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Cite

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The Architecture and Design Review of Houston

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InCite

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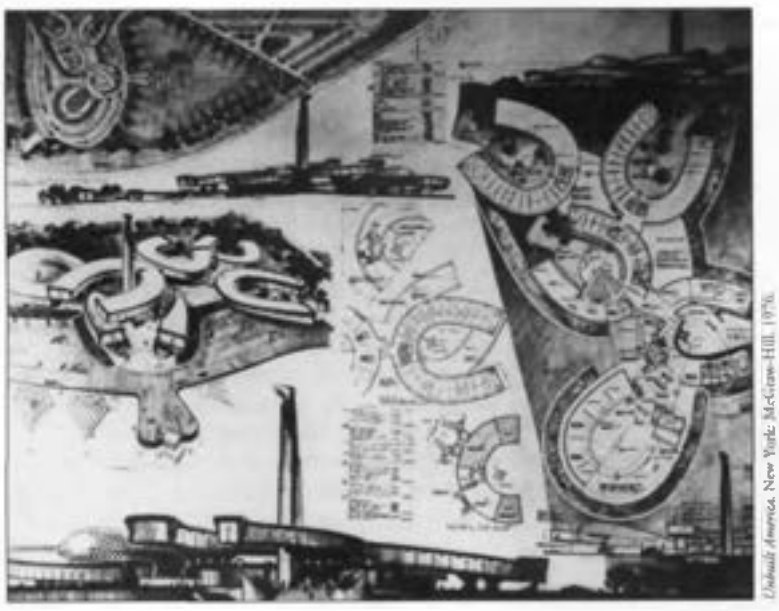
Citegeist

Monuments for Our Time

THE GREAT ENEMY OF ART IS GOOD TASTE.

– MARCEL DUCHAMP

Drexel Turner



Unbuilt America, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.

Shoe-in

With two Houston sites no longer in the running, the George Bush Presidential Library is now destined for the kinder, gentler pastures of College Station, Texas. As an additional point of light for the someday resting place of the papers of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue's foremost horseshoes enthusiast, the brood mare of all possible secondhand designs for Texas's second presidential library lies waiting in the archives of the Art Institute of Chicago: Bruce Goff's unrequited project for the Cowboy Hall of Fame (Oklahoma City, 1960).

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Ivory tower

The black-and-tan fantasy of Robert Graham's Duke Ellington memorial has found some Knickerbockers in a less than sentimental mood. The tabloid taste mavens of the *Daily News* have even compared its larger-than-life piano and satin-doll caryatids to a bowling trophy, however low-key they may seem contrasted with the neon outline of Holcombe-Lindquist's levitated piano on Houston's Southwest Freeway. Not to worry: Graham's sophisticated ladies and their instrumental accompaniment, loved madly by Bobby Short (president of the memorial fund), Joan Didion, and a band of other righteous angels, will be dropped off in Harlem at the northeast corner of Central Park this year, more than a decade after they were first composed.

Museum of Modern Art, New York

© 1991 Paul Hester, Houston

Fork lift

This less than al dente spaghetti-column-with-fork-poised-in-the-manner-of-Picasso's-absinthe-glass-sugar-strainer is stranded inside the knickknackery of Carrabba's Kirby Drive premises, a twist and shout away from the bright (head)lights of Ant Farm's *Save the Planet* Thunderbird (1987) at the Hard Rock Cafe.

Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

Spoonbridge anthology

Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen's *Spoonbridge and Cherry* fountain (1985–88) is now making room for Dada in the sculpture garden of the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, foot-less but fancy free in the manner of André Breton's ready-made photographed by Man Ray for *Mad Love* (1937).

Sea shill

The ultimate soft-shelled crab, an inflatable roof bonnet made in Florida by Incredible Inflatables, appeared briefly last summer atop Houston's Yucatan Liquor Stand on Richmond Avenue before running afoul of Houston's zero-tolerance sign code, which makes no allowance for special effects, even for upper crustaceans. With a little less crabbing, perhaps it can claw its way to the top again.

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Two clever by half

A little of the old recto verso, junkyards and bumpers apart, front-ends Houston's yup-scaled monument to the Marshall Plan at Kee Motors near Kirby Drive (George Ramsey and Scott Bich, 1988) and the jumping jack flash of the New York Hard Rock Cafe's caddy-shack canopy, fin-ly veiled (Isaac Tigrett, 1984).

Big Cité Beat

☛ The **Rice Design Alliance** will honor **Rice University** and its president, **George Rupp,** with RDA's **Award for Design Excellence** at its annual gala on 9 November.

☛ With his eye on the skyline and his ear to the ground, **Barry Moore** has debuted as design critic for the *Houston Press*; the word on the street is that **Cameron Armstrong** will become the *Press*'s interpreter of the mysteries of urban real estate. Cheers to investigative reporter **Linda Barth** for her *Houston Metropolitan* exposés on the Westside airport (December '90) and redevelopment of Fourth Ward and Allen Parkway Village (January '91). Encore!

☛ At its May convention in Washington, D.C., the **American Institute of Architects** invested **Charles W. Moore** with its **Gold Medal** and elevated Taft Architects **John J. Casbarian, Robert Timme,** and **Danny Samuels**: *Cite* contributor **Gerald Moorhead; Jim Gatton;** and **Bob Fillpot** to **Fellowship** in the institute. The **Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture** named Texas A&M's **David Woodcock** one of five **Distinguished Professors of Architecture** at its April convention in Washington.

☛ Princeton Architectural Press has issued a gorgeous color catalogue, *Le Corbusier: A Marriage of Contours* by **Richard Ingersoll,** documenting the exhibition of Le Corbusier's drawings that he organized at the Farish Gallery with **Drexel Turner** in 1989. The designer is *Cite*'s **Alisa Bales Baur**. Also out are **Peter G. Rowe**'s *Making of a Middle Landscape* (MIT Press), **Ben Nicholson**'s *Appliance House* (MIT Press), **David D. Red**'s *Rational Design* (Vantage Press), and **Roxanne K. Williamson**'s *American Architects and the Mechanics of Fame* (UT Press).

☛ **Philip Johnson** is violating the perfection of his 1957 master plan for the campus of the **University of St. Thomas** with his newly unveiled design for a campus chapel. Johnson will also design a new science building for UST and may soon be

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architect for an addition to the **University of Houston Law Center.** Completion of **Sesquicentennial Park** will begin this summer with construction of the second phase of Team HOU's award-winning design: **Guy Hagstette** and **Kerry Goelzer** are phase two designers. And **Carlos Jiménez** has been selected by the **Museum of Fine Arts, Houston** to design a new building containing staff offices and more studio space for the Glassell School.

Citelines

Cite Awarded $25,750 Grant From the NEA

The Rice Design Alliance's biannual journal, *Cite: The Architecture and Design Review of Houston*, has been awarded a grant of $25,750 by the National Endowment for the Arts. The grant will provide 37 percent of *Cite*'s budget over the next 18 months and will allow the magazine to pay writers for feature articles and to be distributed more widely in Texas and the Southwest.

Now in its ninth year of publication, *Cite* offers a forum for critical analysis of architecture, urban planning, and design in and around Houston and of issues affecting the city's growth and quality of life.

In recent years, *Cite* has published articles on transportation plans for Houston, the city's public and low-income housing, and the architecture of significant Houston neighborhoods, as well as commentary on buildings of special interest in Houston and Texas, including the George Brown Convention Center, the Alice Pratt Brown Building for the Shepherd School of Music at Rice, the Conoco Building in Houston's Energy Corridor, the Halsell Conservatory and RiverCenter in San Antonio, the Corpus Christi City Hall, and the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, as well as articles by Phillip Lopate, Max Apple, J. B. Jackson, and Joseph Rykwert and interviews with Charles Moore, Aldo Rossi, and Tom Wolfe.

Michael E. Wilson

1949–1990

Michael E. Wilson, architectural archivist of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, died 2 December 1990. He was 40 years old. Wilson had been architectural archivist at the Metropolitan Research Center since 1982. Prior to coming to Houston, he was assistant archivist at the Rosenberg Library in Galveston.

During his tenure in Houston, Michael Wilson presided over the expansion of the library's architectural collections, accessioning the collections of Howard Barnstone, John F. Staub, C. C. "Pat" Fleming, and MacKie & Kamrath among others. He also compiled and edited catalogues of the Alfred C. Finn and Harvin C. Moore collections. Wilson served at various times on the boards of directors of the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance, the Texas Chapter of the Victorian Society in America, and the Society of Southwest Archivists. He was a member of the Historic Resources Committee of the American Institute of Architects/Houston Chapter and a contributor to *Cite*.

Contributions in his memory may be made to the Michael E. Wilson Memorial Fund of the Houston Public Library. These will benefit the research center's architectural collections.

Stephen Fox

Tiel Way Architectural Tour

The Rice Design Alliance's 14th annual architectural tour, held from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, 18 and 19 May, featured six houses on Tiel Way in River Oaks. These houses constitute one of the most consistent and superlative expressions of mid-20th-century modern design in Houston. The houses open for the tour included:

2 Tiel Way – *Gardens only*
1961, MacKie & Kamrath

8 Tiel Way
1953, MacKie & Kamrath

20 Tiel Way
1956, Northrop & Northrop

48 Tiel Way
1958, MacKie & Kamrath

59 Tiel Way
1949, MacKie & Kamrath

67 Tiel Way
1950, MacKie & Kamrath

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48 Tiel Way, MacKie & Kamrath, 1958.

Karl Kamrath (1911–1988) and Frederick J. MacKie, Jr. (1905–1984), established their practice in 1937. Profoundly influenced by the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, they were among the foremost modernist architects in Houston from the late 1940s until the early 1980s. Their works include the City of Houston Fire Alarm Building (1939), San Felipe Courts (1942–44), the University of Texas M. D. Anderson Hospital and Tumor Institute (1948–54), Temple Emanu El (1949), St. John the Divine Church (1951–54), the headquarters for Schlumberger Well Surveying Corp. (1953), and seven houses on Tiel Way.

Stephen Fox, architectural historian and Fellow of the Anchorage Foundation of Texas, presented a lecture on the works of MacKie & Kamrath on 8 May in the Brown Auditorium at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

The lecture was funded by the Bromley Smith Freeman Charity Fund. The tour was funded in part by Gilbert King Construction; Mitchell Energy & Development Corp.; Renaissance Builders, Inc.; Structural Consulting Co., Inc.; Truffles and Flourishes Catering, Inc.; Windham Builders; and the city of Houston through the Cultural Arts Council of Houston.

UH Students Win Architecture Competition

Antarctica has emerged as a vision of the 21st century. The ozone hole, environmental protection, possible future uses of natural resources, and international cooperation have joined scientific research as major issues at Earth's last frontier. In June 1990 the American Institute of Architects/Student Chapter, in cooperation with the American Institute of Architects and the National Science Foundation, issued a call for entries for a national student competition titled "Environment 1, a South Pole Research Facility." The charge was to design a research center that would exert a minimal environmental impact upon the polar region, meet the research requirements of the scientific community and maximize their comfort, and use state-of-the-art architectural technologies.

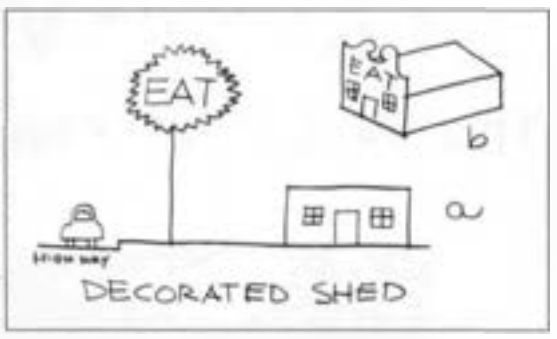
In preparing our entry, the first step was to conduct research on the unique climate and topographic conditions of Antarctica. The research center at the South Pole sits on a 9,000-foot-deep bed of ice that accounts for 70 percent of the world's fresh water. But the South Pole is a desert: water is a valuable commodity, because all of it is frozen. Another problem of building in Antarctica is snow drifting. The wind blows constantly at five to ten knots, creating an unstoppable ice buildup of 6 to 12 inches per year. The existing station is almost completely buried. The inhabitants struggle year-round, through a six-month day and a six-month night, against these conditions. They gather ice for melting and dig to keep ice off the structure.

Our design was developed by attempting to work with the environment rather than against it. The focus is on using the inevitable ice buildup on the leeward side of any object. In our design, the prevailing wind blows the snow over the aerodynamic shell of the building; the ice accumulation that naturally occurs is melted for fresh water. The building components are modular and respond to the size of the cargo bay of an LC 130 airplane, the only current means of delivering building materials. The linear wing allows for the future expansion of the center. The linear design also provides a zone for utilities at the rear of the structure. Buildings underneath the wing-shaped windbreak are elevated to dissipate the heat generated inside. Otherwise the ice below the structure would melt and cause the foundation to settle unevenly.

The aesthetics of the design resulted from the problems the site presents. The competition was unique because we did not have to search for formal inspiration. We tried to develop an architecture of purity that would make the effect of human presence at the South Pole pristine and elegant.

Peter Dorsey
John Major

Environment 1, a South Pole Research Facility, 1990, model of premiated design, Peter Dorsey and John Major.



Courtesy Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates

National Football Hall of Fame, 1967, model, Venturi & Rauch.

Satiric proposal for Boston City Hall, 1972, Robert Venturi, delineator.

Decorated shed diagram, 1972, Robert Venturi.

Courtesy Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates

The Children's Museum of Houston, model, Cannady, Jackson & Ryan and Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates.

A TEMPLE FOR TOTS

Suspending adult disbelief and competitiveness in order to create an island of mystery appropriate to a child's imagination was the charge given the designers of the proposed building for the Children's Museum of Houston. While examples of this building type range from day care to science fair, they have the potential to mediate between the pressures and responsibilities of adulthood and the fertile minds of our nation's young.

Toward realizing this potential, the Children's Museum of Houston in September 1990 purchased two adjacent blocks bordered by Binz and Ewing avenues and Austin and Crawford streets. The tree-shaded site, split by LaBranch Street, provides room for the new building on the east block and visitor parking next to Park Plaza Hospital on the west block. This site lies one block north of Hermann Park in the city's nascent museum district.

The complex planned for the east block consists of two buildings, the Mary Gibbs Jones Building facing Binz and the Exhibit Design Studio along Ewing. These have been designed by Cannady, Jackson & Ryan of Houston in association with Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates of Philadelphia. The two buildings will frame a planted courtyard, the Children's Discovery Garden, a space shaded by the remainder of the stand of 70-foot-tall pine trees that presently grows on the site. SWA Group is the landscape architect.

Rather than present static artifacts, the exhibitions produced in the Exhibit Design Studio will invite hands-on experience, reflecting the progressive developments in children's exhibition design that began with Michael Spock's ground-breaking exhibition *What's Inside* at the Children's Museum of Boston in 1963. In anticipation of this, the architects opted to provide a neutral enclosure for the gallery spaces, one that will serve as a "toybox" to hold memorable treasures and accommodate changing exhibitions. As counterpoint, they aligned the permanent institutional spaces along the Jones Building's public face toward Binz Avenue and joined these to the galleries with the Kids' Hall grand arcade.

From first sighting, the complex reveals the paradox of its architects' conflicting agendas. It is ambiguous rather than clearly dialectic, presenting itself as a "difficult whole."[1] Because the architects chose not to distinguish clearly and completely between the heroic and permanent nature of the gallery building and the utilitarian and flexible nature of the exhibition design studio, one is reminded of Robert Venturi's aphorisms advocating an architecture of "both/and" rather than "either/or."[2] Reflecting this condition, Jeffrey D. Ryan, Venturi's Houston collaborator and one-time employee, described the new museum as incorporating "both traditional Classical and Modern architecture" in a way that "addresses the dual need for flexible space that will accommodate interdisciplinary hands-on exhibitions, as well as a permanent and imageful appearance that creates the Children's Museum identity."[3]

Given this clear statement of dual purpose, one might expect the Children's Museum to represent the next evolutionary stage in Venturi's brash building-sign hybrid strategy, which was demonstrated in his visionary scheme for the National Football Hall of Fame of 1967 and his satiric counter-proposal for the Boston City Hall of 1972. Yet, although its programmatically responsive interactive agenda reigns paramount inside, outside the museum's visual agenda yields both flat and subtly modeled civic expression. The Jones Building presents inexpensive metal-clad walls on three faces of the complex. On the fourth, toward Binz, a thin scrim is hung, a temple colonnade to be realized in cast stone and synthetic stucco. Toward the corner of Binz and LaBranch, where the entrance is located at the pedestrian crosswalk, a curved, billboardlike propylaeum is "inflected." Child-size cutouts form a protective "caryakid" loggia next to the LaBranch Street schoolbus loading area. These classical motifs in low relief constitute a visual simulacrum, neither merely graphic nor fully architectonic. The façade of this cultural institution is thereby equated to mere advertising, fueling the debate surrounding Venturi's controversial exploration of the "decorated shed" and his challenge to distinctions between high and pop culture.[4] In contrast to more literal "decorated sheds," the Jones Building's monumental decoration wraps the edges of its north façade and, while tempting one to find associations with the banality of tract houses and strip shopping centers, does not fully surrender to its signlike role. It hazards being mistaken for significant construction. If its irony is missed and it dupes the public into accepting such immodest economy as a new paradigm, it demonstrates the persuasiveness of mirage as a surrogate for haptic experience. Given that advances in communication technology and the operations of the mass media have made the experience of architecture increasingly subordinate to the play of images, Venturi and Scott Brown's design calls to mind Jean Baudrillard's assertion that the logical development of advanced technology may ultimately lead to a world of "simulations" alone.

This is the paradox of Venturi's surface-oriented techniques. If consumed at face value, they encourage complacency toward the construction of important cultural monuments and an acceptance of the bourgeois view of urban life they present. One can hardly take solace in the fact that Adolf Loos faced this same condition in Vienna nearly one hundred years ago. It is ironic, however, that in his public warning he invoked the sham façades constructed by Field Marshal Potemkin to quiet the conscience of Catherine the Great. In his analogy, Loos prophesied our time:

Who does not know of Potemkin's villages, the ones that Catherine's cunning favorite built in the Ukraine? They were villages of canvas and pasteboard, villages intended to transform a visual desert into a flowering landscape for the eyes of Her Imperial Majesty. But was it a whole city which that cunning minister was supposed to have produced?[5]

Patrick Peters

Notes

1 "The difficult whole in an architecture of complexity and contradiction includes multiplicity and diversity of elements in relationships that are inconsistent or among the weaker kinds perceptually." Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 2d ed. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1979), p. 88.

2 Ibid., p. 23.

3 Children's Museum press release, 9 October 1990, p. 2.

4 Venturi argues for the "particular significance of the decorated shed with the rhetorical front and conventional behind: for architecture as shelter with symbols on it." Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1977), p. 90.

5 Adolph Loos, "Potemkin City," in *Adolph Loos: Spoken Into the Void: Collected Essays, 1897–1900* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1982), p. 95.

Do the Wright Thing

The W. L. Thaxton, Jr., House

Robert Morris

Thaxton House, Bunker Hill Village, 1954, Frank Lloyd Wright, view of garden front.

"I bought the lot for $5,000 or $5,500. Now I can't believe that the thing is worth $535,000, and that's with the house being a teardown."
–William L. Thaxton, Jr.[1]

In April 1949 at the Rice Hotel in downtown Houston, Frank Lloyd Wright was awarded the Gold Medal of the American Institute of Architects. Wright was a spry 82 (he would die exactly ten years later) when in his acceptance speech he commented, "Although I have never been a member of the institute, in order to maintain my amateur status, the honor is a long time coming from the home boys."[2]

Forty-two years later, my drive through the intersection of Holcombe Boulevard and Main Street no longer presents the hulking ocher and green mass topped by the large porcelain and neon sign that Wright said "should read W-H-Y, Why?" (a reference to his dislike of what he called the International Modern Style). Reflecting on the demolition of the Shamrock Hotel, the most notorious work of architecture in Houston in 1949, as yet another loss of a piece of Houston's history, I am reminded that Wright's only structure in Houston and his first building completed in Texas, a "Usonian" house, is sitting on a 1.2-acre wooded lot in Bunker Hill Village and is being advertised for sale as a teardown.

Usonia was Wright's name for the reformed American society that he tried to implement in the form of his "Broadacre City" planning concept during the last 25 years of his life. His familiar though misunderstood term "organic," related to Taoist and Zen concepts, referred to the way in which change would occur. John Sergeant writes in *Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian Houses* that Wright ascribed this better word for the "States United" to Samuel Butler's novel *Erewhon*, where it does not, in fact, appear.[3] George R. Collins's paper, "Broadacre City: Wright's Utopia Reconsidered," suggested that Wright picked up the name on his first European trip in 1910, when there was talk of calling the U.S.A. "U-S-O-N-A." to avoid confusion with the newly formed Union of South Africa.[4] Whatever the derivation, the term is now associated with the small, sometimes owner-built houses he began to design in 1936 with the first of two houses for Herbert Jacobs, in Madison, Wisconsin.

The Usonian house represented Wright's 20-year struggle to solve the problem of low-cost housing in the face of a shortage of resources during the Depression, then rising costs during World War II. The Usonians were successful because of their low building costs and their comfort. During the interwar period, 26 houses were completed and some 31 other designs were not built. After the war several more designs were built as Usonians, even when the sites were more generous and required larger houses. Approximately half of the original clients still live in their houses; other houses are sought after as either private homes or public restoration projects. A recent exhibition of Wright's work had as its centerpiece a "Usonian Automatic" that was open for tours.

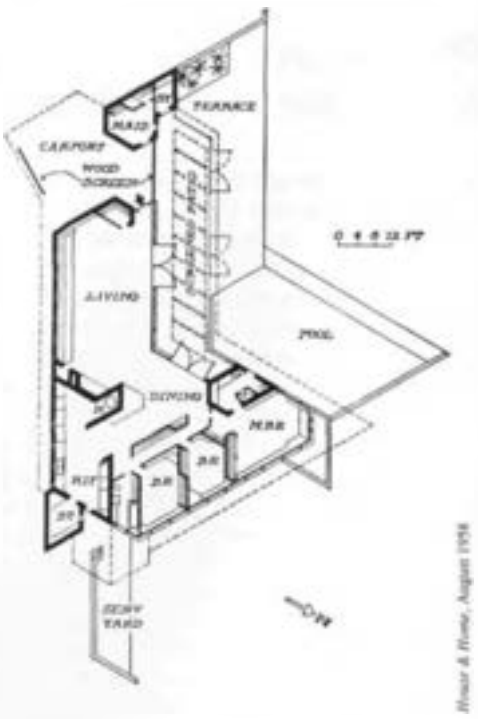
Sergeant's *Wright's Usonian Houses* identifies five basic types of Usonian house, categorized by plan. The Polliwog was the most frequently employed plan. The Diagonal, basically the Polliwog with diagonal elements, was frequently used in postwar designs. The In-line was similar to the Polliwog but had shorter circulation routes and a smaller external perimeter. The Hexagonal extended the hexagon grid over an entire site to integrate a number of buildings. The Raised type, to be supported with masonry piers, was used for extraordinary site conditions, such as the edges of ravines or watercourses.

In the summer of 1953, W. L. Thaxton, Jr., a 31-year-old insurance agent, and his 24-year-old wife wrote Wright a letter asking for his help in designing a house for their newly acquired 1.19-acre lot on the "outskirts" of Houston, in what is now Bunker Hill Village in the Memorial area. Living amid the crowded, well-manicured lawns of the rapidly growing postwar city, Audrey and Bill Thaxton dreamed of a "country estate" in an isolated place that could be "natural and wild." The letter was lengthy (five full pages) and included descriptions of the site and of their personalities, preferences, and programmatic desires. They received a reply a week later from Wright's secretary, Eugene Masselink, stating, "Mr. Wright would like to help you get what you need and want," with Wright's standard statement of services enclosed.

The original contract was for an 1,800-square-foot house to cost $25,000, the perfect qualifications for a Usonian design. The plan that Wright conceived for the Thaxton property is most closely related to the Diagonal type but employs a 30°– 60° diamond grid in lieu of the Diagonal's hexagon grid; the basic unit of both plans is the equilateral triangle. The plan also featured the In-line's tight spatial organization. The materials and construction techniques of the original house are typically Usonian. The floor was an integral slab-on-grade of exposed, polished concrete, scored with the diamond planning grid. The load-bearing walls were of 8" x 8" x 16" concrete masonry units set back half an inch every second course, giving the walls a slight batter. The exterior non-bearing walls and interior partitions were of the hardwood batten and veneer plywood board system, aligned with the masonry, that was conceived for the first Usonian in 1936.

A typical Usonian element was that much of the furniture was built in, conforming in plan and shape to the planning grid. The Thaxton House had several linear feet of wall seating and shelving, wardrobes in lieu of conventional closets, and beds shaped to the diamond grid. Freestanding pieces of furniture were also designed to fit the particular planning grid. None of the freestanding furniture is now in the house.

Three features of the Thaxton design not usually found in the modest Usonians were a large screened patio, swimming pool, and "refrigerated air" system. The screened patio, adjacent to the living area, served as an extension of the family room. These kinds of spaces, a response to the Houston climate, served as "summer rooms" for relief from hot interior spaces. They have been virtually lost in present-day designs for buildings. The swimming pool flanks the master bedroom and fits up tight against the adjacent exterior wall: one can literally step through a door into the pool from the master bathroom. Refrigerated air had been used in Houston commercial buildings prior to World War II, but it was still a novelty in less expensive houses in the early 1950s, when only the houses of the affluent had central systems. Many Usonians had a heating system of hot-water-fed copper pipes buried in the floor slab, but Wright had not originally made provision for a central air system; Thaxton decided to install one after the design was complete. Since the Usonian construction system had no suspended or furred ceilings in which to hide the metal ductwork, an underfloor system integral with the foundation was conceived by Wright. This idea had been used by other Houston architects, including Howard Barnstone (who had been an ad hoc chauffeur for Wright during his 1949 stay in Houston).



View of living room and porch with original furnishings.

Through the years, subsequent owners' unsympathetic additions and alterations have reduced the Thaxton House to a shell of its original design. Its current state is undoubtedly the reason it is considered a teardown; certainly no enlightened person would conceive of destroying the work of a great artist, especially when other cities herald any work by Frank Lloyd Wright as a treasure.

I pose these questions: Would a work of Van Gogh be destroyed because it is one of his lesser works? Is a work of architecture different from any other work of fine art, and should someone tear down the work of a great architect such as Wright because the building is not considered a masterpiece and only the land is perceived to have value? I propose that land as property has no value in terms of modern real estate until it has been developed, until something has been built upon it and around it. Development gives the land its character as a place, and only then does the land gain value.

Our concept of real estate has caused us to think that we can destroy a building because it is nothing more than an inconvenience on a piece of land. Can Houston afford to destroy more examples of its history, especially one by such an artist as Frank Lloyd Wright? Certainly in this city the "home boys'" work meets the wrecking ball on an almost daily basis. Along with the buildings, our history and therefore the sense of who we are are destroyed. Are we really, as architect James E. Langford stated in his proposal for the reuse of an Atlas missile silo, "voluntary hostages who lead normal lives under the threat of nuclear destruction"?

The disposition of the Thaxton House will represent Houston's current state of community, in the sense that it betokens the quality of our culture. Saving the Thaxton House would be the ultimate act of community in an enlightened culture. It would express to the world that Houston values its architectural treasures, even though the real estate may not make a buck.

The sense of "community" is virtually lost in this era. As planning is now seriously being considered for Houston, I offer these words by Percival and Paul Goodman in their famous book *Communitas:*

A community plan is not a layout of streets and houses, or of viaducts and factories. It is the external form of the activity going on. It is more like a choreography of society in motion and in rest, an arrangement for society to live out its habits and ideals and do its work, directing itself or being directed. What is important is the activity going on, how it is influenced by the scheme and how it transforms any scheme, and uses or abuses any site, to its own work and values.[5]

Without these "acts of community," we are only what Wright described in his speech at the Rice Hotel in 1949:

a good example of the capitalist city, one great single broad pavement, skyscrapers at one end and way out in the country at the other end, skyscraper; in between out on the prairie and in the mud, the people. Architecture is the cornerstone of that culture of which we have none or little, we only have an amazing civilization.[6]

Notes

1 Danni Sabota, "Wright's House: Will It Be Wrecked or Rescued?," *Houston Business Journal*, 28 January 1991, p. 14.

2 Wright's speech was recorded as part of the proceedings of the 1949 American Institute of Architects convention. There is a taped copy of the original 78 rpm record in the Pacifica Radio library in Houston.

3 John Sergeant, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian Houses: The Case for Organic Architecture* (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1976), p. 16.

4 Cited in Sergeant, *Wright's Usonian Houses*, pp. 16, 171n.

5 Percival and Paul Goodman, *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Ways of Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), p. 1.

6 See note 2.

Update

Since this article was written, the effort to save the Thaxton House has become a media event. Printed articles have appeared in the *Chronicle* and *Post* and nationally in *The New York Times*. Broadcast reports have been aired on National Public Radio and Houston television stations.

On 4 May 1991, the *Houston Chronicle* reported that Betty Lee and Allen Gaw had made a bid on the house. The real estate broker confirmed this, and said the owner would not accept any other offers.

The Gaws, who learned that the house was in danger from a TV report, intend to rehabilitate the house and return it as nearly as possible to its original condition. Although the Gaws work together as dentists, Betty Gaw holds a graduate degree in architecture and has been a practicing architect.

The Gaws' effort is a true "act of community," one of a magnitude to make a difference. My sincerest gratitude goes to my friend Gertrude Barnstone, who encouraged me to share a draft of this article with Ann Holmes of the *Houston Chronicle*. Miss Holmes's article of 11 April 1991 was the catalyst for the media coverage that led the Gaws to act.

Preserving the Thaxton House is a small event compared to the enormous problems that face us today. But it should encourage us to act and to influence others to "do the right thing." ■

Citesurvey

Saint Luke's Medical Tower

William Curtis

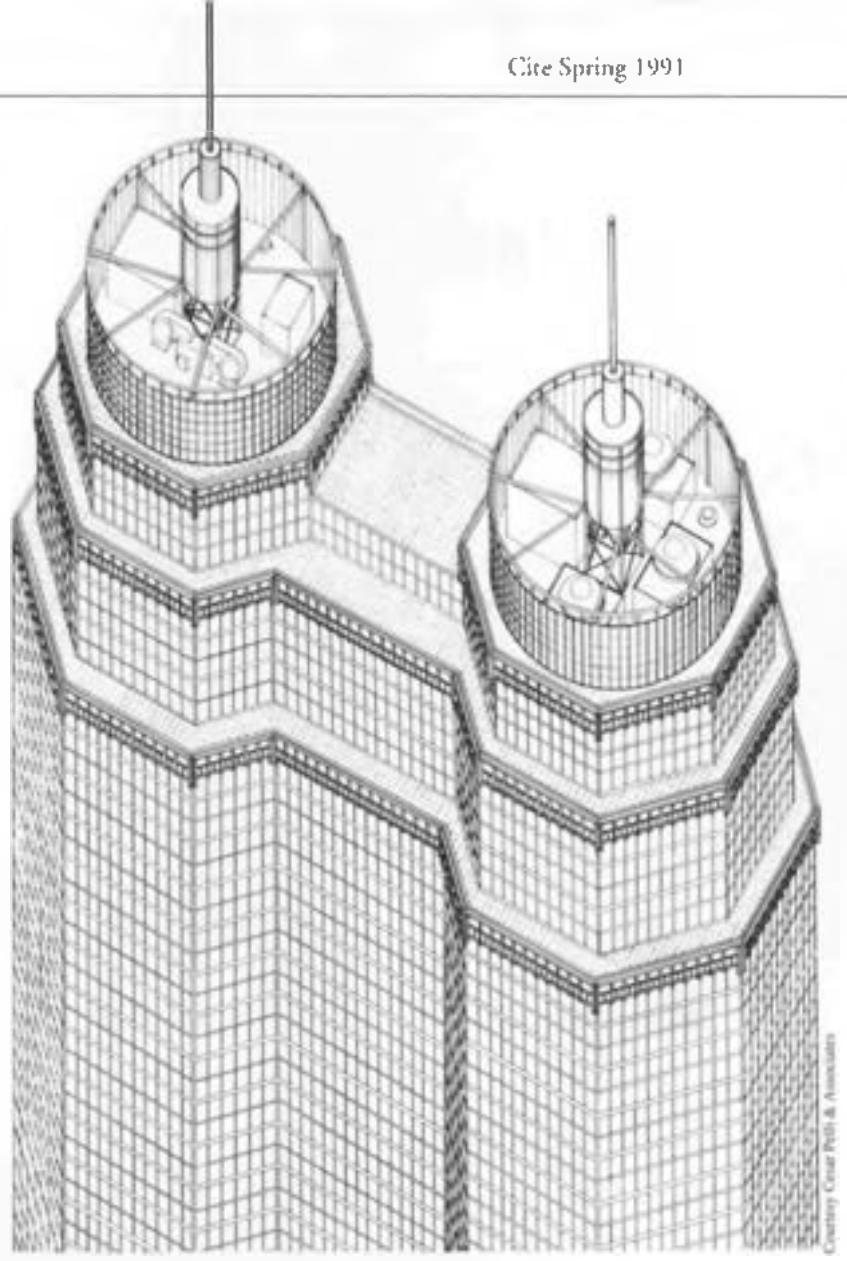
Through openings in the canopy of live oaks along Main Street, glimpses of a shining silver glass tower herald a refreshing new addition to the buildings that make up the Texas Medical Center.

Saint Luke's Medical Tower by Cesar Pelli & Associates (with Kendall/Heaton Associates) occupies a rectangular site fronting both Fannin and Main streets and is linked to Saint Luke's Episcopal Hospital by means of a glass enclosed walkway. The building comprises twin 25-story octagonal towers engaging the ends of a through-block slab. At their bases the towers frame public entrances on Main and Fannin and rise through an eight-story parking block to culminate in needlelike spires set against the sky atop crowns of tiered fretwork.

Pelli clad the concrete structural system of this combined medical office tower and parking structure with his now-familiar gridded glass curtain wall. In this case, continuous white horizontal bands (wider where they mark floor levels) contain matching panels of silver reflective vision and spandrel glass. The effect is that of a continuous skin folded tightly around a volume of space.

Pelli skillfully chiseled and stepped this volume of space into a dynamic composition of towers, slabs, and blocks. The compilation of well-balanced shapes – abstract yet referential – is a direct response to an awkward two-faced site. Complimenting the formal gestures is Pelli's use of silver reflective glass for the building's skin. This may seem an odd choice, since the image of the silver reflective-glass building is not always a positive one. But Pelli understands the ability of reflective glass to absorb surrounding colors as well as reflect them. The result is an abstract polychromy that engages the building and its surroundings while permitting a constant readjustment of the building's appearance as the time of day and the weather change.

These exteriors enclose approximately 483,000 gross square feet of hospital and tenant office space as well as parking for 1,350 automobiles. The building's first two floors contain the entry and elevator lobbies, waiting rooms, retail space, and access ramps to the lower three and upper six garage floors. Saint Luke's Episcopal Hospital occupies floors 9 through 12;



Courtesy Cesar Pelli & Associates

The twin peaks of South Main, St. Luke's Medical Tower.

© 1991 Paul Hester, Houston

St. Luke's Medical Tower, 1990, Cesar Pelli & Associates and Kendall/Heaton Associates.

© 1991 Paul Hester, Houston

Detail of Fannin Street entrance and walkway bridge.

© 1991 Paul Hester, Houston

Detail of motor lobby.

floor 9 is an ambulatory surgery center. The remaining floors, 13 through 25, are tenant floors, with mechanical space above the 25th floor and in the basement.

Visitors to the tower will encounter the building's least convincing moment at its base. The need to accommodate large volumes of automobile traffic has so severely eroded the building's base that the octagonal towers seem like anchoring counterweights. The use of silver reflective glass is less convincing at ground level than on the building's upper floors. The opacity of the glass is supposed to provide a sense of continuity and solidity at ground level, but the openings for pedestrian and automobile traffic interrupt the surface and reveal partial views of the building's interior. In an attempt to compensate for the compromised ground floor and unify the building's lower reaches, Pelli visually reinforced the second floor with projections and bands of color.

The public ground-floor spaces of the tower are unusual in that no attempt is made to segregate pedestrian and automobile traffic. The sheer number of automobiles needing to be accommodated demanded considerable space for street-level drive aisles and parking ramps; when the building's service core and retail spaces were taken into account, little space was left for exclusive pedestrian use. Given these requirements, Pelli embraced the automobile and used the residual pedestrian space to create a distinctive ground floor. Through the clever juxtaposition of the ground-floor drive aisles and interior walkways about a transparent glass wall, Pelli visually united the two paths between boldly patterned screen walls. These walls act as backdrops against which the building's users proceed with equal ceremony to elevator banks and the hospital or medical offices above, or to the upper-level parking decks.

One of the building's most entertaining features is the glass enclosed walkway connecting the tower to Saint Luke's Episcopal Hospital. Pelli chose to span the steady stream of traffic on Fannin with an arched bridge. The bridge's paired bowstring trusses are scrub-suit green, complementing the garb of the medical center staffers who regularly choose this exhilarating new route.

The building's most distinctive features are the twin crowns and spires that emerge from the top of the engaged octagonal towers. Pelli confidently fitted the facets and curves of these autonomous forms with an applique of delicate white aluminum fretwork. The prolific use of this fine-scale ornamentation contrasts sharply with the building's volumetric mass, terminating the strong forms gently against the sky. The twin spires, with their continuously blinking lights, serve as punctuation marks highlighting the tower's distinctive presence in the Texas Medical Center and on the Houston skyline. ■

Citesurvey

The Ziegler House

Gordon Wittenberg

Ziegler House, 1990, Ziegler Cooper Architects, front elevation.

The Ziegler House, designed by Scott Ziegler of Ziegler Cooper, is located in the subdivision of Royden Oaks. Platted in the late 1940s to take advantage of a small parcel of land located immediately west and south of River Oaks, Houston's most prestigious garden suburb, Royden Oaks is also one of the latest inside-the-Loop neighborhoods to experience large-scale replacement of its original post–World War II houses. Most of the new developer-built houses are large, characterless red brick boxes with, at best, an applied cornice and diminutive front porch. Against this background the Ziegler House proposes a positive alternative in returning to the more picturesque forms and planning principles associated with the beginning of the suburban movement.

Family room.

The house's massing is dominated by a triple gabled front facing Ella Lee Lane, a form first popularized by the English architect Edwin Lutyens in houses such as Tigbourne Court (1899) and used lately by such architects as Robert A. M. Stern and Kliment/Halsband. It is a popular form because its peaks and valleys establish an intimate scale, while the three gables collectively exert a larger presence. The wall plane is established by a banded pattern of St. Joe brick that provides a strong horizontal continuity to contrast to the gables' vertical thrust.

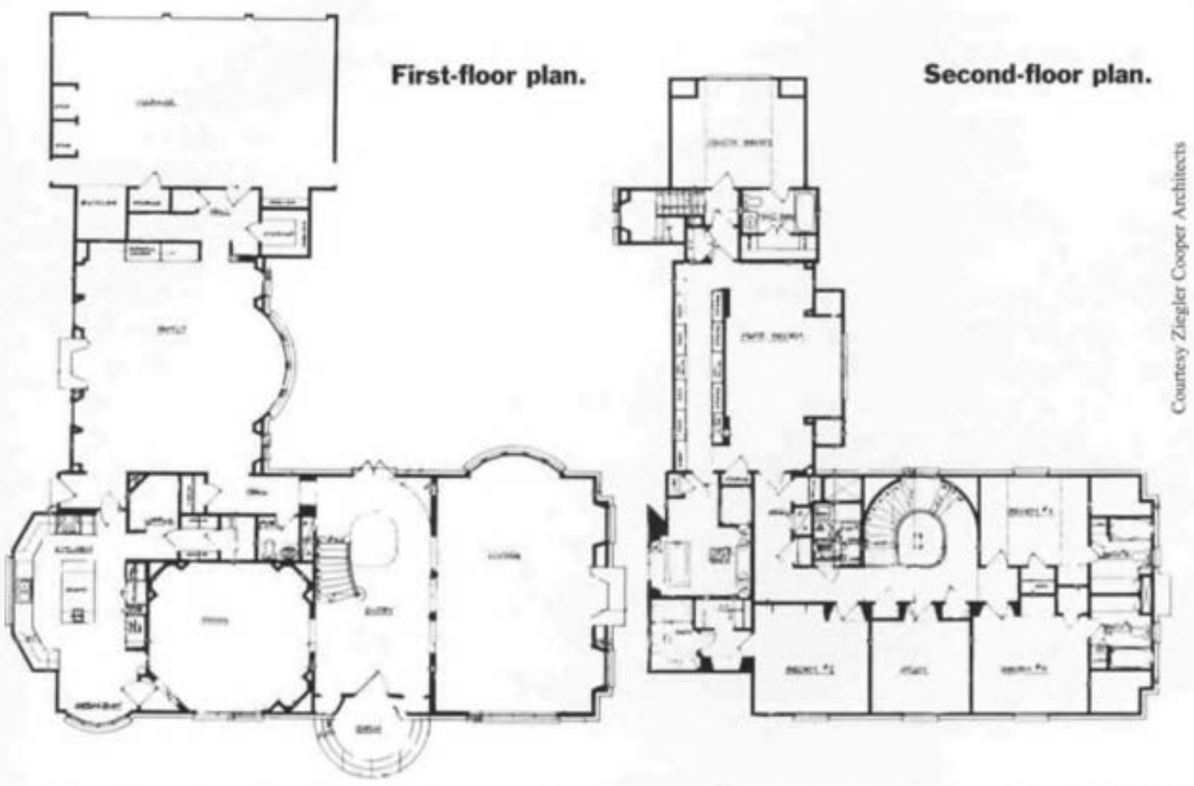
The plan is that of an L around a walled rear garden along Maconda Lane. The orientation of the house is of interest because it places the back yard toward the street, somewhat unusual in enclave-happy Houston. Although the yard is enclosed by a brick wall, orienting the house in this way creates a more open streetscape, in the classic suburban tradition. The plan is organized bilaterally around an entrance and stairhall that visually connect the front door with the back yard. From the stairhall one steps down through a colonnade into the living room. Upstairs, a bedroom or study occupies each gabled bay, creating an unusual intimacy of scale. In fact, one of the most striking attributes of the house is the relative modesty of the bedrooms and baths. Typically, new developer-built Houston houses have huge bathrooms and closets, overloading the second-floor plan (and consequently the massing). This house represents a return, in a positive sense, to prototypes of the late 19th and early 20th centuries that developed along with the suburban movement.

Three spaces in the house are of mid-20th-century origin: the large kitchen, the family room, and the attached garage. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the kitchen and other service spaces were designed for a servant staff and were thus not a major programmatic element. The family room, with bird's-eye maple and white pine paneling, is the most extravagantly finished room in the Ziegler House, and the largest. The family room is driven by program to be not only the largest but, in some ways, the most important room in a house. Yet the ritual living and dining spaces retain their formal and symbolic importance in the plan, creating a real dilemma in the contemporary American house that has persisted since the family room was "invented" in the 1930s.

Much attention was paid to detail in this house. At door and window openings, the gypsum-board corners have been rounded to create the effect of plaster. Floors are made of wide pine boards. The bathrooms have strikingly exuberant tile patterns. Many necessary modern elements have been creatively modified to be consistent with the style, bringing to mind houses by the Houston architect John F. Staub dating from the 1920s and 1930s.

However, it is at the level of detail that the design might also be most seriously challenged. One of the most noteworthy aspects of the houses of such eclectics as Lutyens and his contemporary C. F. A. Voysey was their sheer inventiveness. They used historical precedent as a point of departure, not as a scholarly exercise. Historical models served as a background for invention. This was especially true with regard to the small-scale elements of the design, in the instance of Lutyens the bedroom balcony at Tigbourne, the gutter at El Guadalperal, the gatehouse at the Salutation, the doorbell at Deanery Garden. These invented elements were essential to both Lutyens's and Voysey's architecture. Their idiosyncrasy stands in critical contrast to the avowedly historical forms, tying these works to their own specific culture and time.

The most serious criticism of this project is not directed at the architecture at all, but at the uncritical attitude toward the conventions (architectural and social) of the suburban movement. Beginning with such early examples as John Nash's Regent's Park (London, 1823), the suburb has stood for the creation of neighborhoods of a single economic class, dissociating working and living. The suburban movement has historically embraced a picturesque fantasy about the natural environment (the collective parklike setting) that has conventionalized and destroyed a great deal of the real American landscape. All of these ideas have had serious consequences for the modern city. Ultimately, there is a danger that any architecture, no matter how well intentioned, that does not at least attempt to acknowledge these conflicting aspects of the culture relegates itself to pastiche. ■



First-floor plan.

Second-floor plan.

A Con

Rafael Longoria

AFTER A DECADE OF WORKING IN GRANITE AT HIS STUDIO IN ROCKPORT, TEXAS, JESÚS BAUTISTA MOROLES HAS GAINED WIDESPREAD RECOGNITION AS A SCULPTOR. HE WAS BORN IN CORPUS CHRISTI IN 1950 AND SERVED IN THE U.S. AIR FORCE IN THAILAND. AFTER GRADUATING FROM NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY IN 1978, HE SPENT A YEAR WORKING IN THE QUARRIES OF CARRARA, ITALY.

DURING THE FALL OF 1990 MOROLES HAD HIS FIFTH ONE-MAN EXHIBITION, AT HOUSTON'S DAVIS/MCCLAIN GALLERY. THERE HE CREATED A MYSTERIOUS ENVIRONMENT OF GRANITE PORTALS AND STEPS AS A SETTING FOR HIS GRANITE SCULPTURES. HE IS NOW WORKING ON HIS BIGGEST COMMISSION TO DATE, THE HOUSTON POLICE OFFICERS MEMORIAL, WHICH WILL OCCUPY A PROMINENT SITE ON THE NORTH BANK OF BUFFALO BAYOU JUST WEST OF DOWNTOWN. THE CROSS-SHAPED COMPOSITION OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ZIGGURATS, TO BE COMPLETED IN OCTOBER 1991, PROMISES TO BE ONE OF THE CITY'S MOST SIGNIFICANT PUBLIC MONUMENTS.

RL Thomas McEvilley, in the essay he wrote for the catalogue of your last Houston show,[1] refers to your European sensibilities. Did you change during your time in Italy?

JBM I had an experience in Italy that made me realize life was short and I had done very little. So I needed to get to work.

RL How did this come about?

JBM I was involved in a car wreck and had to be hospitalized. I was not in good shape. But before I left Italy, I made a pilgrimage to the top of Altissimo, where Michelangelo used to hide out from the Pope and get stone for his sculptures. I started at night up a pathway cut from the live marble. It had been polished by the many feet that had walked on it. It was the same polish that bollards get when they have been touched by people for centuries. There was dew, it was wet, it was translucent, it was alive with nature. It had been touched by man but it was still nature.

RL Why did you choose to work in Rockport?

JBM I knew that I could not go to New York because a big studio is not possible in Manhattan. And if I was not going to be in Manhattan I might as well be anywhere. So I just picked a comfortable place. I remember from my childhood playing in the Gulf while my father fished for crabs. I had fond memories of seafood and shrimping, so I picked this little town.

RL You had previously expressed a "burning desire" to build. Can you expand on this?

VERSATION WITH JESUS BAUTISTA MOROLES

JESUS BAUTISTA MOROLES IN HIS ROCKPORT STUDIO, 1990.

Courtesy Davis/McClain Gallery, Houston

JBM Flying in today from Phoenix, I was looking at the mountains and thinking how I want to bore into a mountain and change it inside. In a way my last Houston exhibition was a landscape. I saw it while flying. It had been in the back of my mind for ten years. But now I was able to accumulate all the materials and have the manpower and equipment to do something like that.

RL So the exhibition was conceived not as a display system, but rather as a piece of art?

JBM It was conceived as a whole environment. A continuation of a lot of different things. The work did not change, it was just the way it was presented that changed. People were actually on the granite, not just looking at it, but walking on it. So they really had to experience it.

RL Is this the first time you built an interior environment?

JBM Yes.

RL How do you evaluate this, since you don't have the natural elements to interact with the stone as you do outdoors?

JBM It can go inside or outside. I was just looking at an outdoor place in Arizona for this same environment last night. The desert site is really beautiful, with 20-foot saguaro cactuses and granite boulders all around.

RL It seems that it can be much more powerful outside with the natural elements.

JBM Well, I am going to get to see it that way. Houston was the first stage, and now it is in Los Angeles. The rooms are completely different, though the elements are the same. In the desert it will go through its third phase.

RL This is a good point to talk about the Houston Police Officers Memorial, as a continuation of your interest in creating environments.

JBM The memorial is also a continuation of ideas. I have a picture of a similar piece that I started in 1980 and completed in 1982. It was very early on that I conceived my granite ziggurats, stepped pyramids. The Houston police wanted a memorial, which they thought of as a sculpture or an object. But that is not what I wanted to do. I saw the whole space as a place, and I wanted to go and sculpt the place rather than make a sculpture for it. So I went into the ground and gouged it out. Then I took that earth and built it up. What ended up was the inverted pyramids that go into the ground to create amphitheaters. It is a maze of steps and terraces that moves people around, down, and up.

RL How involved do you plan to be in the building of this piece?

JBM I have been involved in every little step, but we have had consultants on lighting, landscape, drainage, and so on. It will be a collaborative effort to achieve my final design.

RL Will the stone pieces be crafted in your shop and shipped to Houston?

JBM If it costs less, we will do it somewhere else and not tie up my shop for something that I consider almost to be mundane. Fabrication of flat thermal-finish slabs with a tolerance of so-and-so doesn't interest me. But if it comes down to it, I am set up to do it. I would rather do the parts that have some kind of detailing.

RL Your fountain [at the Albuquerque Museum of Art] relies heavily on dramatic lighting to create a magical environment. Is lighting going to be crucial on this project?

JBM The piece in Albuquerque is being taken down and moved to the front of the museum. And we are doing an arroyo that feeds it. The landscaped edge of it will be similar to the environment in the Davis/McClain exhibition. So it is going to change, but lighting will still be very important. And lighting on this project [the police memorial] is very critical. Every situation is very, very different and presents a multitude of problems. And a lot of them are not the most ideal. We have some units ready to go out there, and I will take some granite to the site and try different plans for the lighting.

RL Did the chosen site, at the edge of the bayou, have any influence on your design?

JBM Yes. Peter Marzio [director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston] showed me the site without my even knowing anything about the project. He said, "I want to show you something." We looked over the bank, and walked around the site, and I had the feeling that this had to be the best site in Houston. I still have the feeling that this is a crucial, pivotal point in the bayou, visible from Memorial, from the air, and from downtown buildings. It can be very strong.

RL How about the project's close resemblance to pre-Hispanic pyramids, specifically El Castillo at Chichén Itzá?

JBM I have never been there. I have never been to Egypt or Indonesia or Meso-America, where these cultures built pyramids. When I started to carve the landscape, it was like carving clay. I gouged out the earth, and built it up like a sand castle. To get people to go down into it I had to make stairs. It would be large at the bottom and become smaller as it spiraled up like the Tower of Babel. Stone has its own integrity. To me there are certain shapes that come out in stone that are inherent in stone. The stone always wants to be that.

RL Like Louis Kahn's bricks?

JBM I feel that the stone has always wanted to be lintels, and wants to be stairs, and wants to lead you around . . . and be walls, and statues, and monuments.

RL In the small ziggurat sculpture that you did before this commission, the idea of a universal archetype is more readily apparent. I think the four symmetrical stairs of the police memorial depart from the universal archetype and start resembling a Mayan pyramid.

JBM If you look closely, you will realize that the stairs don't simply go up and down. If you climb one stair, you end up nowhere. You have to walk around until you come to the next and then go up: you don't go straight up. At Chichén Itzá you go straight up, which is logical, but what I wanted was to create a maze, and not have you go up so quickly.

RL You must be tired of people constantly wanting to find a Meso-American connection in your work.

JBM Early on, I published a book that doesn't have any words, which is very Japanese. I have never been to Japan and I have no Japanese experience or background. But the work has a feeling that really relates to the sensibilities of the Japanese, very simple. My work is classical, although abstract. I want it to be perceived as international.

RL So you would agree that your work is archetypal, and that its relation to pre-Hispanic art comes from the inherent nature of building with stone?

JBM Before Mexico, there were stepped pyramids in Egypt.

RL Have you ever been interested in architecture?

JBM I love architecture. I feel like a frustrated architect because I have been building all my life. When I was nine or ten years old, I was already five foot eleven. I would go in the summers and work with my uncle in Rockport building seawalls. He was a master mason from Mexico. The two of us could put a house up in a day an a half – all the block walls. I was his assistant. I would mix the mortar and hand him the blocks. So early on I felt that construction was solid and real. To me, concrete and tile and concrete blocks are very real. Wood is not a building material that will be around for a long time.

RL Don't you think there is a cultural preference for more lasting materials? Mexicans usually look down on wood houses.

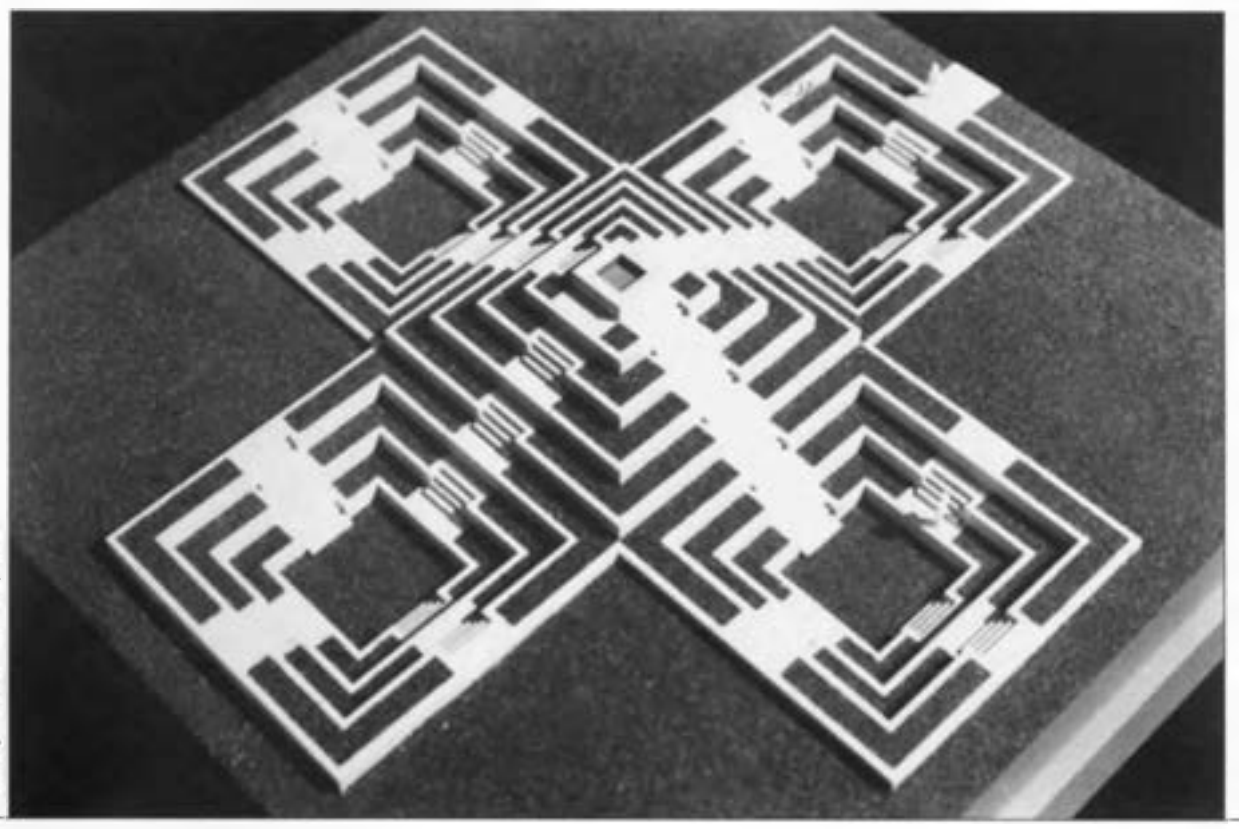
JBM I do! I have been attracted by the permanence of granite from early on.

RL Are there any specific architects that you admire?

JBM My favorite, without knowing much about him, is Luís Barragán. I like his sense of mass and color. Some of his houses are very tied to their environment. The Satélite Towers in Mexico City are very strong.

RL Have you ever experimented with color?

JBM Granite has its own color. I do tend to go towards the neutral colors and the "unbusy" granites. I stay with browns and grays, but I really relate to the colors Barragán uses – Mediterranean colors, Mexican coastal colors. ■



Courtesy Davis/McClain Gallery, Houston

HOUSTON POLICE OFFICERS MEMORIAL, MODEL, 1990, JESUS BAUTISTA MOROLES, SCULPTOR.

Notes

1 Thomas McEvilley, "At the Gateway: Jesús Bautista Moroles," in the exhibition catalogue *Jesús Bautista Moroles: Granite Sculpture* (Davis/McClain Galleries, Fall 1990).

Lines of Site

Olive Hershey

***Passage Inachevé*, 1990, Linnea Glatt and Frances Merritt Thompson, sculptors.**

Four p.m., running east along the jogging trail on the south side of Memorial Drive:

I trot under the Waugh Drive bridge, step off the concrete and onto the fine broad swale beside a gentle arc of Buffalo Bayou. Towers of crystal gleam silver, green, and rose in the lowering sun. In the foreground the trail falls to a rustic bridge, rises again, and falls once more toward the city. Along this stretch of green space the fortunate runner evades the ennui of jogging in a city with almost no grade changes. Seeing is best here as well, for the eye can make a long sweep on the Buffalo Bayou Parkway; there is little to impede its play.

Not that there's nothing to look at as I pass. A gray-green scrim of willow branches and vines veils the bayou's edge; a fitness station of wood and plastic exhorts me to perform deep knee bends; and the totemic columns of the Memorial Drive bridge loom as stark and white as the ruined rice dryer high above. Hearing my footfalls bouncing off

the bridge, I wonder where the naked man is today, the one I saw here a year ago taking his ease in the deep shadows; and where is the remarkable tenor voice singing Puccini that stopped me in my tracks under this same bridge?

My fondness for this five-mile loop, its voices and vistas, has evolved into a mission. Every time I run out from under that bridge and onto the four-acre meadow that borders the southeast side of Glenwood Cemetery, I check for surveyors' stakes like the ones I pulled out and threw into the bushes almost exactly a year ago. Since there are no stakes today I quicken my pace, admiring the shiny black streak my dog Bear makes galloping against the wall of leafless trees a hundred yards away. Bear, who is tracking a rabbit, is swallowed up in the tangled brush, and as he is lost to view, still barking, I am filled with an acute sense of the freedom this bayou trail affords me, of how fortunate I am to carry through that spaciousness the illusion that I might run, and see, forever.

That this long line of sight might be vital to Houstonians, too long in city pent, ought not to need restating. However, the recent acceptance of two new sculptures – *Passage Inachevé* by Linnea Glatt and Frances Merritt Thompson, donated to the city by the Texas Chapter of the Committee for the French Revolution, and the Houston Police Officers Memorial – raises once again the dilemma of art versus open space in a city with deplorably few acres of usable and attractive space available.

In the last long meadow before the Sabine Street bridge lies *Passage Inachevé*, a steel sculpture shaped like a house straddling the jogging trail. Arrested by this strange object, I slow to a walk, observe how at a certain distance its girders and open eaves visually decapitate downtown skyscrapers as nearly as a guillotine. Walking into the piece, I sit on one of the eight concrete cubes inside, wondering what kind of ritual could be performed here. A band might stand on the cubes to play, a group of poets might read; but the sculpture looks so much like a burned-out structure that one wonders.

I try walking around the sculpture, looking through its grid at bayou, willows, skyscrapers, clouds, and my strongest impression is of a barrier interposing itself, insisting on making its statement. Although I do not pretend to criticize the work as art, I resent this intrusion, preferring the subtler, gentler narrative the curve of the bank makes and the lyrical cadence of cypress and maple beside the wooden bridge to the east. As I walk past the sculpture up the rising trail to Sabine Street, I have to wonder: what is it about our psyche that demands that all spaces be filled with objects, all silences with sound?

I am not arguing against placing art in public spaces, only suggesting that some of our scarce greenbelt land is better left uncluttered. The concept of preserving open space does not appear to be one of the priorities of the Municipal Arts Commission, which reviews proposals of groups and individuals who wish to donate art to the city. The criteria most often cited in a recent meeting of the commission were safety, durability, and ease of maintenance. Sue Rowan Pittman, chairman of the commission, had this to say about the review process: "The main point is to cause political people not to deal with the good-bad-obscene question." Of Houston's parks, Mrs. Pittman said: "They're not like parks in the Northeast. People up there can use their parks year round."

In the mid-1970s, Charles Tapley and Jerry Lunow drew extensive plans for the Buffalo Bayou Parkway that called for leaving the land in a relatively natural state from Shepherd to Sabine Street. According to Tapley, his plan was later scrapped by the Whitmire administration and another similar plan adopted. If commemorative art is to be placed along this stretch of the bayou, there is an urgent need for an integrated process of review, site selection, and landscaping.

"I think the time will come when people are going to laugh at the silly postage-stamp approach to public art we have in this city," Tapley says. There seems to be little cooperation between donors, artists, landscape architects, and the city. Objects simply appear one day as if dropped from the sky.

On my way west I pass Henry Moore's bronze sculpture, *Large Spindle Piece*, solitary on a knoll overlooking the site of the new Jesús Bautista Moroles sculpture on the opposite side of Memorial. The Knox Foundation had a hand in raising funds for both pieces, and the foundation's representative, Britt Davis, told me that Moore consulted extensively with the city before the site was chosen. On the other hand, the site for the Moroles piece, a memorial to Houston policemen killed in the line of duty, was chosen four years ago, before the artist was selected. Thus both pieces might be said to be site related, although not site specific. Neither qualifies as "plop art," a term used by artist Jack Massing to describe works that are "plopped" down anywhere. "I think in Moroles's piece the site determined a lot," Massing says.

The stepped-pyramid shape of Moroles's pink granite work could hardly be less obtrusive in the landscape. In fact, Thomas McEvilley refers to the "humility" of its low rise above ground level. Although the center portion of the piece will rise vertically to a modest 12 feet, the four outer squares of the mandala will descend the same depth into the earth. According to Britt Davis, the Harris County Flood Control District required that the total mass introduced into the site not exceed the amount excavated. The equation is evocative, denoting sensitivity to the site as well as concern for the dignity and authority the artist wants to express.

I am standing on the curb looking down on the broad, green four-acre plain where the mandala shape of Moroles's memorial is marked off with white plastic pipes. The model I saw at Davis-McClain Gallery has an unassuming dignity, a gravity without heaviness. Above all, the piece will not intrude between the viewer at the curb and the arc of magnolias and crape myrtles surrounding the sculpture and delineating a meditative space around it. As I take in this spaciousness I am in some way made more spacious. The January sun is warm on my face and in the winter grass crickets are chirping. Million of spiderwebs run between the grasses. In my meadow on the far side of the bayou no art has yet appeared. In the barren tracery of distant trees there is a purity and peace unequalled by any sculpture, and I think of what Guy Hagstette, one of the architects of Sesquicentennial Park, said to me the other day. "People are losing the capacity to be alone with themselves. That's part of the reason they want to put things in spaces. They don't value their own emptiness." ■

Single-family infill housing being built on Lyons Avenue by the Fifth Ward Housing Corporation, a community development corporation.

The Rise of the Community Development Corporations

John Rogers

During the 1980s, while most of the nation was undergoing a construction boom of unprecedented proportion, Houston was experiencing declining real estate values, bankruptcies, and economic stagnation. Nowhere was the impact of this depression felt more severely than in the city's low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. It was here that loss of jobs resulted in homelessness, overcrowding, and deterioration of already marginal housing stock. Meanwhile, loss of revenue by neighborhood services and retail businesses led to further decline in the local economies of these areas.

Houston's apparent revival of prosperity tends to be limited to the city's more affluent districts; there is little evidence of a recovery in African-American, Hispanic, and other low-income neighborhoods. However, despite the continued reluctance of local developers to risk projects in such areas as Fifth Ward, Denver Harbor, or Acres Homes, there is now cause for optimism. The prospects for new development in these neighborhoods are greater than at any other time in the recent past. One reason is the arrival of a new phenomenon in Houston: the community development corporation (CDC).

CDCs are community-based, nonprofit, tax-exempt corporations that may engage in a variety of activities but whose focus is primarily the development of real estate within their stated target neighborhoods. The typical CDC has a board of 10 to 20 directors representing the community's various residential, commercial, civic, and institutional interests. In many respects CDCs function like private developers. However, unlike private developers, CDCs are not driven exclusively by the profit motive. Instead they sacrifice profit in favor of other objectives defined by their constituent neighborhoods.

Since the mid-1960s, CDCs have been active in efforts to redevelop inner-city neighborhoods in many Northeastern and Midwestern cities. Founded in response to the failure of the urban renewal approach of the 1950s and 1960s, CDCs build development capacity within neighborhoods requiring revitalization. In fact, this is achieved by building partnerships with other nonprofit and public agencies, financial institutions, and even private developers.

Over the past two years, at least ten CDCs have been formed in various Houston neighborhoods. Although that is a relatively small number (Chicago has more than 100), there is significant support behind the fledgling groups. The Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), working in conjunction with its local affiliate, the Houston Committee for Private Sector Initiatives (PSI), has committed funds and staff to the organization and training of several new CDC boards during the past year through the Houston Development Team. Modeled after a successful LISC program in the Monongahela Valley suburbs of Pittsburgh, the PSI development team has selected several neighborhoods within which to recruit boards of directors, to whom legal, design, and organizational assistance have been provided.

In addition to the Houston Development Team, support has also been made available to some CDCs by the United Way. Through New Foundations, a pilot program now under way in Houston and four other U.S. cities, the United Way has committed multi-year operating funds, as well as technical assistance, to three local CDCs. These critical funds have enabled CDCs in Fifth Ward and the East End to hire full-time staff members and achieve a higher degree of organizational stability than would otherwise be possible. A third group, the Amoco Foundation, set up shop in Houston several months ago following successful efforts to assist CDCs in other cities. Amoco provides grants to fund feasibility studies, land acquisition, and other programs.

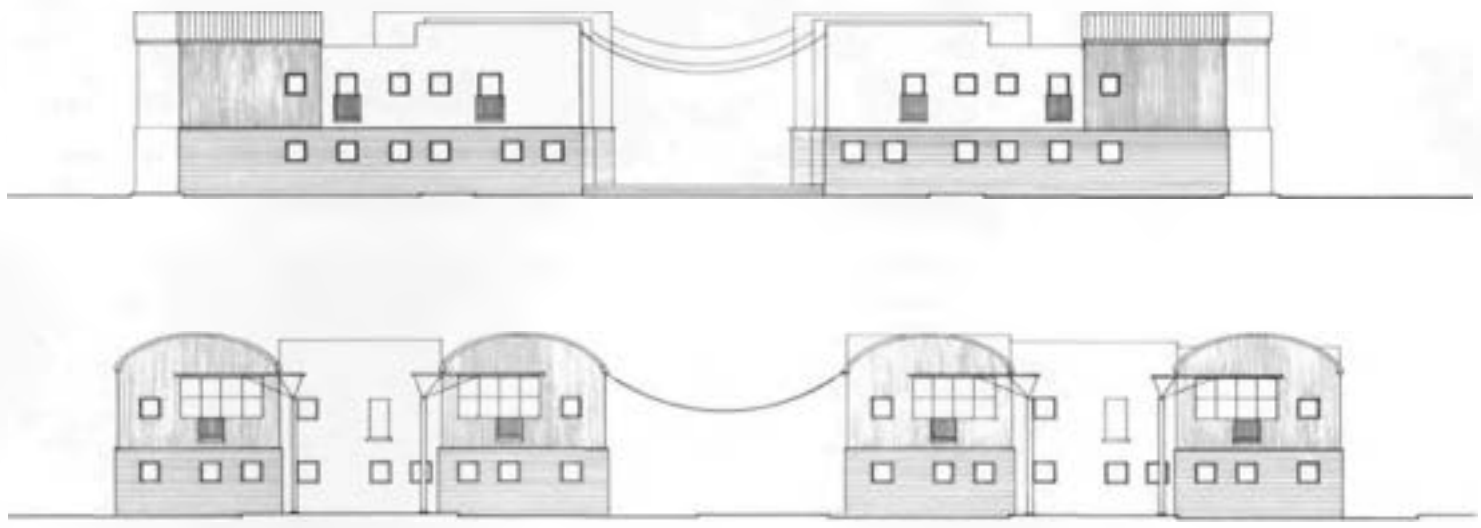
The majority of Houston's CDCs are focusing their efforts on the production of affordable housing. For instance, on 12 February the Fifth Ward Housing Corporation commenced construction of single-family houses along Lyons Avenue. Nearby, the Fifth Ward Redevelopment Corporation's program of building new, single-family houses (designed by EDI) on infill lots has received a financial commitment in excess of $300,000 for "soft" second mortgages from the city of Houston. Meanwhile, in the East End, the Association for the Advancement of Mexican-Americans CDC will soon begin construction of the first phase of what will ultimately be a 65-unit apartment complex designed by Cisneros & Partners. Nearby, on a site across I-45 from the University of Houston, the Greater Eastwood CDC is working out the financing of a 17-unit townhouse project designed by Ray Bailey Architects. Similarly, groups in the Heights, Acres Homes, and elsewhere are studying the feasibility of new housing in their own neighborhoods.

CDCs are engaged in other work in addition to housing. The Acres Homes CDC has received a commitment from the city to install new streetlighting in strategic portions of that neighborhood. In Second Ward, a CDC is planning a new day-care center as its first major project. And in what must surely be a necessary step in attracting scarce investment dollars, CDCs in the East End and Fifth Ward are preparing neighborhood redevelopment plans with the assistance of Ray Bailey Architects and EDI.

The typical CDC project relies upon a variety of funding sources. It is the belief of LISC staff members and others committed to the CDC approach that matching funding from foundations with market-rate bank financing and public sector funds gives the city and the financial institution a stake in the outcome of the project. In theory, vested interest in the project's success translates into increased capital improvements by the city and to further commitments by the bank, if for no other reason than to protect the initial investment.

Houston's banking community has expressed great interest in loaning money to CDCs, due in no small measure to the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA). Enacted by Congress in the late 1970s, the CRA requires banks to reinvest a portion of their assets in moderate-income communities. The CRA had little impact on Texas's local lending practices until revisions to the law were enacted last year requiring public disclosure of compliance. Although other mechanisms exist through which banks may reinvest in communities, a number of local banks, including United Savings, First

(continued on page 12)



Affordable housing planned by the Association for the Advancement of Mexican-Americans CDC: Magnolia Residential Housing Project 1 (first phase), 73rd & Sherman, Cisneros & Partners, architects, Dino Ponce, delineator.

Above: Magnolia Residential Housing, first-floor plan of residential unit.

Left: Magnolia Residential Housing, Cisneros & Partners, architects.

(continued from page 11)
Gibraltar, Texas Commerce Bank, and Bank One, Texas, have been aggressively pursuing CDC deals.

However, the economics of most CDC projects dictate additional financial participation by the public sector. Last summer, at the urging of a consortium of CDCs, the Houston City Council approved spending up to $1,000,000 in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to provide "forgivable" second mortgages to selected CDC housing projects in order to make them more affordable to low-income families. The logic behind such a spending program is that it leverages each dollar of CDBG funds into an additional two to four dollars of private investment. Thus, by combining public- and private-sector funding in the same project, the city can stretch its CDBG monies further. By contrast, the notorious city-sponsored Palm Center and Mercado del Sol projects were funded exclusively through CDBG funds, investments that were lost when these projects failed financially.

Although the city's participation in the CDC process is essential, there are as yet many unanswered questions with regard to the soft-second mortgage program. Unlike a private bank's loan committee, the request for proposal (RFP) procedure now being used by the city's Department of Housing and Community Development forces CDCs to adjust their project timetables radically to conform to the release dates and lengthy review process of the RFPs. Furthermore, the competitive nature of the review process may be vulnerable to politically motivated manipulation through the selection of reviewers. As a consequence of the RFP process, several CDC projects currently in the works have experienced costly delays that might have been avoided through streamlined funding procedures.

To date, neither the political cohesiveness nor the effectiveness of the CDCs has been tested in Houston. Yet the future success of any individual CDC will likely depend on their collective ability to influence the disposition of the city's chronically underutilized and mismanaged CDBG funds, as well as the RFP process itself. [*Editor's note: On April 8, Paula Phillips, head of the city's Department of Housing and Community Development, which administers CDBG funds, resigned under pressure.*]

Currently, members of several area CDCs are active in Advocates for Housing, a group formed last year by a coalition of organizations concerned with affordable-housing issues. If Advocates for Housing is to play a decisive role in promoting the work of the CDCs, it will mean tangling with the CDBG issue, a perennial embarrassment to the Whitmire administration.

Recent national developments forecast increasing prominence for CDCs. In an effort to reform funding programs of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which were the objects of blatant corruption during the Reagan administration, the Affordable Housing Act of 1990 mandates that specific percentages of budgeted funds be reserved for use by CDCs alone. Consequently, Houston's ability to attract HUD funds will be dependent to some degree on the vitality of its CDCs. It would therefore appear to be in the city administration's best interest to support the CDC movement.

In the Bronx, CDCs rehabilitate approximately 1,500 housing units annually. Houston has a long way to go if it is to match that kind of performance. It is unlikely that CDCs alone can solve the dual problems of revitalizing inner-city neighborhoods and producing enough units of affordable housing to go around. However, they have the potential to build something that no other source of urban renewal can replicate, the capacity within a neighborhood to articulate needs, and, more importantly, the political and economic wherewithal to address those needs.

The example of the Monongahela Valley CDCs is instructive in this regard. Though it took two tempestuous years to get their first projects underway, within two more years the numerous CDCs in the small suburban Rust Belt towns that stretch along the river valley from Pittsburgh were flourishing. They have formed a coalition, have established strong banking relationships, and have developed or are currently developing housing, commercial structures, a business incubator, a recycling plant, and even a steel museum (with the cooperation and financial support of the National Parks Service), among other projects. Their work demonstrates that CDCs can achieve results. Perhaps CDCs will work in Houston, too. ■

Habitat for Humanity Houses Houstonians

Above and left: **UH students and a future homeowner work on a Fifth Ward project for Houston Habitat.**

Habitat for Humanity was founded in 1976 by Millard and Linda Fuller as a nonprofit, nondenominational Christian organization. Its mission is "to eliminate poverty housing and homelessness from the face of the earth by building basic adequate housing." While this may be a lofty goal, the organization is making definite progress. More than 500 active projects in the U.S., Canada, and 26 developing countries are building houses, at a rate of four a day. Thousands of low-income families are benefiting from these efforts.

The basic concept of Habitat is to use donated funds and materials together with volunteer labor to construct quality homes. Habitat is not a mere "hand-out" program. It emphasizes involvement of the future homeowners, who purchase their homes with a down payment of 500 hours of "sweat equity" and a small amount of cash and pay back a no-interest mortgage, with payments carefully matched to their ability to pay. The payments in turn finance new Habitat housing starts. By requiring these commitments, Habitat not only furnishes shelter but also restores dignity, motivation, and a sense of responsibility. Continued contact with the residents ensures that the organization's efforts are not simply a Band-Aid solution but effect permanent changes in people's lives.

Houston Habitat for Humanity, the local affiliate, was founded three years ago and has provided 15 Habitat houses housing a total of 70 people. As the membership grows and the organization strengthens, the number of houses completed annually increases: 9 houses were provided in 1990, and 24 are projected for this year. During 1991, the Houston chapter hopes to increase the involvement of the architectural community. An architectural committee has been set up to recruit and involve more professionals and to develop new housing prototypes and building techniques.

UH Habitat, a student chapter, was formed in fall 1989 at the University of Houston's College of Architecture. Sharing the goals of the parent organization, it also provides members with an opportunity to gain hands-on construction experience. Students routinely are sent to work on Houston Habitat projects and are raising funds to sponsor a UH Habitat house. Their sense of social responsibility has increased along with their understanding of how a wood frame building is put together – qualities that will serve them well in their professional architectural careers.

Deborah Arbes

For more information about Habitat for Humanity:

Habitat For Humanity International
Habitat and Church Streets
Americus, Georgia 31709-3498
(912) 924-3498

Houston Habitat for Humanity
P. O. Box 270411
Houston, Texas 77277-0411
(713) 521-2816

UH Habitat
University of Houston College of Architecture
Houston, Texas 77204-4431
(713) 749-1181

Two of 16 Habitat houses on Raleigh Street in Fifth Ward.

STRADANUS,
AN ARTIST IN HIS
STUDIO WITH
APPRENTICES

"A FASCINATING DISPLAY
OF THE EQUIPMENT
AND ACTIVITIES OF A
FLOURISHING STUDIO."

"Braque divides his studio into separate areas, like the stage of the mystery dramas in the Middle Ages. . . . On several easels, I saw different canvases simultaneously in progress. They looked like parts of the studio, the studio like parts of the paintings. There was no divorce."

THE ARTIST'S STUDIO

Deborah and David Brauer

Photographs by Paul Hester

The evolution of the artist's studio from artisan's workshop to private space has paralleled the change in the function and nature of art in the Western world. Workshops from antiquity to the 18th century produced "public" art – historical and religious painting and public monuments – while art since the mid-19th century has expressed a more interior, personal vision that is manifested in the increasingly private and intimate character of the artist's studio.

This emphasis on privacy determines the nature of most artists' studios today, including the Houston spaces illustrated on the pages that follow. Many of these spaces function as mirrors, reflecting the artist's vision and excluding the surrounding environment. In others the window is critical, providing a controlled vantage point and light.

Most of the studios presented here are owned by the artists, each of whom has either altered an existing structure or designed and built new space.

"REMBRANDT WAS AN AVID COLLECTOR AND CONNOISSEUR OF FINE ANTIQUES AND OBJECTS. IN MANY SELF-PORTRAITS HE IS SEEN WEARING OR USING SOME OF HIS ACQUISITIONS."

REMBRANDT, THE ARTIST IN HIS STUDIO

"THE GREAT STUDIO IN RUBENS' HOUSE IN ANTWERP; TODAY IT IS A MUSEUM, BUT IT ONCE ECHOED TO THE VOICES OF THE MASTER AND HIS ASSISTANTS WORKING IN FEVERISH ACTIVITY."

"Rubens established his studio in the courtyard of his Antwerp home. The exterior of the studio was decorated ornately in the Italian manner with a baroque triumphal arch adjoining the garden."

All photographs and quotations on this page are taken from *The Studio and the Artist*, by Francis Kelly (Newton Abbot, England: David & Charles, 1974).

"*. . . Our Studio . . . a place to live work and play . . . A great place to enjoy a sunny day, and give 110% to our art effort . . . Hope the chips fall in the right place . . . drop on by if you're in the neighborhood – have some ice-T and a nice chat.*"

THE ARTE GUISE (MICHAEL GALBRETH AND JACK MASSING) MULTIMEDIA ARTISTS THE HEIGHTS

"*Although my studio is somewhat inconvenient and not the place I would have thought I'd make for myself, I like living and working in it and looking out of it. I evidently need, or accept, a certain overlap of order and disorder.*"

ROBIN UTTERBACK, PAINTER MONTROSE

"*Engineered by Robert Gilchrist. Engineer and I poured piers. My responsibility . . . was to erect sills, floor joists and add plywood flooring. I acted as contractor. . . . Erected by 30 of my friends at 7:30 a.m. on April 21–22, 1990. Nicknamed Brokerwood. 24' wide x 50' long and 22' high.*"

KARIN BROKER, DRAFTSMAN
WEST END

"*My studio is a very pri in order that I feel free of doing. This has been wanted to work and be continue to actively inf*

CHARLES SCHORRE
PAINTER, PHOTOGRA
THE VILLAGE

HOUSTON

"*I have built and equipped this studio to allow me to produce works in almost any medium and scale without physical or technical limitations. This studio is designed and built for these freedoms.*"

ROBERT BOURDON, SCULPTOR
WEST END

STUDIOS

"My studio functions as my 'hideout.' It has a secluded quality and during the day is filled with natural light."

ARTHUR TURNER
WATERCOLORIST
WOODLAND HEIGHTS

ie work-place-space . . . where I am grounded – ado anything I could ever imagine I was incapable n locus for over 20 years and never have I not ventive to signals and nuances I have received that n my life and work."

HER

"I built my studio with windows to the garden so that I could always see it. It's like a painting; once you have painted it you must look at it many times to know it. It is also a personal landscape that reflects my own change and growth. Even when things die, new things begin to live."

MALINDA BEEMAN, PAINTER, PRINTMAKER
THE HEIGHTS

"Security and maximum wall space determined that all the windows be near the cornice area. I actually like the enclosed, without-a-view space for a studio, with only a glimpse outside of the sky. For me, the studio is a retreat, a very private space and calming, but one that constantly changes according to the works in progress. The architecture doesn't impose – I like that."

DEREK BOSHIER, PAINTER
THE HEIGHTS

ForeCite

Getting Real in the Nineties

Deborah Morris

Too much architecture today is preoccupied with a self-referential discourse and a self-conscious dialogue with high culture. It is cocktail-party architecture – noisy, posturing, trying to make an impression, to stand out, to be talked about, to be desperately interesting. Such architecture is clever architecture, not wise architecture. It aggrandizes the designer and the client, but has lost touch with what architecture is all about: creating a vital, humane habitat that artfully expresses the conditions of its time and place and the dreams of its people.

Anne Whiston Spirn

© 1991 Paul Hester, Houston

We are faced today with a number of grim realities. They include but are by no means limited to the following:

☛ **Toxic air and water.** Houston claims the second most polluted air in the nation.

☛ **Rapidly diminishing natural resources.** The average prediction for the depletion of national oil reserves is the year 2020, with an additional two or three decades granted for world reserves.[1]

☛ **Tens of thousands of homeless in our streets.** It is estimated that in Houston and Harris County, on any given night, 10,000 people sleep in shelters, public places, and abandoned buildings.[2]

☛ **Substandard and insufficient housing.** While 480,000 Houstonians live below the poverty level, the city offers the lowest number of public housing units per capita of the 25 largest cities in the United States.[3]

☛ **Fragmentation and decay of low- and middle-income neighborhoods.** In a paper titled "The Environmental Destruction of Houston," Jack Matson, professor of environmental engineering at the University of Houston, cites additional Houston liabilities: "Flooding, subsidence, impending water shortages, toxic contamination of the Ship Channel and Galveston Bay, poisoned fish and aquatic life, and abandoned hazardous waste sites freckling the landscape."[4]

These problems pose a formidable challenge to the environmental professions. They are issues that must be addressed in formulating an architecture that can respond effectively to environmental conditions and social needs as we approach the millennium. Yet current thought and practice in architecture espouse a far less integrated system of values. Much contemporary architectural theory and criticism is configured within a framework of purely formal and stylistic issues and denies more compelling priorities, the complexity of contemporary programs, and the potential for architecture to represent more than single-issue propositions. Moreover, this discourse, bloated by philosophical projection, is frequently couched in such obscure and arcane language as to render it virtually inaccessible to all but a well-informed elite – which is the more to be regretted, since it stands unchallenged by many who would ultimately be the recipients of its products.

Peter Eisenman's departure from anthropomorphism in order to propose an anticlassical, antiheroic "weak form" architecture can serve as one example. Such internalized, hermetic references threaten discourse itself, the very instrument of political and cultural exchange, and further enfeeble the tenuous affiliations among theorists, practitioners, and the communities they serve. Edward W. Said writes of a similar dilemma in the human sciences, the need for a "humanistic antidote to what one discovers, say among sociologists, philosophers and so-called policy scientists who speak only to and for each other in a language oblivious to everything but a well-guarded, constantly shrinking fiefdom forbidden to the uninitiated."[5]

Another wrench in the mechanism is the popular perception that redressing these problems is the province of someone other than ourselves: despite evidence to the contrary, we persist in believing that the specialists upon whom we confer this mandate will act prudently. This tendency to relinquish responsibility is due in part to the sheer magnitude of the issues and a contingent sense of helplessness in the face of impenetrable bureaucracies, and the subsequent need to retreat, to create safe distance between oneself and the looming crises. Less than a year ago, National Public Radio broadcast results of a nationwide air quality awareness survey. More than half of the individuals polled, including residents of such large cities as Houston and New York, acknowledged serious national and global air pollution but believed, by and large, that the air they breathed on a daily basis was wholesome enough. This conclusion indicates an appraisal of the problem in purely abstract terms, and a failure to accept and confront it in its phenomenal manifestations. On another front, there is enormous, albeit understandable, resistance to this confrontation. For many in Houston – particularly the development communities and petrochemical industry, which virtually run the city – confrontation and resolution represent a conspicuous conflict of interest.

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National living standards are measured in terms of commodities bought and sold. It follows, then, that the relative ability to purchase commodities should be taken as an adequate measure of quality of life. Economic viability, the natural priority of such valuation, is established as a national objective, outstripping and in many cases subverting more public-spirited social, cultural, and ecological considerations. The persistence of this standard is witnessed within these spheres in Houston, showing up in situations such as the lingering Fourth Ward imbroglio. (See "Fourth Ward and the Siege of Allen Parkway Village," in this issue and Fall 1990.)

In his critique of Houston's environment, Jack Matson indicts commercial and residential development that proceeds "on flood plains, over wetland areas, in areas of subsidence"; the public's reluctance to address environmental problems before they have reached disastrous proportions; voter antipathy to taxes; and a pervasive "frontier mentality" that views the environment as something to exploit. His implication is that the public influences that could counterbalance these forces have been discouraged and manipulated by commercial interests.[6] The result is the abrogation of any long-term project of reform for the option of short-term gain.

But recent studies indicate that individuals are becoming increasingly aware of the profound costs of conspicuous energy consumption, the degradation of our natural environment, and the excesses of unrestrained commercial development. The Houston Area Survey, conducted annually over the past decade by Stephen Klineberg, professor of sociology at Rice University, suggests that the number of enlightened and concerned citizens is growing. This body of individuals is likely to be critical of current practices and receptive to architectural and urban design propositions that respond to a broad range of environmental issues and social concerns.

The challenges now facing the architectural community are manifold. Stock, formulaic programs and packaged, predictable responses fail to meet these challenges. Stylistic developments conceived outside of social and environmental exigency have little credibility beyond their formal contributions. A growing population of better informed and more influential clients will demand new strategies expressing new values from their architects, planners, and public officials.

The potential of these strategies inevitably raises questions about influence, role, and authority within the architectural profession. It is tempting to dismiss this as outside the designer's jurisdiction. But if architecture is to remain a viable profession in the 21st century it must become more than a "powerful tool of adaptation," as Anne Whiston Spirn suggests.[7] It must become an instrument of change, speaking with intelligence and imagination to an emerging collective sense of propriety and challenging existing models of development and the assumptions with which many of us still live today, in resignation and compliance. ■

Notes

1 Jan Lundberg, *Beyond Oil: The Threat to Food and Fuel in the Coming Decades* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger, 1986).

2 "Addressing the Problem of Homelessness in Houston and Harris County," a report prepared for a steering committee of the Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County, Stephen Klineberg et al., 8 December 1989.

3 Ibid.

4 Jack V. Matson, "The Environmental Destruction of Houston," a paper presented at the American Society for Environmental History conference "The Environment and the Mechanized World," 28 February – 3 March 1991 at the University of Houston.

5 Edward W. Said, "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community," in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983).

6 See note 4.

7 Anne Whiston Spirn, "Toward a Unified Vision," *Landscape Architecture*, August 1990.

The exterior is the result of an interior.

Le Corbusier, Towards a New Architecture

Johannes Birringer

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

Below: A scene from *Invisible Cities*, 1989, Lawndale Art and Performance Center.

Hans Staartjes

I had meant to write about two performance-exhibitions, *Invisible Cities* (1989) and *Ad Mortem* (1990), which I staged at two alternative art galleries in Houston after having moved to the city in 1987.[1] Both works were perceived as performance art, and the audiences seemed to accept the premise that the scenographies I built did not reproduce the viewing conditions of modern "realist" theater but rather translated the space of visibility itself into decentered, multiperspectival, and simultaneous processes of projection (multiscreen, video and film images), sound (prerecorded and live), physical movement, and fragmented narrative.

The spatial and temporal dispositions of the intermedia performances resulted from questions that my collaborators and I had posed during our research. In describing this research as a kind of ethnography of social space, I want to emphasize that we were less interested in the architecture of Houston than in our psychopolitical relationships to the environment and its effects on our bodies and our sense of identity. In other words, both works *performed* a relationship to the city in which the architecture and construction of social space are themselves neither stable nor given but are continuously redefined by our variously experienced and imagined perceptions of urban realities. As in performance, my writing here cannot speak from the position of architecture and its theory and practice. Rather, it approaches the other side of the social and economic conditions within which the interplay of architecture and experience must be reimagined and our ideological environment reinterpreted.

Invisible Cities was a response to the persistent question that arises from our automobilized experience of space in Houston: to what extent does the constant circulation of traffic correspond to a transitory sense of place and identity – a sense heightened by the symbolic blindness of the downtown towers, which epitomize the mythic self-consciousness of an expanding boomtown?

With economic expectations collapsed and flattened out in the recurring sameness of an endless suburban sprawl, we surmised that mobility itself was blind to the increasing dissolution of all sense of historical connectedness to a memorable past. This sense of disconnection perhaps reflected an inchoate, equally mythic belief in renewable space and in a renewable future unburdened by the failure of earlier promises of limitless economic growth. The indifference of Houston's suburban sprawl thus seemed to mirror the repression of material differences that we found in the unregulated delirium of steel and glass skylining the inner city. The skyline has become a cherished backdrop for commercial film productions and TV advertising spots. The delirium, however, is mostly an effect of downtown architectural façades that hide another reality: the façades began to appear less glamorous and more frightening when we looked at urban development from the perspective of racially segregated and underprivileged communities.

A scene entitled "Blind City" dramatized the recognition of racial segregation by depicting a heightened moment arising from a banal technological failure. A Hispanic woman and her two-year-old daughter are forced to leave their stalled car on one of the busiest stretches of Interstate 45, the point near Allen Parkway where the north-south freeway divides downtown from Fourth Ward, an African-American community seemingly condemned to deterioration in the shadow of the glass towers. Unable to find help on either side of the freeway, the woman becomes physically trapped inside the flowing traffic, carrying her child back and forth inside a violent borderline. Her experience of isolation is magnified by an image of relentless speed, the cars rushing by – an image that also functions as a dialectical reference to the historical past and the slowed-down time of Fourth Ward.

A second screen projected small-scale slide images in slow motion onto the larger image of the mirror-glass façades of the skyscrapers. The smaller images showed a row of tiny and dilapidated wooden shotgun houses from Fourth Ward. During the months we were working on the scene, we learned of a new redevelopment plan that would substantially demolish Fourth Ward, Houston's oldest African-American settlement, and replace it with commercial development and new housing. Throughout the projection of the images, the physical performance onstage made it clear that each of the performers in the multicultural cast was trapped in his or her own "zoning law" experience, contrary to Houston's official ideology. We wanted to draw attention to the power relationships that are consolidated by the massive concrete ramps of a freeway system that cuts through the collective body of the city, erecting artificial barriers. Besides supporting and channeling the unrestrained mobility of vehicular traffic, the freeway barriers reflect the mechanisms by which corporate power and commercial real estate interests are separated and shielded from the designed decay and ghettoization of the inner city.

Like the homeless, whose nomadic lives embody the refuse of "city architecture" at the lowest economic and social margins, the ghetto and the barrio reflect a damaged reality and a form of social desertion, knowledge of which is repressed more and more deeply in the political unconscious. The American siege mentality, which may be one of the historical effects of urban decay and social disintegration, surfaces with full force in the desperate "military" rescue operations that federal and local governments launch in their "wars" on drugs, crime, unemployment, AIDS, and illiteracy. The bitter irony, of course, is that such "warfare" admits unequal economic

development and the failure of urban planning; such aggressions turned against one's own population resemble the aggressions of urban gentrification plans that erase or dislocate neighborhoods and communities.

The question of how to conceptualize and experience community today was raised in a more radical form by *Ad Mortem*. This concert-exhibition addressed social reactions to the AIDS crisis, not only by exposing the silent, unspoken territories of the epidemic, the bodies and experiences absent from political, medical-scientific, and mass media discourses, but also by searching for nondiscriminatory metaphors and strategies for the construction of a cultural space from which those people most affected by AIDS, as well as those who have hitherto separated themselves from the sick and the dying, can make the necessary personal and social choices and resistances. We sought to demonstrate that as a communicable disease affecting the social body as a whole, AIDS has forced us to rethink our sexual identities and social behaviors across the boundaries of historically separate communities. Such border crossings deconstruct inequities on several levels: within the logics and administration of science and health policies; within and between politically and socially constituted communities (e.g., gay communities and communities of color); and in the symbolic communication and the lived experience of the AIDS epidemic. *Ad Mortem* pointed to the invisible suffering and pain caused by a lethal disease; it also searched for social and spiritual practices of communion that can heal the rifts and build solidarity.

Such practices, which we discovered in community-based church, support, and self-help networks, are largely underdeveloped. If we were to use "architecture," therefore, in the literal and metaphorical sense of *building as a politics of choices*, as a process of public and cultural decision-making that responds to social needs and social changes, it would not be sufficient to recall the failures of the technological aesthetics of an earlier avant-garde, whose utopias of a "collective space of urban well-being" we can observe in buildings that "exist by means of their own death," as Mies van der Rohe wrote. Nor would it be sufficient to extend Manfredo Tafuri's critique of "design and capitalist development" into current academic debates on postmodern theories of decorative historicism, stylistic eclecticism, pluralism, or, as in the case of Peter Eisenman, a displaced, grotesque architecture of "decomposition." We have nothing to learn from Las Vegas, Dallas, Los Angeles, or Eisenman for that matter, except perhaps that displaced architecture reveals the increasingly abstract, theoretical relationship between architects and the late-capitalist decision-making processes that may determine the shape of the future.

I would suggest, therefore, that we reconsider the limits of community – and the fragmenting effects of differences within communities that we experience under the impact of a local and global health crisis such as AIDS – on concrete political interrelationships with technologies of social, racial, and economic repression and marginalization. To speak about construction, destruction, or preservation of buildings or public spaces or neighborhoods implies, in my experience, also speaking about resistance to discursive control (whether by the media or within a scientific, legal, political, or military context) over the construction of identities and the experience of power relationships. Silence equals death. Self-determining communities need to be able to speak and to mobilize the bases from which they can organize their interests. As Cindy Patton observes in response to the development of AIDS community organizations and activism: "People living with AIDS would not stay quiet for long. Their discourse shifted to a critique of the oppression of early death and unnecessary infections resulting from treatments delayed and education denied. Then the media stepped in to co-opt the new discourse by transforming the lived experience of people with AIDS and their friends into human-interest stories which performed the pathetic absolution necessary to a society complicit in wholesale slaughter (and that performance is not unique to AIDS)."[2]

If we want to speak about construction, or rather rebuilding, of community in our city, we need to see how the urban condition reflects social relations of domination and unequal access to the city. Extending my example of the AIDS crisis and the activist response to the marginalization and stigmatization of affected groups, I would argue that the technocratic definitions of the city by experts and managers need to be resisted, because current expert legitimations of urban development, dictated by the necessities of control and profit, necessarily conceal the fact that the interests of state institutions or the private sector conflict with the needs of those who are already suffering the consequences of economic and social policies. These policies have in fact produced the displacement we see in the homeless, the unemployed, the uninsured, the undereducated, and the underprivileged.

We have become refugees in our so-called public spaces, which we don't own, while our diverse cultural and social practices and ideas are denied representation in the homogenizing media and information systems. Our economically and racially segregated cultural space, which was never unified in the first place, can *only* be represented by unitary systems of information control that misrepresent or efface reality. The worst scenario may nevertheless open our eyes to the mechanisms of exclusion. We have experienced it in the media "coverage" of the relentlessly brutal war in Kuwait and Iraq, coverage of "surgical strikes" and "carpet bombing" on an unprecedented scale that failed to produce an assessment of the real destruction and the disastrous effects of technological warfare on the whole region. I began to write this essay under the immediate impact of the war, and I was consumed by a sense of powerlessness at being forced to watch an electronic media war constructed as a surreal mixture of disinformation, macho patriotism, and entertainment without reference to the physical devastation of a culture and a civilian population. All along, the United States government and military command used the vacuous rhetoric of a "new world order" to deflect attention from American economic and political interests in controlling the Middle East and in demonstrating military hegemony.

What has not been discussed is that this "new world order" resembles the old order. It does this in the linkage between military aggression and social, economic, and racial oppression, and in the linkage between the high-tech war abroad and the technologies of social control at home in our cities and our media. Silence equals death. We may already be condemned to live in a permanent war economy, but we are still learning to come to terms with the idea that this economy also threatens the survival of community and social cohesion.

To resist militarism is to understand the linkage between the enormous costs of this war to the Arabs and the continuing "collateral damage" produced by the crises in our own urban environment: poverty, housing, health, education, multicultural integration. Across our various differences, we can easily identify with Edward Said's description of the irony that "we Arabs are of this world, hooked into dependency and consumerism, cultural vassalage and technological secondariness without much volition on our part. The time has come where we cannot simply accuse the West of Orientalism and racism and go on doing little about providing an alternative."[3]

We are also of *this* world, sharing it with people of different color or sexual preference, with the elderly and the unemployed, with people with AIDS and the homeless. Alternatives for building coalitions and shared communities must come from our expert knowledge of secondariness and exclusion from the discourses of technocratic power. The preservation and reinvention of our multiple cultural and social identities will depend not on architectural and urban design solutions but on our ability to understand community as a spatial and political formation, a continuous process requiring a clear articulation of needs and claims in order to attain political leverage and contest the power of the administrative state. Architecture historically has been on the side of the state. Community activism will always find itself on the other side. ■

Notes

1 *Invisible Cities* was performed at the Lawndale Art and Performance Center in October 1989; *Ad Mortem* was staged at both DiverseWorks and Lawndale in December 1990.

2 Cindy Patton, *Inventing AIDS* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 130.

3 "Ignorant Armies Clash by Night," *The Nation*, February 11, 1991.

Video stills of "Blind City" from *Invisible Cities*, 1989, Lawndale Art and Performance Center.

Response and Responsibility

Elysabeth Yates-Burns McKee

Common Ground: **a Houston undertext, 1991.**

In a recent lecture hosted by the Department of History at Rice University, Richard Bernstein of the New School for Social Research outlined variable responses to the so-called "modern" and "post-modern" conditions. Juxtaposing the points of view of Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, Bernstein formulated a relationship between their ideas. I want to apply these ideas to the production of architecture.

The questions Bernstein raised in citing these two critics confront theorists and practitioners of numerous disciplines: What is postmodernity? And the corollary: What is modernity? For architects and designers, conditions of modernity and postmodernity permeate the practice and production of architecture. And yet it is difficult to move beyond a superficial assessment of their implicit, if not explicit, contracts. Modernity and postmodernity suggest definitive operations when apprehended in a rigorous manner. Yet the "modern" and "post-modern" share a common ground that is fundamental to their respective tenets. This common ground lies in the realm of response and responsibility, upon which are founded the fabric of our cities, their institutions and their architecture. By excavating this common ground, we can descend beneath the superficial and stylistic manifestations of modern and postmodern polemics in architecture and the design arts.

Jurgen Habermas is a proponent of the ideals of modernity, and his ongoing project has been the continual redress of the project of modernity, that of reason, its paradigmatic component. He feels that we have not used the tenets of reason – rational thinking – to the degree mandated by the period in which we live, nor have we used the faculties of reason to the fullest in addressing social, ethical, and moral issues. Habermas attempts to formulate a model of conduct among members of society, individually and collectively, with his theory of "communicative reason." Communicative reason depends on the dialogue between individuals and groups of individuals who represent specific desires and interests. It is through the process of "reflective argumentation" among and between social subjects, in which the individual viewpoints are preserved and respected, that differences can be worked out. All parties involved must seek to account not only for themselves, but for the interests of others, giving them equal weight. This is the "undertext" of Habermas's argument.

Such a theory supposes shared forms of social life upon which normative conditions for argument and dialogue can be positioned. What is significant, however, is that these norms, or "normative structures" as Habermas refers to them, are multiple in number as well as multifarious in character. Accordingly, in so-called modern and postmodern societies, it is clear that there is a multiplicity of contexts; hence, universal "monological" prescriptions – "general theories" – become obsolete. This multiplicity of contexts is what is often referred to as pluralism or a body politic – a point of view that stresses the accommodation of differing viewpoints. However, pluralism within the body politic depends upon the recognition and acceptance of the "undertext," the shared goal of universal response and responsibility. This goal, as yet unattained, is Habermas's "incomplete project of Modernity." For architecture, he sees the "incomplete project" in terms of a shared response and responsibility to the social and ethical problems we as architects are faced with today. The "new historicism" of the 1980s produced an architecture that was largely irrelevant to such issues as urban decay, homelessness, housing, and the increasing breakdown of community experience.

The second part of Bernstein's equation was a brief elucidation of Jacques Derrida's provocative philosophy of deconstruction or, as it is alternately called, "post-structuralism" or "postmodernity." There are indeed slight differences in these terms, some of which may be radicalized depending on the context of the discourse. For our purposes, however, these differences remain slight. Like Habermas, Derrida emphasizes the multiplicity of points of view. Derrida's thesis also represents a kind of pluralism, although his particular project is based on the multiple interpretations of kinds of texts; "texts" include all forms of writing, both inscribed and visual texts. Of late, he has turned his attention to the visual arts (in particular paintings by Cy Twombly) and architecture, having recently collaborated on projects with Peter Eisenman and Jeffrey Kipnis. Through the manifold interpretations of various texts, Derrida maintains that new readings might be discovered, liberating the reader from the hegemony of privileged, and delimiting, readings. Even in so brief an outline of Derrida's theory, it is fair to say that this point of view acknowledges differences of opinion and interpretation – Derrida's *différance*. In accordance with *différance*, Derrida seeks to accommodate the role of "the other," those voices or referents that have been marginalized or that exist outside of normative and conventional interpretations and social boundaries. It is here also that the critic and maker have a responsibility to the numerous voices that issue from the margins, outside the boundaries of conventional norms. And it is in the production of things (art, architecture, texts) that individuals respond to the desires and interests of "the other," others not like themselves. Collectively, the individuals who make up society respond to the various forces that come into play, most important those forces – people – that compose the body politic of our democratic system.

It is important to note that any complex text, including novels, legal documents, and architectural drawings and objects, is constituted by a variety of conditions. All sectors of the city – all communities, whatever their economic, religious, or ethnic status – contribute to its complexity, variety, and plurality. Recognition of variety, accommodation of plurality, and mutual coexistence are therefore absolutely necessary to preserving the complexity of the city.

During a recent visit, Rem Koolhaas remarked that Houston was the ultimate postmodern city. Its form, Koolhaas said, is virtually unmediated by conventions and established norms. The free play of unbridled economic and architectural production, the total absence of zoning requirements, produce *only* marginal conditions. Development is boundless, describing the "raw data" of economic architectural production. There are few boundaries or explicit urban programs that exist and function to define areas and zones. Given recent changes in public opinion, zoning may soon begin to introduce a kind of discrimination through the implementation of land use controls. And given the zoning code's "phasing-in" procedures, Houston will become a laboratory for experimentation on the conditions of margins and boundaries in the city. For a time, zoning may act as an index of the lack – and the partial implementation – of its mandated regulations, encoding the differences between the two kinds of cities as they are manifested over time.

In a recent letter to Peter Eisenman, Derrida argues for the architect's response to current problems and his responsibility for seeking their solutions. These comments were addressed specifically to Eisenman in light of his often arcane intellectual projects. Derrida advocates an "other architecture," an "activist" architecture that attempts to embrace and respond, not to aesthetic fabrications, but to the marginalized members of contemporary, postmodern societies. These include the lower classes, the underclass, and the homeless, who have been marginalized by development and gentrification in and around our major cities. This point of view is not new, but it has been given a relatively unconventional theoretical foundation in Derrida's work. The lack of adequate, affordable housing in our cities has become increasingly critical in the past three decades. Many areas that once accommodated various classes and ethnic groups no longer exist. The modern city itself continues to lose vitality and viability; the flight to the suburbs and unrelenting "progress" and "growth" clearly reinforce our fixation on numbers. But what of the reality of our experiences in the city and the community? Who is responsible?

Habermas's proposition of "communicative reason" relates to the word "community." The root of both means "to share." This implies the necessity for response and responsibility. In the case of both Habermas and Derrida, the "undertext" depends on a recognition of plurality (a radical democracy); an affirmation of plurality and difference; and an insistence that citizens, individually and collectively, instigate a "policy" of response to and responsibility for our shared culture. It is the city that both is constituted by and gives form to the motivated action of its citizens. ■

Left and below: **CityWalk, 2828 Greenbriar, 1990.**

That quantity is the key factor in making and selling architectural space in Houston is a troubling fact of life. Few recent buildings rise above cost calculations based on square footage, timing, financing requirements, and market turnover to contribute to the quality of the social and civic landscape. Houston builders and buyers typically trade the opportunity to create a more beautiful, more livable city for short-term effects dictated by fashion, so-called market forces, and the structure of the building and development business.

Taking Care of Business

The Design and Development Cycle

Cameron Armstrong

The reasons for this misfortune are numerous. Most obvious are the negative impact on design of the economic forces driving builders and developers, and the uncritical acceptance of the patterns resulting from the real estate decisions we all participate in. Historically, these two factors have interacted to move Houston away from building, or even dreaming of, a better urban landscape and from the qualities of personal and civic life such a landscape might stimulate.

The term "economic forces" is a catchall for the financial risks and rewards that attend construction in a free-market system. Much the same for all builders, whether of houses or towers, they include every kind of negative pressure known to modern economic man, from indebtedness to all sorts of casualty and legal liabilities, the timing risk associated with interest rates, and the fluctuations of real estate markets. These forces express themselves directly as costs that the builder must bear.

The successful builder carefully watches land and labor costs, the structure of the budget, market activity, and especially market timing. Just as Houston had a long dry spell during which it sometimes seemed that nothing could be sold profitably, the city will soon see times when almost anything can be sold at an inflated price. The smart builder plans for such times.

For this entrepreneur, steep rises in the costs of such basic commodities as land, labor, materials, and money during good times are balanced by greater profits and the sometimes virtual elimination of "wild cards" (such as the buying public's independent preferences or the quality of the product itself). Developers are most secure when the public's ability to discriminate or refuse their product is weak. In a tight real estate market, design attributes – values derived from the qualitative experience the building offers – suffer the same devaluation as the product's other qualitative attributes. Good times reveal design as simply one among the builder's many costs that can and should be controlled, if not eliminated.

The recent history of Houston's apartment market is a useful example of the social and aesthetic impact of the buyer's market for design that exists here in good times and bad. The exodus of workers at the end of the city's last boom left a big hole in the demand for apartments, which in turn resulted in a high rate of vacancy and abandonment. Between 1987 and 1990, tens of thousands of units were demolished, just in time to help fuel the strong rebound in rents and values prompted by our economic revival. Apartment rents and occupancies are now at all-time highs, particularly in certain high-demand areas, and a number of builders have responded quickly with an unprecedented array of dismal, overly dense, tenement-style, walkup multistory apartment blocks. The projects' success speaks volumes about the lack of choice confronting the typical apartment dweller in 1991.

The future social costs of these new projects are not clear, but are likely to reflect the norms set by products of previous boom times. Southwest Houston, for example, is littered with examples of speedily built, quickly occupied apartment "communities" whose ill-considered (and unloved) designs have attracted little long-term loyalty from tenants. Fluctuating occupancy and high turnover rates mock hopes for social cohesion or economic stability. The quick answers of a decade ago to a strong apartment market have already often become the killing grounds of drug warriors or, at best, temporary lodgings for transient workers.

The significance of these points is not that certain builders or architects should be pilloried for insensitivity or brutality. Rather it is that this pressure to forgo good design is felt not only project by project but systematically, market wide. The ability to reduce the cost, and importance, of design is simply part of the developer's job description. That this effort has such a critical impact on daily life in Houston is due to the fact that builders and developers here are entrusted with the de facto stewardship of the community's interest in the city's physical form. What developers put in or leave out of their projects, the rest of us must live with or without, often for the rest of our lives. It is tragic for Houston that these stewards have a vested interest in reducing and even at times eliminating design costs.

It can be argued that the role the public plays in dictating values through the thousands of leasing and buying decisions made every week regulates builders' economically determined approach to design. Ultimately, the argument runs, in setting continuous and at least partly predictable patterns for builders to aim at, the "market" makes its desires known and finds satisfaction. In a place that is built incrementally, it is indeed hypothetically true that each generation of buildings must compete with all surviving buildings and that therefore the place as a whole must gradually and inevitably improve. One might further contend that there are always choices for buyers and renters and that therefore the quality of design and construction depends absolutely on how insistent consumers are about issues of quality.

In fact, experience shows that the patterns set by buyers and renters, to the extent that they are not ruled by shortage, are dictated by fashion. The perception that long-term monetary value can be assured by adhering to a particular kind of plan or "style" ties the design tightly to ongoing balances between supply and demand, shortage and credit. For instance, if it is determined that to guarantee its sale or lease a house simply must be "Georgian" or a retail center "postmodern," much of the opportunity for thoughtful design work has already been lost. In a rising market, shortages of time and money makes things even worse.

Real estate cycles and builders' consequent perception of timing dictate when and where new building commences. In the absence of such factors as government intervention (e.g., housing subsidies or savings and loan deregulation), they dictate that building will start when shortage is imminent – precisely the time when design (and other elements that affect quality) is least likely to be considered important to the ultimate sales success of the project. Rising costs for land and other quantitative considerations further devalue design work at such times.

Therefore, improvement in the design and quality of Houston's buildings and the urban life they shape are unlikely to come from or through the present system of real estate development. Even when the builders themselves want it, such improvement runs counter to their best (short-term) interests. Their contingent position in the operation of the real estate market makes developers poor candidates for the role of stewards of the public interest. It is no wonder that their track record as stewards is so far, if not without exceptions, miserable.

Approaches to guiding development in healthy directions abound in the United States, ranging from systems of professional peer design review to community oversight to tight legislation of quantitative standards governing such items as lot coverage, project size, density, and height. Houston's record with development guidelines, exemplified by the first post–World War II federal financing programs, has been excellent in some instances – for instance, the sensibly designed Kirby Court Apartments on Steel Street – proving that good, long-lasting rental housing can be built here by private industry. The city's tragedy, for renters and buyers alike, is not the disappearance of such programs but the failure to replace them.

Lacking a civically oriented planning process and both the larger view and public debate such a process would entail, Houston has made a tradition of changing its urban fabric on a piecemeal basis. Thus the active public life of downtown streets and squares from the 1920s through the 1950s was abandoned, the mix of houses, stores, and offices in neighborhoods throughout the city decided, and the disposition of economic development dictated, largely without public or civic involvement. These choices were taken at the behest of consumer demand by agents who had no larger interest than the health of their bottom line. For the city as a whole to come to grips with similar future choices will require creation of a broad-based decision process involving citizens, public servants, and professionals, along with builders.

The upcoming debates on zoning and other types of planning regulations may open the door to such a process. For designers, the definition and allocation of responsibility for protecting and enhancing the quality of individual buildings and the public realm as a whole – beyond responsibility to individual clients – is an urgent matter. A new system of stewardship by which development might be made to bring general improvement should be central to these discussions, and undertaken early. Making sure the question is included on the agenda is the responsibility of professional bodies and individuals alike. Although it is difficult to foresee the outlines of the prospective planning resolution, it will be a disaster for Houston if stewardship of the city's form is not specifically addressed. ■

The Inverness, 3133 Buffalo Speedway, 1991.

Fourth Ward and the Siege of Allen Parkway Village

The Private Sector: Founders Park Venture and Community Activism

Fourth Ward residents and members of Houston Housing Concern picket the Founders Park forum, 18 August 1990.

Courtesy Sikes, Jennings, Kelly & Brewer

Rives Taylor

The Houston city government's hesitant and ineffective participation in the urban planning process has created a vacuum, a vacuum that has in turn compelled a number of private actors and agencies to take action. Recently, the sweeping political and economic changes envisioned for the city – comprehensive planning, a rail-oriented mass transit system, and council redistricting – have been driven by key, identifiable individuals with a wider (if not always widely supported) vision.

But the private ventures have often conflicted with the wishes of the communities they affect. Whereas the privately driven planning vision measures its progress in months and hundreds of thousands of dollars, community-based planning measures its progress in volunteer efforts over a period of years. Greater access to resources and political clout give private planning efforts the edge in any contested issue. Private efforts typically frame design notions in terms of a single, focused vision that grass-roots planning efforts of a possibly diverse community often cannot attain. Even the vocabulary of physical and fiscal planning is foreign to all but the planning experts – only the chosen, educated few understand the process. All planning efforts in a city must bridge this chasm of unequal resources and experience.

In the fall and winter of 1990, the Founders Park Venture redevelopment proposal for Fourth Ward became the proving ground for three major city-planning initiatives that call for a reappraisal of urban planning and community redevelopment in Houston. These initiatives – comprehensive planning and zoning, Metro rail, and Founders Park – are concerned with land use issues, the investment of tax dollars in public infrastructure improvements, power brokering, and, inevitably, large sums of money. Each initiative envisions some form of public-private venture. Founders Park Venture, a collaborative project of Cullen Center, Inc., and American General Investment Corporation, aims at redeveloping Fourth Ward and the site of Houston's largest public housing complex, Allen Parkway Village. The mechanics of the planning effort, the orchestration of community involvement, and the community opposition that has resulted have made it a test case for city planning reality in Houston in the 1990s.

To date, Founders Park has elicited a community participation process orchestrated by "hired guns" (as distrusting community participants labeled them) from urban design planning and architecture firms who gained their experience in cities elsewhere. The venture is relying on the expertise of Gary Hack, of Carr Lynch Hack & Sandell of Boston, and Frank S. Kelly and Ben Brewer, both of Sikes Jennings Kelly & Brewer of Houston. Their initial charge was to test the waters for a 650-acre development in the heart of the inner city, as well as to prove that the expertise and management skills of private enterprise can fulfill the social and urban planning mandate that ought to be carried out by the city. To its credit, the goals of Founders Park reflect both corporations' notions of civic responsibility. Their preliminary plan addresses the critical need for affordable housing, public open space and improved amenities, safe and pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods of mixed economic (and in theory, racial) composition, resource management, mixed-use areas integrated in an existing residential neighborhood, and historic preservation. The Founders Park planning mechanisms seem closely allied with the findings and mechanisms proposed by city councilman Jim Greenwood's committees formulating a zoning and comprehensive planning strategy for Houston.

Understandably, Fourth Ward community organizations distrust all the corporate and city bureaucratic powers involved in the planning. Neighborhoods citywide, especially those with disadvantaged populations, often feel powerless to control their own future. The planning record in Fourth Ward and Allen Parkway Village is characterized by the willful destruction of the community's fabric and institutions by government agencies. The elimination of key blocks of the neighborhood began with the erection of a "whites-only" public housing complex, San Felipe Courts (now Allen Parkway Village), in the early 1940s. Occupying the most visible of sites, facing the Buffalo Bayou Parkway, San Felipe Courts was the first of a series of efforts to eliminate a vibrant community that planners saw as being at odds with the adjoining downtown and the "image" of the city. The construction of Interstate 45 in the 1950s wiped out the eastern third of Fourth Ward, where most of the community's venerable civic institutions were located. Thus Founders Park Venture must labor in the shadow of troubling legacies. An already hostile African-American community continues to battle the outsiders, including the area's absentee landowners (a bit of a misnomer, as the landowners are from families who once lived in the area), who it believes are driven by objectives alien to and destructive of their community. The community is by no means united in organization or intentions. The residents of Allen Parkway Village (directly appealed to in the Founders Park proposals) have been awaiting the outcome of a federal lawsuit that sought a permanent injunction against demolition of the project. (See "APV Update.") The Freedmen's Town Association refuses to talk to outsiders at all. Residents of North Montrose and Temple Terrace, west of Fourth Ward, although apparently less hostile to the whole proposal than in the early fall, remain wary of the proposed tax increment financing district that Founders Park wants the city government to authorize, and, more specifically, of what they perceive to be its potential power of property condemnation.[1]

The Founders Park Venture proposal is driven by profit, as its organizers acknowledge. This seems to be at odds with the proposal's goal of establishing a mechanism and steering group to create affordable housing citywide, although profit is in fact what will generate funds for low-income housing. Further, Founders Park's preliminary plan calls into question the need to maintain the integrity of the two National Register historic districts affected, Freedmen's Town and San Felipe Courts. The standard concerns of planning also remain: long-range implementation, financing, and accountability. The good intentions and alluring images in any master plan may persuade initially. But who is responsible over the long term for what happens when economic and political realities set in? One response is that once a master plan is approved by city council there can be no deviation in its implementation without further public discussion and approval. Yet this assurance then raises questions about the efficacy and immutability of the development controls, design guidelines, and legal restrictions used to reach a desired planning end and imposed by a bureaucracy on the public realm. Finally, the Founders Park Venture proposal accentuates the larger urban issue of balancing community concerns with the city's planning and economic projections. Is ensuring the highest and best use for land development and a city's economic vitality consistent with protecting a neighborhood's interests or ensuring its mere survival? Cullen Center and American General Corporation have broken new ground at a time of heightened suspicions of the motives of corporations and city government in attempting to act as both private developer and community facilitator in an area of proud and stubborn renters, landowners, and community activists.

A Private Proposal

The vision that guided Founders Park Venture originated in the minds of two individuals: Marvin Marshall, until recently president and chief executive officer of Cullen Center, Inc., and his counterpart at American General Corporation, Max Schuette. Marshall instigated the first broad planning investigations in late 1987 and early 1988. He remembers that the two "grand thinkers," gazing down from their skyscraper offices at the underutilized and almost abandoned acreage between their two corporate empires, could not help but wonder what could be made of it. Schuette had assisted the city with his banking and organizational expertise on a number of occasions and had served on city commissions looking into Fourth Ward economic redevelopment. As Schuette related in the fall of 1990, it became obvious to him that the private sector could most effectively orchestrate the complex interaction of planning requirements, financial pro formas, and community collaboration that redevelopment would require. Fourth Ward needed a comprehensive vision and a strategy for accomplishing these goals free of the public sector's unwieldy decision-making process. Another stipulation, even at the onset of this "grand thinking," accompanied private sector interest and involvement: "The basic truth is that private sector investment is not made unless careful attention is given to the risks of the enterprise before any investments in development or other economic actions are taken."[2]

Part of the planning process, as foreseen by Cullen Center in the spring and early summer of 1988, was to gauge interest and opposition in the community and the city administration. The fact that such concerns arose in a private planning process establishes a precedent for future development here. A planning document produced by Cullen Center and its planners, Hoover & Furr, a 3D/International company, in 1988 succinctly stated the goals:

The participants desire long-term profits and the enhancement of the present holdings adjacent to the project area. At the same time the Venture will ensure a dedication to the enrichment and ultimate reward to the citizens of Houston for the economic growth and well-being of the Central Business District, and the significant improvement of the socio-economic values of the existing residents.[3]

Max Schuette concluded in 1988 that any redevelopment in Houston, and most especially Fourth Ward, warranted a program of affordable housing. It appeared to him necessary to create a new, private organization to deal efficiently with the complex problem and to seek wider sources of funding for affordable housing. "Something had to happen to attract the attention

of the politicians [in order] to help the vulnerable people in the area."[4] The expression of such interest is rare for a private developer in this city. There is no shortage of critics who see this as a smoke screen to hide what they believe is really going on – private corporations using their power to displace a community for private profit.

Cullen Center, Inc., and American General Investment Corporation formally announced their 600-acre development during KUHT-TV's "Almanac" program on Friday, 13 April 1990. The May-June 1990 issue of *Texas Architect* carried the developers' announcement that a series of open forums would be held to make the plan a reality.[5] The three-year planning process set in motion by Founders Park Venture culminated in the December 1990 release of the Founders Park Venture preliminary master report by Sikes Jennings Kelly & Brewer and Carr Lynch Hack & Sandell. Its evolution involved a number of planning efforts on the parts of such designers as Hoover & Furr and, later, Andrés Duany of Coral Gables with Phillips & Brown.

Contributions From Afar

For two months in the summer of 1990 the prospective plan preoccupied Duany, whose fame and reputation have grown since he and his wife, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, created plans for the Town of Seaside, Florida. Though his involvement was brief, his lasting contribution to Founders Park was urban planning based on the planning principles of Savannah, with 65 percent of the land in public space. His proposed "democratic townscape" had generous pedestrian paths, a mix of low-rise housing types for families of different incomes, and small city blocks that continued the Fourth Ward fabric and discouraged fast-moving traffic.[6] This concept, humane and supportive of urban renewal in the best sense, was in fact generated from afar; after an initial interview with the Founders Park principals, Duany decided to do a quick charrette rather than fly to Houston for a second interview. "It's the way we work – from aerials we work quickly . . . five hours . . . to create the framework for the plan. [The plan] was not yet fine-tuned. The key is simplicity."[7] The Houston office of Phillips & Brown was to have fine-tuned the plan to local conditions and assisted in implementing the scheme.

In July 1990, Founders Park Venture abruptly turned to Sikes Jennings Kelly & Brewer. Not only did this Houston firm have important local political contacts, it also had the smooth touch necessary to stroke all the parties involved. Moreover, Sikes Jennings Kelly & Brewer had recent planning experience with building public consensus in an urban redevelopment project in Boston. Frank S. Kelly, at the time president of the American Institute of Architects/Houston Chapter, and Ben Brewer, former president of the American Institute of Architects, were not afraid of the delicacy of the task. SJK&B associated with its planning collaborator from Boston, Gary Hack of Carr Lynch Hack & Sandell, a firm working with Kevin Lynch's notions of city planning. A professor of urban design at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Hack brought different credentials to the project, having worked with inner-city redevelopment and housing reform in the older cities of the Northeast and Canada. He was included on the team to orchestrate the important community forum, slated for August 1990.

Other Visions

A March 1990 *Houston Post* article described three current development visions for the Fourth Ward–Allen Parkway Village area. The first was the Founders Park scheme, a redevelopment project reputed to entail "upscale townhouses and apartments at 5 stories, a neighborhood shopping center, all organized by town squares, parks and small lakes."[8] The discussion of the other two proposals showed that Founders Park was not the only interested and organized party involved. Lenwood E. Johnson, president of the Allen Parkway Village Resident Council, was on record as doubting the efficacy of mixing economic groups: the "rich won't buy into the notion," he said. Instead Johnson advocated rehabilitation of Allen Parkway Village, which would be "followed by the emergence of small community businesses that would result in gradual economic development to a neighborhood that remains low income" – sweat equity by the African-Americans in Fourth Ward to remake their neighborhood.[9] Johnson's thoughts followed at least seven years of outside volunteer and community-based planning efforts, such as the several design charrettes sponsored by local universities. As Stephen Fox relates, this "poor and, presumably, unsophisticated" African-American community "has demonstrated an extraordinary ability to use urban planning as a tool to define and articulate grass-roots community objectives. Forging coalitions with local, regional, and national volunteers and social agencies, [it] pursued historic preservation as a tool to win recognition of the cultural significance of the endangered neighborhoods."[10]

Since the late 1980s the community had worked with Nia Dorian Becnel and her University of Houston students to create a rehabilitation plan. The plan, as finally drawn up on a pair of presentation boards, used the notion of public thoroughfares to connect the two historic districts directly and called for development guidelines to protect the existing historic fabric as well as foster a supportive environment of neighborhood-related entrepreneurial zones. For example, Valentine Street, extended beyond its current limited right-of-way in Allen Parkway Village, was to become a pedestrian boulevard lined with spaces for civic services and institutions that would reunite Allen Parkway Village and Fourth Ward. Other streets, interrupted when Allen Parkway Village was built in the neighborhood's midst, would be rehabilitated to serve as public spaces and neighborhood linkages. The plan remains to be taken farther. With Mrs. Becnel's death in November 1990, an invaluable component of the planning process was lost.

The third vision was a compromise of sorts put forward by "a hodgepodge of low-income-housing advocates, planners and architects."[11] Peter Brown, who, as the article noted, worked for "American General, Cullen Center and the Ayrshire Corporation on Founders Park," was quoted as referring to the success in other cities of mixed communities with a large component of low-income housing. He cited the model of Tent City in Boston, a 300-unit apartment complex of five to six stories in the Back Bay–South End. This idealized vision could lead to a demographically balanced community of local residents and the new upper-income gentry. A cautionary point made by this group of thinkers was that "in urban renewal projects developers, banks, and some political associates have benefited. . . . For the poor it has been too little, too late, even with well-intentioned people involved."[12] The exceptions to this rule tended to be in cities with strong local governments and strong neighborhood watchdog groups. Among Houston's community activists is the Neartown Association, which represents the Montrose neighborhoods. Relying primarily on professionals who volunteer their services, Neartown had a planning group and philosophical base well in place before 1990. Dedicated to the stability and enhancement of Montrose-area residential neighborhoods, Neartown developed land-use projections, a planning process to build a cohesive community response, and such nuts-and-bolts ideas as traffic busters (discontinued through-streets to slow traffic) and ways to create different neighborhood identities. Some of their ideas were in fact adopted by the Founders Park planners.

Mrs. Martha Whiting addresses the Founders Park forum, 18 August 1990.

Courtesy Sikes, Jennings, Kelly & Brewer

The Forum, 18–21 August 1990

The first day of the forum, attended by 350 to 400 residents,[1] landowners, and other interested persons, was organized along the lines of meetings in cities where the public participatory process has been refined. Gary Hack later summarized the basis of the meetings as the need to establish a minimum public consensus. At the outset, the groups were confronted with the issues and problems they all faced. The forum's goal was to frame the issues clearly and directly.[2] The four-day charrette was intended to be educational, outlining for the participants the problems and benefits of the proposed tax increment financing district, now defined as stretching from Waugh Drive (the American General property) to I-45 and from Allen Parkway south to a block beyond West Gray, including the area around The Oaks, the old Parker-Baker estate. Frank Kelly enumerated the goals that the planning group had defined before meeting with the public: connecting the Buffalo Bayou Parkway green space to the community; reoccupying empty land located so close to downtown; preserving some part of the historic district of Freedmen's Town; and resuscitating decent housing in the area. All of the issues were open for discussion.

One argument against the forum process is precisely this framing of the issues. How the issues are framed, and what issues are not addressed, can shape a discussion in such a way that "consensus" can be reached without really addressing what is on the community's mind. Lenwood Johnson, speaking for the combined Fourth Ward Freedmen's Town Neighborhood Association and Allen Parkway Village Resident Council, relates, "Information was being gathered by trained employees of American General, while we had no similar representatives to even begin to lay the groundwork for the negotiations." Those antagonistic to the process say that the way questions were framed and moved through discussion in the meeting constituted strong-arm planning tactics. Others in the audience felt that the apparent earnestness of the two moderators, Gary Hack and Frank Kelly, indicated that maneuvering room was left.

Workshops on Saturday afternoon addressed the specific issues that Founders Park Venture had previously identified: urban open space, infrastructure requirements, community services, the area's image and character, historical resources, and (led by Hack) housing requirements. On Sunday, Founders Park representatives met with specific community groups, among them the Neartown Association and the North Montrose Civic Association, and attempted to meet with the Freedmen's Town Association. Separate meetings were scheduled with the Allen Parkway Village Resident Council and the Fourth Ward Freedmen's Town Neighborhood Associa-

Notes

1 Community activist Virgil Knox, in an August 1990 interview, described Fourth Ward as the linchpin in a citywide developer conspiracy to gain control of soon-to-be-valuable pieces of land tied to the development of both the Metro rail system and the intrastate bullet train. See David Theis, "Bad Connections," *Houston Press*, 30 August 1990, p. 12.

2 Interview with Max Schuette, Fall 1990.

3 "Proposed Joint Venture," from *A Presentation to American General Investment Corporation by Cullen Center, May 6, 1988*, by Hoover & Furr.

4 Ibid.

5 Joel W. Barna, "News," *Texas Architect* 40 (May-June 1990), p. 8. It was in this article as well that Andrés Duany's involvement was officially announced.

6 Jane Baird, "Miami Architect No Longer Involved With Founders Park," *Houston Chronicle*, July 4, 1990, p. C1.

7 Interview with Andrés Duany, October 1990. When queried about his sudden departure, Duany said an amicable parting had occurred because of a difference of opinion over planning authority: he believed that the process required equal participation rather than a typical employee-client relationship. Other participants in the first public presentation by Duany and the planning team tell of a conflict of authority and Duany's arrogance. Burdette Keeland remembers that the otherwise thoughtful and promising presentation was marked by Duany's disdain for the architects and planners he was to work with: "He seemed to prefer to run the show himself." Interview with Burdette Keeland, September 1990.

Duany's interest in designing the fine-grained details of the master plan was thwarted with the assignments to the local architects, including 3D/I, Morris Architects, SJK&B, and Phillips & Brown. A number of other participants in the June 1990 meeting questioned whether Duany's abrasive style might jeopardize both the community and political consensus and the financial support that would have to be created. After the termination of the relationship with Duany, Phillips & Brown played a less visible role in the process, apparently to keep the project clear of any "taint of Andrés Duany's lack of success." Keeland interview, September 1990.

8 Jane Baird, "Whither the Ward: 3 Development Visions Emerge as Debate Peaks," *Houston Post*, 5 March 1990, pp. E5–E7.

9 Ibid.

10 Interview with Stephen Fox, January 1991.

11 Baird, "Whither the Ward," p. E7.

12 Ibid., p. E6, quoting Joe Feagin, professor of sociology at the University of Texas at Austin.

tion, but these groups chose not to attend. As Lenwood Johnson explains: "This was an illegitimate process being imposed on us against our wishes. . . . Our participation would legitimize the process."

For the next two days the design charrette carried on with informal reviews and meetings. The planners responded to the concerns expressed by modifying their stated objectives. The planning team undertook a closer examination of the area and, using quickly produced area maps, perspectives, and charts, presented its work to the community forum on the evening of Tuesday, 21 August. The planners listed the points of consensus reached in the workshops and the ramifications of each; in a relatively short time the Founders Park Venture had defined the issues, framed them, and distilled their economic and planning implications in a way its planners believed the community could understand. The presentation was notable for its parallels with planning and housing consensus-building sessions in other cities.

It is in the distillation process that charrettes have problems, though. The complexity of the issues can often be overlooked; broad principles do not address the mechanics of implementation or the social upheaval that can follow in the wake of "democratic" decision-making and community consensus. A longer study of the proposal through the fall would take these elements into consideration. To that end, Hack and Kelly established a citizens' steering committee that would meet with the planners throughout the fall and provide a check on the system.

One issue that could not be avoided: the tax increment financing (TIF) district. From the outset the planners stressed its power to target an area for infrastructure improvement. For the first time in Texas, improvements in affordable and low-income housing would be tied to the TIF district, accounting for a full third of the revenues the tax generated. But throughout the four-day forum, the most vigorous discussion centered around the issue of property condemnation under the TIF. Problems of infrastructure and housing attracted much less interest and discussion, a disproportion that confounded Max Schuette and other Founders Park leaders.

The participants from North Montrose and Temple Terrace feared for their homesteads. Virgil Knox, spokesman for the North Montrose Chapter of Individual Landowners and Homeowners, railed against the abridgment of basic property rights for the benefit of the developer. Question sessions saw emotional pleas: Improve the area, but don't take our houses! This caught the planners off guard. Judy Butler, past president of the Neartown Association, believes that the effort started out on the wrong foot: "They did not include the neighborhood – they did not take into account how people feel about their homes." The Founders Park Venture and its planners sought quickly to allay the fears, and a number of homeowners, grateful for the earnest efforts of Kelly and Hack, have conceded that since their worries were first expressed, Founders Park got on the right track. Discussion made it clear that setting up the TIF district was synonymous not with losing homes, but rather with improvement of the neighborhood. In fact, Judy Butler relates that the Neartown Association informally asked if the TIF district might be expanded in order for the benefits of such directed reinvestment to have wider impact. The North Montrose groups, on the other hand, concurrently asked to be excluded from the TIF district.

The participatory process allowed the Neartown Association to bring up for discussion a number of planning issues that its own comprehensive planning committee had refined. Although persuaded by the process, Neartown is the first to admit that it acts primarily for its constituency. Allen Parkway Village and Fourth Ward are outside its bailiwick.

Of course the absentee landowners and representatives of surrounding neighborhoods who might benefit from Fourth Ward redevelopment applauded the forum and any improvement it would bring. A few of the financially well off African-American speakers saw the discussion as a necessary first step toward positive action, even if displacement of tenants and destruction of the neighborhood's historic fabric were to occur.

The two groups who were not represented and would be most affected were the city of Houston and residents of Fourth Ward and Allen Parkway Village, the former because the issue was still too "hot." (Several months later, District C councilman Vince Ryan, who sent a representative to the forum, asserted that only recently has the political tide turned sufficiently for the mayor to support the initiative.)[1] The issues for the city remain the relocation of the residents, timely reconstruction of replacement public and low-income housing, and preservation of Houston's historical resources.

The other constituency intentionally not participating was the very population to be displaced. Cullen Center and American General Corporation's representatives met once with Gladys M. House, president of the Freedmen's Town Association. She believed that her community should not be ground zero for another try at the white community's notion of urban renewal,

A TIF Primer

Proponents of Founders Park Venture hope to raise part of its funding with a novel vehicle, a tax increment financing (TIF) district. A *Houston Post* article describes how the district would work:

A special tax increment district is proposed that would last 20 years. Such a district could be created by the city council after a public hearing. As development increases land value in the district, the added tax revenue would be used for two purposes. Two-thirds would be pumped into the district to help pay for infrastructure, parks, landscaping, and other improvements. One-third would be spent to build or buy and renovate low-income housing.[1]

The last element has been extremely important. Not only does the Texas Tax Increment Financing Act of 1981, as amended through the efforts of then state senator Craig Washington in 1987, require the one-third allotment, but the emphasis on affordable and low-income housing fits the thinking of American General and Cullen Center. The original TIF legislation was geared principally toward commercial districts with no residential components; the amendment allows for the creation of TIF districts in residential areas.

The mechanics of this legislation defy easy explanation. Briefly, a TIF district may be created by a city council with the approval of the other local taxing authorities, the county, and the school district (as empowered by the state legislature). The district is created in response to a petition of the owners of at least 50 percent of the assessed valuation of the area, and their request must be accompanied by submission of a redevelopment plan, a relocation plan for any resident displaced, and a financial plan. The district must be characterized by urban blight and underutilized lands.

A nine-member district board oversees the redevelopment and directs the manage-ment and allocation of funds, including issuance of bonds. Five of the members are appointed by city council and must be landowners or their representatives. Two must be from the area's state senator and representative's offices; the remaining two represent the county and the school district if those agencies choose to accept the TIF district in the first place. This commission of citizens, none elected, could recommend condemnation to the city council of any property deemed vital to the success of the district. It then remains for city council to undertake the actual condemnation.

Notes

1 Jane Baird, "Whither the Ward: 3 Development Visions Emerge as the Debate Peaks," *Houston Post*, 5 March 1990, pp. E5-E7.

Courtesy Sikes, Jennings, Kelly & Brewer

Illustrative aerial view of Fourth Ward and Allen Parkway Village redeveloped as Founders Park, 1990, Carr, Lynch, Hack & Sandell, Boston, with Sikes, Jennings, Kelly & Brewer, Houston.

following years of misdirected city efforts. Thus she chose not to participate in the forum. Several meetings took place with Lenwood Johnson and Nia Becnel, representing the Allen Parkway Village Resident Council and the Fourth Ward Freedmen's Town Neighborhood Association. Though initially informative, both leaders and their constituencies chose not to participate in the forum.

The preliminary master plan outline, released in early December 1990, is a credible planning document despite its short gestation period. The creators, stressing that the venture still awaits final economic reports and the support of elected city officials, presented a comprehensive but necessarily flexible plan. The 58-page document illustrates a variety of components of the proposal, from the urban planning realm to affordable housing and the TIF legislation. Frank Kelly emphasized that the document was "merely the first blush, schematics,"and called it "a first feasibility test . . . to serve as the basis for documenting the steering committee consensus and as a basis for further discussion." In the next step the planners must commit to specific plans as a component of their petition to city council for the TIF district. The three elements of the TIF petition are the project plan, the financing plan, and a petition from owners of at least 50 percent of the appraised value of the land. In a process clearly outlined in the document, the project would go forward if "a socially responsible and imaginative plan could be agreed upon, the plan was economically viable, and there is support from adjacent neighborhoods and elected officials."[4] The effort is privately funded and motivated, but it has to work with and gain the support of city officials.

The document, in text, aerial and schematic plans, and architects' renderings, outlines goals as well as the process used to secure community involvement. It describes current conditions and the reasoning for establishing such a wide TIF district (the advantages of higher neighborhood land values and improved infrastructure make the district attractive to landowners, as the Neartown Association's informal request can attest). In concise terms the document advocates such basic planning concepts as the creation of green boulevards extending the bayou parkway into the neighborhoods; the "consolidation" (which may imply destruction, as some knowledgeable critics fear) of the Freedmen's Town Historic District into a denser 12-block "historic area" to recapture the character of what the larger area once was; the complete elimination of Allen Parkway Village; and the creation of "a community of diverse, street oriented housing forms which cater to a variety of life-style preferences. . . . At least 10% of the units in Founders Park should be available for low and moderate income households."[5] Residential areas would adjoin a shopping district along West Gray and Webster and a community and cultural center at Gregory School. The buffer area, a dense commercial zone along I-45, is oriented toward downtown. Of importance to the rest of the city, the quality of the residential neighborhoods and commercial districts would be assured by detailed land use controls and a limited form of district zoning.

The planning document further depicts the proposed community character with a number of street perspectives that emphasize communal street life, a mix of housing types, and low-scale but relatively high densities. Gary Hack sees formulation of design guidelines for the housing types as the greatest challenge for project planners, along with developing the character of the green spaces. The document's renderings – full of big shade trees and upscale cars – are too cute to be taken for much beyond conceptual images. This type of residential community is unknown in Houston; getting the mechanics right to make it work will be difficult.

The document by necessity deals with the issues of public housing, the economic implications of the TIF district, and the future of the two historic districts of San Felipe Courts (Allen Parkway Village) and Freedmen's Town. Hack believes the challenge for the Freedmen's Town reconstruction lies in identifying who the residents will be and what buildings are to be rehabilitated through homesteading and block grant programs. To Kelly, the "fascinating dilemma" of this district is how to reconstruct the feeling of the area when in fact so much of the physical fabric has disappeared since the 1984 listing in the National Register. The complex issue of Allen Parkway Village, whose future is more in the hands of the federal court than in those of the city or private enterprise, is mentioned in the document; development along Buffalo Bayou should have a special high-profile character to reflect the value of the land and the uniqueness of the site. One of the provisos for continuing the planning process into 1991 was the future release of the Allen Parkway property for development. Founders Park planners question the social and economic wisdom of housing 1,000 families on that key location. "The architectural merit seems the least of the equation," says Kelly.[6]

The most completely thought-out response to the Allen Parkway Village question comes from Jim Stockard of Stockard & Engler, the Founders Park housing consultants. Charged with investigating national funding sources and the contentious mechanics of relocating residents and replacing housing units, Stockard contributed an extensive survey of funding programs as well as a phased-development and construction costs spreadsheet. When interviewed, he said the document did not address the much-debated issue of replacing the destroyed housing stock quickly enough. On the issue of Allen Parkway Village, his instinct from afar is that the viability of the complex is minimal because of the small size of the apartments, their high density, environmental hazards (lead paint and asbestos), and the outdated regularity and linearity of its site planning. (As presently arranged, the project does not provide tenants privacy or a sense of personal territory.) In response to the city's and the city housing authority's difficulty in creating the needed public-assisted, low-income housing stock, Stockard proposes in the planning document to establish a citywide, privately organized, nonprofit housing development corporation that could guarantee, through innovative funding and management, a one-to-one replacement for units lost in the demolition of Allen Parkway Village. "I believe in housing authorities," he says. "Our experience in general, and specifically in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is that residents prefer to stay in the public housing authority's developments for many reasons, not the least of which is accountability and better stock." He adds that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development favors resident initiatives and ownership opportunities, both of which Stockard sees as key to the long-range viability of mixed housing.[7] Critics claim that by encouraging the construction of public housing elsewhere in the city, Founders Park Venture is creating the mechanism to move most of the current Allen Parkway tenants out of the area.

All of the planners reiterate that what is missing from the process is the leadership and mediating role that the city government should play. Kelly, with his experience in Boston, relates, "We are providing the framework for the process that the planning department should provide, and we interpret and prioritize" a whole series of decisions from the community, yet "we are viewed as the enemy, the developer's hired guns."[8]

As of the end of April 1991 the federal court case is still pending (see "APV Update"), delaying the final fate of Allen Parkway Village. The planning document of Founders Park Venture has been circulating and apparently winning positive reactions from the city. The mayor is rumored to support the plan; Founders Park meetings with her right-hand man, Al Haines, took place the first week of February. Most neighborhood groups seem to feel that any action would be at least a step in the right direction. Even with their vocal but seemingly powerless outside supporters, the residents of Fourth Ward and Allen Parkway Village stand divided, if not alone, in their attempts to frame the discussion and to form their own proposal for the future of their neighborhoods. ■

Notes

1 Dee Gill, "Fourth Ward Proposal Draws Mixed Reaction," *Houston Chronicle*, 22 August 1990, p. 2B.

2 Interview with Gary Hack, January 1991.

3 Interview with Vince Ryan, January 1991.

4 "Founders Park" document, American General Investment Corporation and Cullen Center, Inc., Fall 1990, p. 53.

5 Ibid., p. 7.

6 Interview with Frank Kelly, December 1990.

7 Interview with Jim Stockard, January 1991.

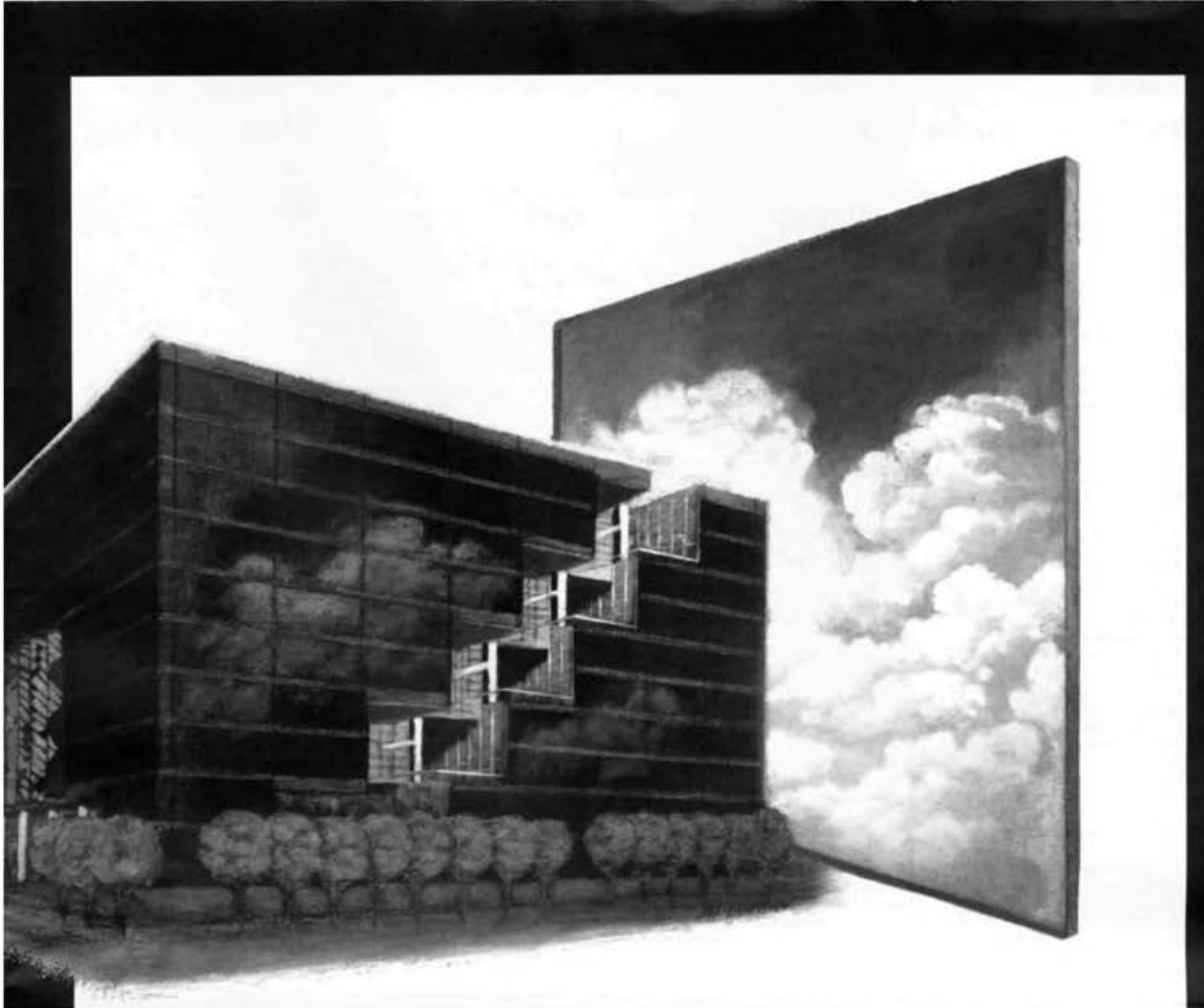
8 Interview with Frank Kelly, December 1990.

APV Update

On Thursday, 4 April, U.S. district judge Kenneth M. Hoyt ruled on the lawsuit brought by the Allen Parkway Village Resident Council against the Housing Authority of the City of Houston (HACH) to prevent use of federal funds to demolish Allen Parkway Village. Judge Hoyt found for the plaintiffs. He directed that funds remaining from the $10 million awarded to HACH in 1979 by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for the rehabilitation of Allen Parkway Village be applied only to Allen Parkway Village and that disposition of these funds, as well as HUD rent subsidies that HACH continued to receive for Allen Parkway Village, be accounted for since 1979. Judge Hoyt prohibited HACH from spending federal funds to promote or plan the demolition of Allen Parkway Village. And he gave HACH 60 days to prepare a rehabilitation plan for the project using the funds the authority had been granted for that purpose 12 years ago. Judge Hoyt's ruling is intended to bring HACH into conformance with the Frost-Leland Amendment of 1987. Sponsored by the late Houston congressman Mickey Leland and Dallas congressman Martin Frost, this prevents use of federal funds to demolish low-income public housing projects.

The housing authority board subsequently voted to appeal Judge Hoyt's ruling. Meanwhile, Congressman Craig Washington, Leland's successor, is seeking repeal of the Frost-Leland Amendment. While a member of the Texas Senate, Washington cosponsored legislation introduced by Senator Don Henderson that amended the state's Tax Increment Financing Act and the Texas Enterprise Zone Act. Without these amendments – which representatives of Founders Park Venture, at the August forum event, stated they had sought – Founders Park could not qualify as a tax increment financing district, nor would corporate representatives be eligible to serve on a TIF district board of directors.

Stephen Fox



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Fireside Chat Lacks Spark

Learning From the '80s,
Lessons for the '90s
Presented by the Rice Design Alliance
24 January 1991

Reviewed by Tim Fleck

Attending the RDA Fireside Chat *Learning From the '80s, Lessons for the '90s* at the Rice University Faculty Club in late January, I was glad I had worn a heavy leather jacket. The diffuse, disjointed discussion produced little intellectual heat but churned up some chilling comments from the audience. Part of the problem was that the panel – all white male professionals – operated from such a narrow cultural base. Women and minorities might have brought different perspectives to the issues. The fact that three of those four panelists, as well as moderator and *Texas Architect* editor Joel Warren Barna, spent much of the 1980s outside Houston lent an abstract air to the presentations. And the participants for the most part were unendingly polite, so much so that preservationist Vincent Hauser's description of developers as "unleashed dogs" seemed to violate the affair's social conventions. It certainly ruffled former Gerald Hines honcho Clayton Stone, the token developer at the table, who nevertheless responded with genteel humor.

Public leadership in Houston, or the lack thereof, was one of the few issues that caught fire during the chat. "I have a lot of anxiety," a crowd member confided to the panel as the last flickers of discussion died down. "We all agree that Jesse Jones is dead and that it's not happening in the locker room of the Houston Country Club anymore, and where is Walter Mischer when we need him? But I don't see public sector leadership. Some leadership has got to emerge."

I too had a certain sense of anxiety as the panel folded the tent on that last question, one member muttering, "I would agree." The eighties in Houston took off with an explosion of loan-and-build excess on the part of bankers and developers and closed amid hundreds of thousands of home foreclosures, business bankruptcies, and bank collapses. One wonders if all we have really learned from the journey is nostalgia for the good old days when a few non-elected kingmakers structured a city that served the interests of the economically advantaged and left out-of-sight minority communities with unpaved streets and no running water. Seems your vision of the City Beautiful depends heavily upon which neighborhood you sleep in at night – and this, after all, was a chat among representatives of the crowd that lives on the right side of the tracks (or will if Metro ever gets around to building the tracks).

At least Houstonians out in the boonies have a clue about what the future demands. Rice University sociologist Stephen Klineberg's Houston Area Survey uses random phone samples of 650 households to track public attitudes on civic issues. "Our findings indicate residents are rethinking the policies of unregulated growth," Klineberg told the audience. His numbers show that more and more Houstonians favor boosting environmental safeguards regardless of cost and enacting governmental regulation of land use to protect neighborhoods. Klineberg is currently gathering data for the 1991 edition of the survey.

Mayor Kathy Whitmire felt the hot political breath measured in Klineberg's survey and quickly got behind the zoning issue. Few would argue that the public has swung around to a position strongly supporting a governmental role in deciding how land is used in the city. Yet, oddly, moderator Barna concluded the fireside chat by summarizing: "Here we are in 1991, but there's not that much difference from 1980 in the attitudes . . . and the conflicts represented here. [There's a] vision of a better city, but distrust of the public sector remains as strong as before."

It's hard to see how audience members would have left the chat with any clearer idea of where Houston is heading than they had when they came. After Klineberg read the entrails of his random phone samplings, developer Stone ran down the roots of the eighties debacle for us. The deregulation of savings and loans, corporate cash funding of pension funds, and eager foreign investors all combined to provide a torrent of financing for construction of just about any project a developer could put on the drawing boards. Competitive pressures forced banks to quit relying on insurance company backup and instead issue direct loans to developers. "Projects didn't have to make sense because tax incentives said it was all right," recalled Stone of those wild and crazy days when inflation was the drug of choice. "Doctors bury mistakes," he laughed, "architects plant ivy, and developers pray for inflation."

Stone called the history of the decade "false optimism with a lot of money behind it and a lot of momentum" – a pretty picture for the feeding frenzy that took place around the money troughs created by the Reagan years of financial deregulation. I'm still wondering how five informed people could have a lengthy "chat" about the eighties and never mention the word *greed*.

Former Houston architect Richard Keating offered the opinion that "we are in a city that I don't think is about the quality of life." He pointed out that big business likes Houston because Texas has no income tax, there's a relatively low crime rate "where you live," and homes are dirt cheap and near workplaces. "Wonder why Texas continues to worry about itself so much," mused Keating. "It's good compared to everywhere else."

Preservationist Hauser also found some positive lessons from the last decade. He said that historical preservationists became the leaders in the neighbhorhood revitalization movement and can provide models for tackling the gritty job of rebuilding inner-city communities in the nineties. That was it for the subject. The only discussion of the tricky politics of race and class involved in restoring inner-city neighborhoods without making them yuppie preserves came later in a question about Fourth Ward. "People who live in the community need to be part of the process," answered Hauser. "I think there's constructive middle ground. I don't know what that is."

With the early planning for zoning in Houston already under way, the lack of discussion about its implications for neighborhood and business development was a puzzling hole in the conversation. The city of Houston's new director of planning and development, Donna Kristaponis, predicts that the efforts to define what constitutes a residential neighborhood will be a central planning issue of the early nineties.

"If there are 600 lots in a neighborhood and 400 are residential, are you going to affect the 200 that aren't . . . and try to grandfather them or amortize them?" Asked whether the answers to this and other quandaries are political decisions, Kristaponis responds: "You bet they are. Absolutely political decisions." This is the kind of down-to-earth realism I came to the chat hoping to hear, but I found little to grasp in a cloud of generalizations.

As for the controversy over the desirability of commuter rail in Houston, both panel and audience, judging from the questions, seemed solidly behind the Metro plan, whatever plan Metro finally decides to ride with. The only discussion revolved around whether Metro's failure to get construction started was due to yet another failure of public leadership.

The tricky business of private-public joint ventures was similarly glossed over. The one mention of the privately funded, city-supported Wortham Theater Center came in a lament by Keating that it had not been built on the site of the defunct Albert Thomas Convention Center. Amazingly, none of the panelists mentioned Houston's feat in completing the George R. Brown Convention Center both on time and under budget in the teeth of the mid-eighties recession and despite the city's failure to construct a downtown hotel to support it. Similarly undiscussed were the debacles of the Mercado del Sol Hispanic-theme shopping center and the Holiday Inn that was to resurface as the Memorial Plaza Highrise for the Elderly. Both of these "public-private partnerships" gobbled up millions of community development dollars only to become boarded-up eyesores on the outskirts of downtown Houston. They provide a powerful lesson from the eighties of what not to do in the nineties, but perhaps all this was too specific and outside the experience of the panelists.

Still, the RDA's Fireside Chats serve a valuable educational function, and this one had a few high points. The standing-room-only crowd demonstrated that there is a desire in Houston for incisive commentary about urban issues. Next time the audience would benefit from a wider range of voices and colors on a panel with more specific local knowledge of the issues. Maybe that could generate some real warmth around the fireplace. ■

Changing Platz

Berlin: The Politics of Order, 1737–1989
by Alan Balfour. New York: Rizzoli, 1990.
269 pp., illus., $39.95

Reviewed by Richard Ingersoll

I never dreamed I would feel nostalgic for the Berlin Wall. That cruel and ugly prefab plane, capped with ungainly concrete cylinders designed to roll down on people attempting to escape, was more than just a barrier between the East and the West; it became the unwitting symbol of the peaceful equipoise of advanced monopoly capitalism and police state communism. Within a year of the Wall's disappearance, the world witnessed the most explicit display of unchecked militarism since World War II, accompanied with triumphant slogans about the creation of "a new world order" (a rhetorical term perhaps borrowed unconsciously from Adolf Hitler, who was also fond of using it). Short of rebuilding the Wall, one remedy to this depressing aftermath would be to read Alan Balfour's *Berlin: A Politics of Order*, to gain a seasoned perspective on the problem of "order" as an ever and always unrequited desire.

Balfour gives us a thoroughly engaging lesson on the importance of architecture and urbanism in the cultural and psychological landscape. Not since Rem Koolhaas's *Delirious New York* has there been such an original and stimulating investigation of architectural history. Text and image are entwined into a multilayered presentation of past and present, so that the remoteness of historical events is given parity with the intimacy of observed drawings and photographs in the present. Part scrapbook, part archival reconstruction, part moral reflection, the book relies on a single urban fragment of Berlin, the octagonal Leipziger Platz, to tell the story of the entire city – like the proverbial button from which the rest of civilization can be extrapolated. Leipziger Platz, laid out on the city's western edge in 1737, became the stage for a succession of significant architectural performances, not the least of which was its own rational delineation. The architects, political protagonists, bystanders, and their historical circumstances ebb and flow across the plaza; each new historical tide rearranges the space as a "landscape of desire" until a 1967 photograph, used on the dust jacket, reveals Leipziger Platz as no more than an octagonal trace in the no-man's-land behind the Berlin Wall. While neither the entirety of Berlin's history nor the best of its architecture was played out at Leipziger Platz, the ideals of history, the various ideologies of social and political order, converged there conveniently as representations of a possible order. The cast of buildings includes Friedrich Gilly's unbuilt monument to Frederick the Great, planned for the octagon's center; Karl Friedrich Schinkel's Doric gate pavilions, placed discreetly at its western entry; Alfred Messel's Wertheim's Department Store, Berlin's first cathedral of commerce; the garish music hall called "Kempinski's House of the Fatherland" on Potsdamer Platz, adjacent to the octagon; and Albert Speer's ponderous Reich Chancellery one block north of the octagon, in the garden of which Hitler would end his life. The Stalinist projects on the east have an uncannily similar demeanor, while Hans Scharoun's Berlin Philharmonic Hall and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's National Gallery, placed in the nearby Kultur Forum in the 1960s, are a final, fruitless attempt in the West to create an architecture of strong beliefs. The nearby Postmodern designs of James Stirling, Peter Eisenman, and Hans Hollein are indicative of a subsequent willing suspension of belief.

One building, Erich Mendelsohn's Columbus Haus (1932), is pulled out of the diachronic sequence of artifacts to be treated in its own chapter. Mendelsohn's World War I trench sketches, depicting

A view down Potsdamerstrasse toward Leipziger Platz, 1913.

forms free of structural or iconographic information, are juxtaposed with sketches by Hitler of a quadrifrons arch and a great domed hall, grandiose ideas that became the ultimate justification for grandiose Nazi policies. In contrast to Hitler's imperial project for the city, Mendelsohn's work was meant to be free of historical allusion and architectural rhetoric, "a reality empty of meaning . . . free to carry any meaning." Columbus Haus is catalogued in various states of occupation and transformation. Mendelsohn believed it to have been used by the SS as a prison after 1933 (although there is now documentation to the contrary). Partly ruined during the war, attacked in a riot after the war, the building is revealed as a sleek missionary of utopian Modernism that resisted for a decade before being completely dismantled and run over by the Wall.

Seen at such close range, Leipziger Platz is a sphinxlike place that despite convulsive changes keeps posing an eternal question. Balfour's eight different landscapes of desire, from the most authoritarian to the most liberal, represent vain attempts to reorder the world through the suggestive power of physical form. The wisdom embedded in this panoramic assembly is that no matter how charged or how stripped of associations of language and memory, architecture serves ideology poorly, as it can neither stop time nor answer the eternal question. ■

Suburban Idylls

Genesis de un municipio de vanguardia, San Pedro Garza García *by Juan Ignacio Barragán. Monterrey: Urbis Internacional S.A. de C.V., 1990. In Spanish. 168 pp., illus., $100*

Tanglewood: The Story of William Giddings Farrington *by Mary Catherine Farrington Miller. Houston: Gulf Publishing Company, 1989. 111 pp., illus., $29.95*

Reviewed by Stephen Fox

San Pedro Garza García is the elite suburb of Monterrey, Nuevo León, the third largest city in Mexico and the country's industrial center. Since suburbanization began in the middle 1940s, San Pedro Garza García has grown from a rural township of 5,000 to a city in its own right, with a population perhaps as high as 200,000. Despite Mexico's economic crisis, Garza García emerged in the 1980s as a cultural and business center, with art galleries, international restaurants, corporate headquarters, and highrise towers filling in between the enclaves of the rich and more densely populated barrios. Land values in Garza García are now equivalent to those in the center of Monterrey. It is the richest city in Mexico and one in which patterns of urban development in the United States have been enthusiastically adopted.

Juan Ignacio Barragán, a Regiomontano architect, historian, and sociologist who teaches at the University of Nuevo León, traces the history of Garza García through its urban development, architecture, social customs, and municipal politics. Each category provides fascinating insights into the attributes that make Garza García exceptional in Mexico. The efficient delivery of public services is a trait that contributes significantly to the city's attractiveness to the Regiomontana upper middle class. Barragán demonstrates how strong neighborhood organizations composed of affluent, well-educated activists compelled not only the PAN but the PRI to respond to demands for effective municipal administration. He examines the foremost social institutions that support the domestic life of the Mexican elite – the church, the home (with corollaries old and new, the wall and the satellite dish), the private school, and the club – to determine their impact upon the formation of Garza García and to survey changes that have transpired since the 1950s.

Several chapters apiece are devoted to urban development and architecture. Barragán details the development of the Colonia del Valle, the subdivision begun in 1944 that determined Garza García's future and whose history has striking parallels to that of River Oaks in Houston. They are approximately the same size (1,100 acres), both were located off their cities' existing axes of fashionable residential development, and both required significant public infrastructure improvements to make them easily accessible. The extraordinary success of both subdivisions had much to do with the visions of two sets of brothers who invested their fortunes to create new models of planned residential development. It comes as no surprise to find that Alberto Santos, the Monterrey industrialist who with his brothers masterminded the Colonia del Valle, knew of River Oaks. Santos was responsible for introducing in Monterrey the North American concept of the auto-accessible, comprehensively planned and regulated garden suburb. This set the pattern for the "green" urbanism that distinguishes Garza García from traditional Mexican cities.

Barragán uses the chapters on architecture to document the changing preferences of wealthy Regiomontanos, their awareness of U.S. models, and the evolution of the architectural profession in Monterrey. The emergence of the professional architect (as distinct from engineer) and of professional specialization (the rise of the architect-decorator), the impact of the Monterrey Institute of Technology's raffling of custom-designed and -equipped houses on images of domestic luxury and currency, and the subdivision of the architectural profession into tendencies identifiable by style and professional attitude are all addressed. Such phenomena as the rise in popularity of the "McAllen-style" house during the 1980s will prove especially intriguing to Texan readers.

Whether San Pedro Garza García is in the vanguard of Mexican urban development or is simply an anomaly made possible by concentrated wealth and attentiveness to extra-Mexican models remains a crucial question. Growth and prosperity have brought to Garza García the familiar problems of environmental degradation, escalating real estate values, escalating volumes of traffic, and uncertainty about the desirability of unlimited expansion – the same Paradise Despoiled scenario that afflicts its North American counterparts. Barragán enumerates the problems confronting Garza García, although he does not examine the impact that its transformation into a supersuburban rival of Monterrey has had on the metropolitan city or the price extracted in resources to sustain a supersuburban scale of development.

San Pedro Garza García is an absorbing account of the development of a new departure in Mexican urbanism. The book's lack of maps, architectural drawings, and good photographs of the works of important architects is a problem for those unfamiliar with the city. Even so, *San Pedro Garza García* gives one the opportunity to look at contemporary Mexico outside the frame of moralizing north-of-the-border assumptions and stereotypes.

The scope of Mary Catherine Farrington Miller's book about her father is more modest than Barragán's. *Tanglewood: The Story of William Giddings Farrington* documents the life of a Houston builder and developer and profiles his major real estate projects. Farrington was an exact contemporary of Alberto Santos. Trained as an engineer, he came to Houston in 1926, working first for the San Jacinto Trust Company on the development of Braeswood, then entering the residential building industry. Farrington survived the Great Depression to become one of Houston's foremost suburban home builders of the 1930s and 1940s. After World War II he built the Lamar–River Oaks Community Center at Westheimer and River Oaks Boulevard, extensions to the River Oaks Community Center on West Gray, and the Parkwood Apartments on Old Spanish Trail (which he also developed). In the mid-1940s Farrington began to block up property one mile west of River Oaks, near the intersection of San Felipe and Post Oak Road. There, between 1949 and 1959, he developed the 552-acre Tanglewood subdivision. During the 1950s he began to acquire property at Post Oak and Westheimer on which he developed and built the Post Oak Shopping Center, opened in 1960.

Farrington's life could serve as a virtual case study of successful entrepreneurship in 20th-century Houston. Not only his building and development activities, but his involvement in civic, charitable, and cultural organizations, where his business acumen was valued, provide insight into the operations of the Houston establishment at mid-century. Mrs. Miller does not emphasize architecture, despite the high standards that Farrington's suburban houses and retail and apartment projects of the 1930s and 1940s exhibit. The River Oaks and Lamar–River Oaks community centers and the Parkwood Apartments remain outstanding demonstrations of intelligently planned, superlatively detailed building complexes. These were the work of Farrington's staff architect at the time, Raymond H. Brogniez.

In River Oaks the Hogg brothers and Hugh Potter had demonstrated the competitive advantage that first-rate architecture could give a speculative real estate development. Gerald D. Hines, at the end of the 1960s, rediscovered this connection between enlightened architectural patronage and market positioning. In light of his own prior achievements, Farrington's seeming lack of concern for architectural excellence after 1949 is puzzling. Unfortunately for him, this lapse cost his two most important undertakings, Tanglewood and the Post Oak Center, the historical distinction that might otherwise have accrued to them.

William G. Farrington and Alberto Santos responded to the desire of affluent city dwellers to drive to, or even beyond, the edge of the city in search of domestic repose. West Houston and San Pedro Garza García are landscapes that, in less than 50 years, have been transformed from countryside into a new kind of dispersed, low-density city. What is so compelling about the comparison of the careers of the two developers that these books make possible is the way in which two landscapes, 450 miles apart, refract the same archetype in response to more profound patterns of domestic culture. ■

HindCite

A Houston Childhood in 1991

Bruce Webb

For a child a city can be an incomparable place for learning. A. E. Parr, a zoologist and senior scientist at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, described his memories of growing up in Norway during the early part of this century:

Until I reached the age of five we lived a short commuter distance outside of a town of about 75,000 on the west coast of Norway. Not as a chore, but as an eagerly desired pleasure, I was fairly regularly entrusted with the task of buying fish and bringing it home alone. This involved the following: walking to the station in five to ten minutes; buying a ticket; watching train with coal burning steam locomotive pull in; boarding train; riding across long bridge over shallows separating small boat harbor from ship's harbor including small naval base with torpedo boats; continuing through a tunnel; leaving train at terminal, sometimes dawdling to look at railroad equipment; walking by and sometimes entering fisheries museum; passing central town park where military band played during mid-day breaks; strolling by central shopping and business district, or alternatively, passing fire station with horses at ease under suspended harnesses, ready to go, and continuing past centuries-old town hall and other ancient buildings; exploration of fish market and fishing fleet; selection of fish; haggling over price; purchase and return home.

When I was five we moved into the town itself, and I started to go to kindergarten and elementary school soon after. The days would go as follows: off to school with other children joining the morning stream of white-collar pedestrian males ranging from clerks to shipowners, usually not walking with our elders but unavoidably exposed to overhearing adult conversation and observing adult behavior; soon passing a small botanical garden and greenhouse, a large building housing a substantial museum of natural history and a fair museum of history and ethnography; passing, also, a great architectural variety of residences; then the railroad terminal and the building opposite which housed the fisheries museum previously mentioned, and also, on higher floors, a museum of decorative arts, a small city art gallery and the exhibition halls of the art association. Past the central park with the music stand, and on to the school, which shared a block with the fire station, city prison, and an historic but still functioning city government building.[1]

A child growing up in Houston today might recall experiences more like these:

Until I reached the age of five we lived a short commuter distance outside a city of 2.5 million near the Gulf Coast of Texas. As a regular routine I was often taken on family outings to the shopping mall to buy things in the shops and big department stores. This involved the following: setting the VCR so we wouldn't miss any shows while we were away; walking from house to station wagon, where I was buckled into my safety seat next to my sister; backing out of our driveway and proceeding down the block of middle-size suburban houses, all reassuringly like our own house and all set far back on neat lawns with azalea bushes snubbling up close to the foundations; driving a few blocks and merging with the heavy traffic speeding smoothly along the freeway, where I remember catching fleeting glances of numerous medium to tall buildings, all of them looking as if they had been pressed from different cookie cutters out of the same reflective-glass material, and most of them as empty as the little cities I built with my Legos; passing a very large Baptist church that was at least 15 years old, and large, colorful signs that seemed to shout at us of things to buy, eat, or drink; leaving the freeway at a slower speed, and stopping at last at an intersection where many other cars had stopped, so we could all momentarily look at one another and at a gas station and at a restaurant with a huge plastic statue of a clown out front; then

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entering the grounds of the shopping center, where I was regularly entrusted with the job of helping to spot an opening among the endless aisles of parked cars.

Then dashing across the superheated blacktop to enter the super-chilled atmosphere of the mall itself, where throngs of people moved purposefully in two parallel routes along the perimeter display windows, the center section having been given over to a collection of displays and fountains lazily spilling Bowline-scented waters, where children older than I smoked cigarettes and shouted to one another. Then dipping into dozens of shops to explore the merchandise that was set out in great piles for us to rummage through, and searching for a clerk to check out our selections; sitting down for a quickly consumed dinner of geometrically shaped bits of chicken and a huge pink "milkshake"; then returning home late at night to watch the programs we had taped while we were gone.

When I was a little older we moved a little farther from the city into a neighborhood that resembled a theme park, and I went off to school, catching a big yellow school bus at the corner of my street for a three-quarter-hour trip to a school in my old neighborhood. While we waited for the bus, standing just inside the curb on a little brown spot of ground in a neighbor's lawn, I could watch streams of cars carrying people to work, their faces hidden behind heavily tinted windows. I could imagine that inside some of them rode the mayor, our priest, maybe even a professional baseball player.

Once I was taken downtown to see a performance of *The Nutcracker.* We left the freeway to enter a labyrinth of narrow streets that crisscrossed between the tall buildings I had formerly seen only from a distance, then slipped suddenly underground to park the car and walk swiftly across the vast, low-ceilinged interior of this dimly lit subterranean chamber, coming at last to a nondescript orange door that led into a green corridor, emerging after a very long walk into the grand hall of the theater, where we were pushed along an escalator by people scurrying to find their seats. After the performance we followed the large crowd along the same green corridor, trying several orange doors until we found the one leading to where our car was parked. Joining the line of cars slowing inching through the rapidly dwindling supply of breathable air, we emerged back onto the street, where I remember seeing a group of roller skaters dressed in leather road warrior outfits outside a building where my father said he worked. We then proceeded along one dark and gloomy street after another in the gathering darkness, my mother saying she hoped we had enough gas to get to the freeway, which we reached with great relief. Feeling more secure with the cars and trucks zipping by us at 60 or 70 miles per hour, I could look back to downtown, where the buildings at that safe distance formed a satisfying sculptural cluster. We stopped somewhere to eat a sit-down meal of geometrically shaped fish morsels served in Styrofoam boxes, which my father said were made in New Jersey, and then went home. ■

From a talk given on 15 January 1990 at a Rice Design Alliance Fireside Chat, The Future of the Street.

Notes

1 A. E. Parr, "The Child in the City: Urbanity and the Urban Scene," *Landscape,* Spring 1967, pp. 3–5.

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