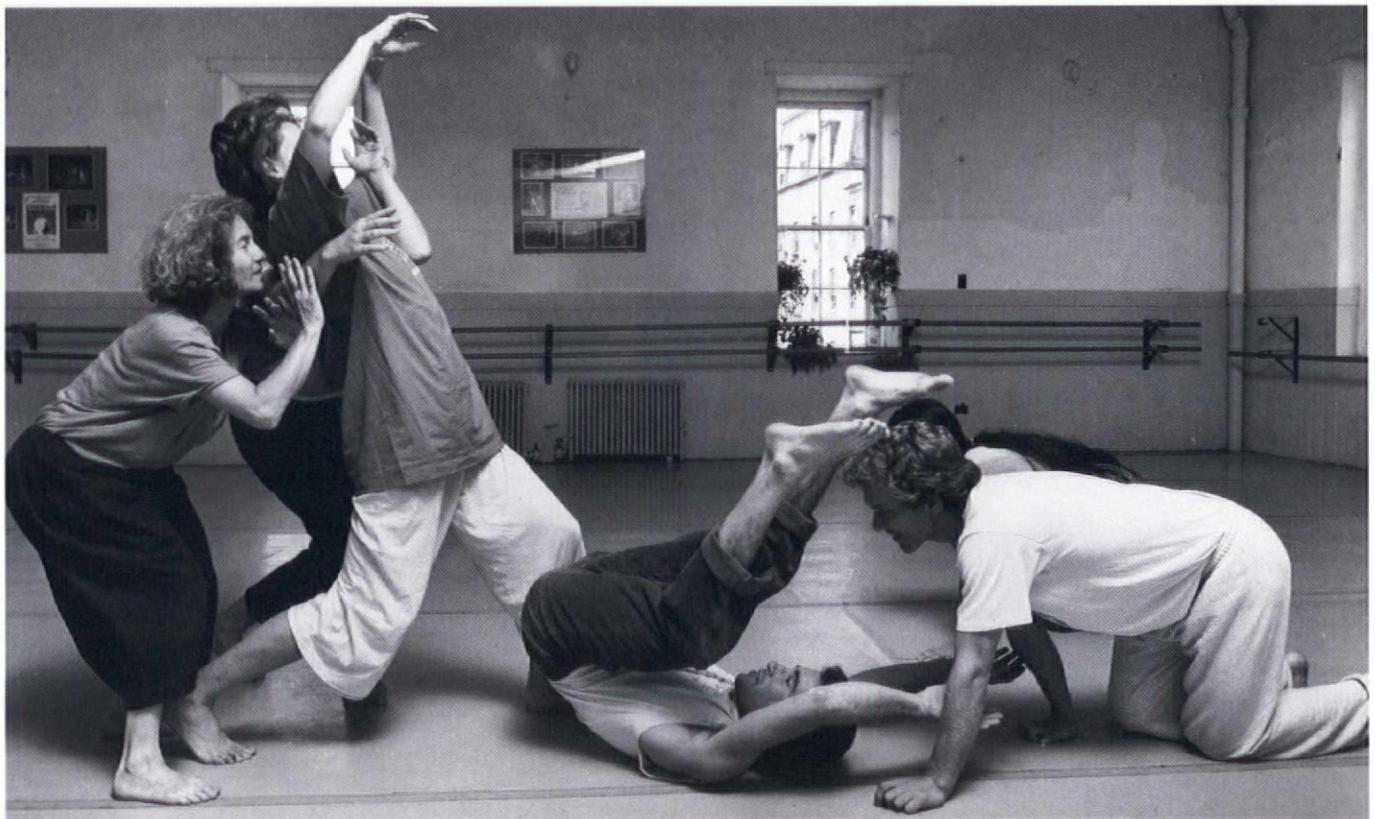
and dynamics through their bodies and all their senses. They then reassembled as a group and developed a performance to share their findings with an appreciative audience. They danced the geological history of the town, rising into mountains and slithering as rivers; they spoke of encounters with reflections in windows; they balanced on docks, rocking with the water's movement; they created for their audience a delicately expanded version of the experiences we all have as we move through our daily lives, thus sensitizing everyone to the rich nuances of the experience of place.

Poet and geographer Denis Wood, from the University of North Carolina, led participants in a remarkable journey of discovery through the town, which was new and unfamiliar to him. He was able to open the eyes of participants who had long lived there to aspects of their town they had never noticed or questioned. One woman, who thought her neighborhood wasn't truly a neighborhood, discovered through investigations and questioning by Wood that it was immensely rich, interesting and complete. He asked provocative questions about every detail; like an archaeologist, he examined litter, monuments, power lines

and manholes to uncover connections and systems, and to reconstruct the whole fabric.

Once a personal connection is made, how does the desire to care for a special place translate into effective political action? Planner and educator Jeff Bishop, from Bristol, England, has developed a set of simple games and tools that enable people to jump right into the planning process. Both children and adults can learn very quickly how to think like a planner, developer, or architect.

Bishop chose an actual site in Brattleboro, a desultory strip of land behind the museum that borders the river, is crossed by railroad tracks and contains coal and oil storage areas. It is a place ripe for fantasy and rife with problems.

The assignment was to develop a plan for the area and to make it financially viable. Working in teams, participants explored the site and then developed rough schemes, making paper and cardboard models to work out the design.

One group created a paradise of fountains, restaurants, docks and storytellers, but couldn't make it pay. Another valiantly attempted to make an appropriate place for a day care center, but recognized the disparities in combining day care with office space. Another team wor-

ried about how to develop this new area without replicating or competing with existing businesses and facilities in the nearby center of town.

By the end of the day, everyone had had a taste of the difficulties and possibilities of working collaboratively and of designing a balanced, workable plan that addressed all their concerns. Everyone had learned to see beyond private interests and had found a global, complex way of thinking about land use problems. By assuming the roles of decision-makers, participants gained more access to the process, more empathy for decision-makers and more skills for engaging in real planning situations.

There were many other aspects to *Our Town*: Clare Cooper-Marcus and Brian Goodey taught skills for grass roots participation in town planning. An oral history project began to assemble stories from people who carry the past forward. A project began to develop footpaths from the center of town into surrounding countryside. A teachers' education program helped teachers develop curricula for their classrooms around issues of town planning. New links were forged between various parts of the community, and the Brattleboro Museum and Art Center created a new role for a

community museum by engaging in town planning and conservation issues.

At the core of the program lay the power of the imagination and its many forms of expression. The imagination is a source of strength, depth and clarity accessible to every individual and community struggling with the complexities and difficulties of change in the environment.

By finding personal and communal connection with the places we inhabit and by sharing those connections with others, we begin to create a larger sense of place and a deeper sense of responsibility to the places we love.

Notes

1. Quoted in Tony Hiss, *The Experience of Place* (New York: Knopf, 1990).

2. Alan Gussow, *A Sense of Place, the Artist and the American Land* (New York: Friends of the Earth, 1972).

Brattleboro residents tackle the design and development problems of an industrial and storage site along the river that passes through town. Photo by Clemens Kalischer.
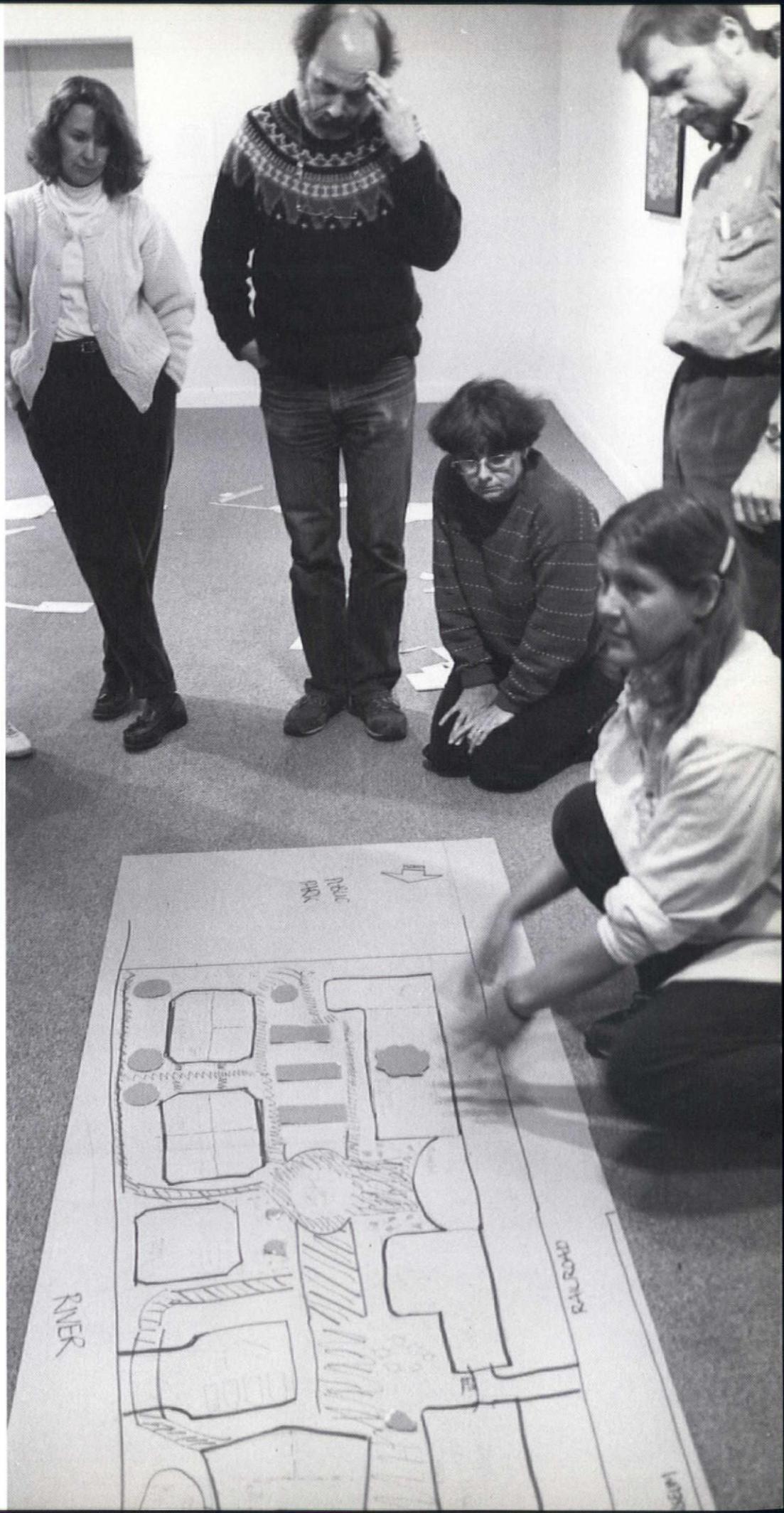
TRASH RECEPTACLES FOR PUBLIC PLACES IN CHINA

While traveling through several of the most popular scenic areas of the People's Republic of China, we could not help noticing the enormous crowds of people who were using these public places. It is the custom in China (more so than in the U.S.) to consume food, drink, cigarettes and other packaged comestibles while sitting or strolling in gardens, parks and scenic areas, and a common result is an enormous production of trash. Some of this public space trash settles on the ground. Much of it, however, is placed in the trash receptacles that are frequently present in these public places.

Although these receptacles are generally smaller than in the U.S., they give the impression that our Chinese colleagues have thought much more than we have about the design of trash containers. Certainly the Chinese design approach is different.

Each city (and in some cases, each public area) has its own design for waste receptacles. At times these reflect a theme or symbol associated with the city or region, or a vivid image from the general culture, such as the panda. These receptacles are almost all relatively inexpensive, being made from easily available materials such as tile, concrete, plastic, or fiberglass. They are decorated to attract attention and are usually conveniently located. Their smaller size, on the other hand, makes them seem less obtrusive than ours. Sometimes there is an accompanying ceramic or plastic pot, typically filled partially with water and used as a spittoon and also for the disposal of cigarettes.

The trash collection procedure is simple and straightforward. Each container is emptied by hand, often with the aid of a long-handled pan and a brush. There is invariably a small trap door in the bottom of the receptacle for this purpose. The trash is usually

carried off in cloth bags or bamboo baskets across the shoulders of the collector, a widespread method of transporting materials in this labor-intensive society. We were informed that the person who empties the container is then owner of the trash and derives a meager living from the recycling or disposal of the materials. From our observations the system seems to work well in general, although there were some areas where more receptacles or more frequent emptying seemed necessary.

The accompanying photographs show some examples of the varied and colorful waste receptacles that we saw. Note the absence of the standardized, cylindrical, wide-opening containers, which seem to be used ubiquitously in U.S. public spaces.

—*Irene Fairley and Carl Steinitz*
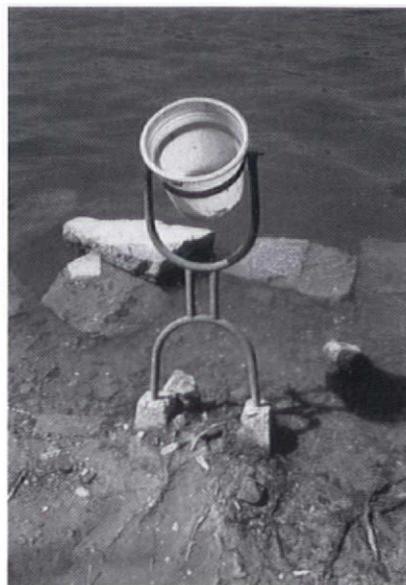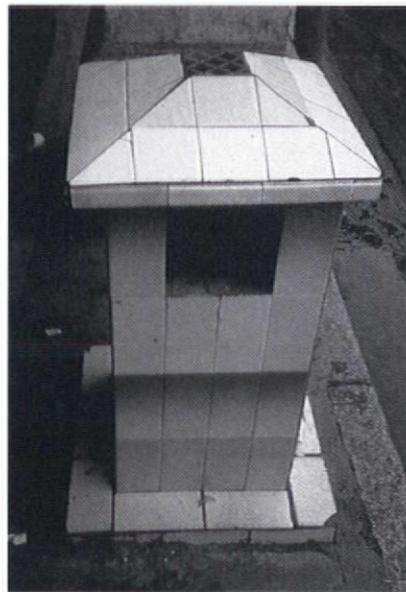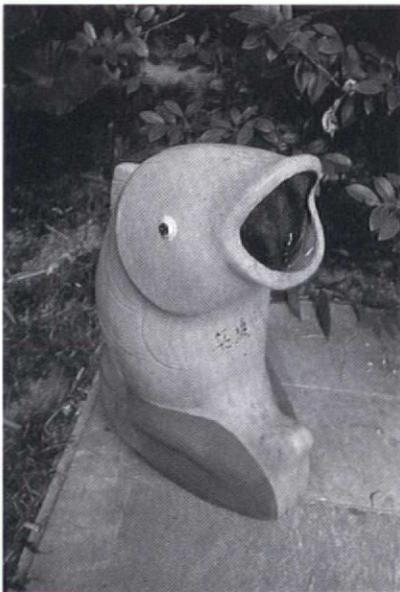
Photos courtesy Irene Fairley and Carl Steinitz.

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Melvin Charney

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is founding curator of architecture and design at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. His exhibition, *Visionary San Francisco*, was featured at SFMOMA last summer, and he is currently organizing an exhibition about the Japanese architect Shin Takamatsu.

Dan Solomon

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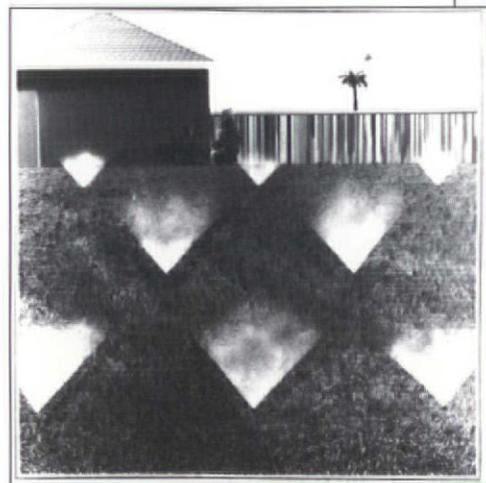
A Lawn Being Sprinkled © David Hockney, 1967

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