

Places

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Places

John B. Jackson

Place Debate:

Piazza d'Italia

**The Creation of a
Sense of Place**

Kimberly Dovey

Light and Public Places

Richard C. Peters

Clearings

Barbara Stauffacher

Solomon

Milton Street

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Space into Place:

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Urbanism in Warsaw

Alexi Ferster Marmot

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Places

A Quarterly Journal
of Environmental Design

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George Baird
Robert S. Harris
Christian Norberg-
Schultz
Jay Claiborne (with
Tom Aidala)
Ron Filson
Allen Eskew
Charles W. Moore
Donlyn Lyndon

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Alexi Ferster Marmot

Volume 1, Number 2, Winter 1984

John B. Jackson



Twenty years ago, as editor of what was then a very small and very obscure periodical struggling to survive on the subscriptions of some 200 readers, I received a manuscript entitled "Toward Making Places." The opening sentence read as follows. "The architect's task is more than the manipulation of materials and the molding of space, it is the definition and possession of place."

Puzzled but impressed, I read further.

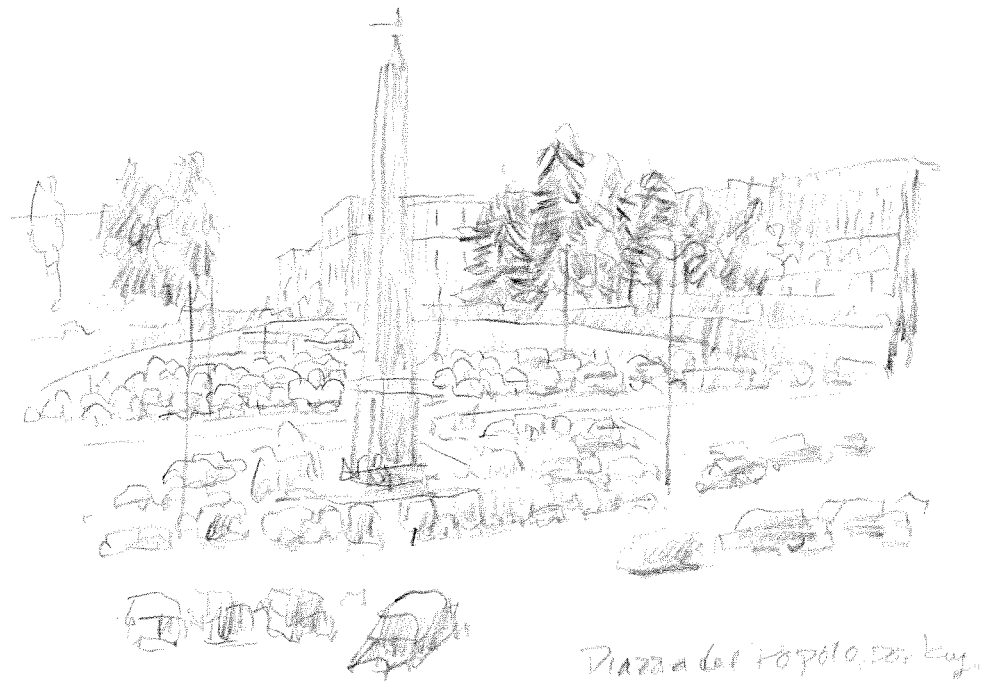
A building is in a specific place to which it must specifically respond. Generalized forms must grow out of a thorough understanding of the particular place, activities, techniques of building and systems of service. We must start not with geometry but with the user. . . . We must be reminded of an order that is not our own; the simple facts of the natural world that nurtured our growth and on which we still depend. . . . The creative act of architecture abstracts intrinsic qualities of an existing natural environment, together with components of our mechanical world, synthesizes a new place, a harmony of human and natural environments.

I had already published not a few articles dealing with the then popular topic of how to reconcile man's presence with the preservation of the natural environment, and I must say I was not eager to read what I suspected was still another of the familiar

admonitions to architects and planners to design with nature. Those were the years when the environmental movement was more concerned with design than with ecology. But to my surprise I soon saw that this article had a very different tone and point of view. It read more like a manifesto than a warning. It called for our "taking possession" of the environment, not to exploit it but to establish human domains. "The specific solution starts with a place, makes it habitable, and enhances the qualities of the specific place by making it responsive to the needs of the people who use it."

The underlying theme, repeatedly emphasized, was that "the places that we build should . . . keep us aware of the conjunction between natural order and synthetic form that is the base of human activity." "We require architecture as distinct from buildings, to create a singular sense of order; a sense of *place*." But what attracted me most about the article was the importance attached to the notion of specificity of concreteness. It seemed to be saying that there was no such thing as *place* in the abstract. Each one was a unique reality.

The four young authors of the article were then members of the faculty of the Department of Architecture at the University of California at Berkeley; they have since become eminent teachers, writers, and architects. They were Donlyn Lyndon, Charles W. Moore, Patrick J. Quinn, and Sim



van Der Ryn. I am proud to remember that *Landscape* published their first collaborative piece of writing. They were among the earliest, I think, to express the need for including place as an ingredient in every architectural design, and I know that each has written much more on the subject. The intervening 20 years have seen an ever widening interest in the approach—this magazine being the latest and most significant instance—and there is no doubt that the interest will spread throughout the design professions before the decade is over, and be discussed by laymen as well.

It is this prospect of acceptance and popularity (and inevitable misinterpretation) that leads me to believe that one of the first undertakings of the editors of *Places* would be to explain the subject; to specify how it intends to show specificity, and tell us what concreteness is, with concrete examples. And the very word itself calls for interpretation, for I doubt that the initiates always realize that in talking about *place*—in the singular and without a definite article—they are using an ordinary

word in an extraordinary way. No dictionary that I know of mentions this usage. Among the 14 different definitions of the noun “place” listed in the *American Heritage Dictionary*, not one comes close to the word as used (for example) in such a phrase as “sense of place.”

Far from finding this singularity objectionable, I think it indicates that a new spatial concept has evolved. It is simply a question of saying, as clearly as possible, what that concept is. My own response, when I am confronted by an old word being used in what is to me a novel way, is to find out what it originally meant—not in order to return to that meaning, but to learn something about its subsequent evolution. *Place*, I discover, has a complicated past, and its evolution, as I understand it, has been in two separate directions: one toward increasing abstractness, the other toward greater visibility and specificity. In its original Latin form—*platea*—its significance was down-to-earth: it meant a broad street or an open space. It is related to such words as flat, and flag (as in flagstone), and of course to plaza and piazza. This urban usage seems

to have persisted well into the Middle Ages, for *place* often indicated a collection of houses or a town, and even a mansion. By the Renaissance it was used to refer to what we call a square: an orderly arrangement of houses that is not a street, and an eighteenth-century English traveler commented on the “squares, as we improperly call them in England but which the Germans, as well as the French and Italians, more properly denominate Places.”

So the urban connotation lingered over the centuries. But it so happens that there still survives an older English word, this time of Germanic origin, meaning place in the strictly spatial sense, and that word is *stead*. Stead, it is true, has its urban usage—as in the German word *stadt* and in place-names like Hampstead, but words related to it tell us something about a more rural concept of space in the past. We still use in everyday speech such words as homestead and farmstead, and also steady and instead—meaning, of course, in place of—and a remote relative of stead is a now obsolete term for place: stow or stowe, which we still use as a

verb meaning to pack tightly or to “put in place.”

If we had not discarded the old word “stead”—no doubt because it was Anglo-Saxon and countrified—we could now use it and discuss the “sense of stead” or the “making of stead,” and use the word place to indicate *position*. Nevertheless, our forebears decided in favor of place, and since of necessity the newer Latinate word had to take over the meanings of the word it replaced and still retain its own meaning, the result was a word which was at once abstract and specific. The essentially urban and object-oriented concept inherited from the classical world was combined with the older, more rural word emphasizing security. Thus, by the late Middle Ages, *place* had come to mean both the location of an orderly, permanent arrangement of spaces and structures and a social or official position. Putting these two usages together we might say that a specific example of a place would be a *homestead* containing crops and fields and family; *steadfast* in that it was fixed in one spot in the midst of a shifting and unpredictable environment, *steady* in the sense of being regular in operation. The classical contribution provided this place with boundaries, with defined *extent* and *status* in relation to its neighbors. It transformed the homestead into an *estate* or domain.

The word, in short, had achieved a

degree of specificity at least in spatial terms. Even so, place had no landscape or aesthetic identity. It was still little more than the location, the container, of certain social or economic values.

As one might expect, a newer and much more specific definition evolved in the eighteenth century. I scarcely need point out how the romantic movement not only taught us to appreciate the beauties of natural scenery, but how it taught us to seek out the beauty unique to a specific region or place. But more than romanticism was at work revising and expanding our sense of place. We began to value place as a way of expressing ourselves and even of developing our personality. Place was our own individual space. “It is a curious fact,” Peter Collins observes in *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*, “that until the eighteenth century no architectural treatise ever used the word [space]. Moreover, the idea of space as a primary quality of architectural composition was not fully developed until the last few years. What mattered to classical theorists was structure, and this did not necessarily imply the enclosure of space. . . . The change in outlook probably first occurred in the middle of the eighteenth century as a result of the introduction of romantic gardens.” Collins points out that one of the first signs of this personal awareness of space was the popularity of the villa or country residence which, he says, became “a medium for expressing

architecturally many of the most powerful aspirations of the age.”

What, we might ask, were those? Surely domestic privacy was one of them, and status derived from being associated with a handsome place was another, but perhaps the most important aspiration of them all was to receive and be influenced by the spiritual forces of nature. Place, interpreted as a secluded and natural appearing environment, privately owned, acquired the determining role that we now ascribe to environment. Whether place was the villa of the London merchant, the Hudson Valley country place, or the grandiose park of Prince Pückler-Muskau, place became identified with the solitary experience of nature.

The naïve environmentalism that sought to make architecture reflect the influences of place in the use of local materials and in conforming to local landscape characteristics has long since yielded to a more scientific, and more abstract, definition of environment; whereas nineteenth-century thought of the influences of place, particularly “natural” place, as essentially emotional and private, has yielded to a view that those influences can be therapeutic and social as well. If place and the possession of place in the spatial sense can mean so much to the individual and help so much in establishing his or her identity, is there any reason why these benefits should not be available to all? Could we not further elaborate and enrich the concept of space so that

we could actually design and create space-communities “abstracting the intrinsic qualities of any existing natural environment” (to rephrase a passage from “Toward Making Places”), and “together with components of our mechanical world, synthesize a new place, a harmony of human and natural environments?”

As I see it, this is how matters now stand. With increasing urgency and specificity we are asking how socially defined place can be made here in contemporary America, and we are looking systematically in many directions for inspiration and guidance: to those places that already exist and give satisfaction, to those that existed in the past, to individual experiences of place, and above all to those disciplines—environmental, historical, philosophical—that have studied and interpreted man’s ceaseless and rarely successful efforts to feel at home in the world.

I close with an excerpt from an article that appeared in *Landscape* shortly before “Toward Making Places.” It was originally a speech by Dolf Steinberg, professor of political science at Heidelberg, given in 1953, at a time when there was still much homelessness and “enforced mobility” in Central Europe. In 1962 it seemed to offer a way to interpret certain characteristics of the American landscape. Today it suggests the wisdom of taking those characteristics into account in the

creativity of any truly American place.

It is doubtful whether our essential rootlessness, our homelessness in the widest meaning of the word, can ever be overcome, whether in fact rootlessness is not a basic characteristic of man. . . . We do not want to design architectural or planning fantasies for a society of plant-like beings, we do not want to become a deeprooted immobile race, inhabiting a hivelike community or neighborhood. . . . When we take into account that in a spatial topographical sense there are three poles in the habitat: dwelling, work, and society . . . it follows, it seems to me, that the task of producing communication is no less important to the architect and planner than the task of providing shelter and workplace. . . . Whether it is an automobile or motorcycle or bus or subway, whether road or rail, these objects belong no less than do dwelling and workshop or factory to a complete overcoming of the sense of homelessness among men, for they provide the possibility of freedom and movement. For man is *not* a plant and his house is not an organism, and he must be free to move at his will between these three poles which taken together constitute his home.

Understanding the sense of place is a long-term, evolving project. That sense takes root in the form and character of the natural environment and of the artifacts that have been built into it, the pace and manner of change, and even in certain memorable events from the history of the particular locale.

To each place individuals and groups bring their own histories, their own expectations, their own convictions, and their own skills in reading and acting upon the environment. These qualify their potential to experience. Thus, a sense of place in the aggregate must be thought of as plural, as a collection of experiences, many of which overlap, some of which may be distinct.

Our inclination as designers and educators is to focus on the artifacts and shaped landscapes that make the physical settings for places. Our preferences are for those settings that support multiple associations, that are rich with the evidence of history, and that provide for or even invite continuing evolution to meet real or symbolic needs.

Places will endeavor to mirror the richness, the pluralism, the specificity of the best places and processes we describe. It should also make its strategic contribution to the processes of environmental change: it should foster learning, learning about places in their plenitude, learning about the processes that precede and accompany inter-

vention, and learning how to make places wonderful.

Places can flourish only if your contributions grow in number and variety. Please let us have your ideas and articles.

We wish to express our unbounded gratitude to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The NEA's acknowledgment of the idea of *Places* through a generous grant for its initiation was absolutely essential to its becoming. Equally important was the patient support of its director through the adventure of starting the journal, and through the change of leadership required by the tragic loss of Donald Appleyard.



Donlyn Lyndon



William L. Porter

Places is considering a series of articles on "Labors of Love," about stories of unsung heroes who have created special places in their communities—not through grand design but through the slow, incremental process of their own labor and with limited resources (See Hester, Randy. "Labors of Love in the Public Landscape." *Places* 1 [Fall 1983]: 18–27.). These places and types might also include people who have cared enough about a place to stop something from happening—such as the man who kept an island on Lake Winnepesaukee from being developed.

Have these "Labors of love" changed their communities in a significant way?

Send your examples of "Labors of Love" to:

Donlyn Lyndon, Co-editor
Center for Environmental Design
Research
373 Wurster Hall
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720

or

William L. Porter, Co-editor
Laboratory of Architecture and
Planning
4–209
Massachusetts Institute of
Technology
Cambridge, MA 02139

Being There

Donlyn Lyndon

learning how to orchestrate and be a participant in a group activity, and of learning the importance of flexibility and vulnerability. The making of the Piazza both as product and process, was at times exhilarating, scary, confusing, and, most of all, educational. The exhilaration stemmed from the sheer fun of making an unconventional space with an unconventional set of rules and design parameters. The scary side came from working for the first time with a fancy guy like Charles W. Moore. This confusion always prevailed, because confusion is so much a part of Moore's existence. He thrives on the edge of disaster yet can always turn the most confusing of signals into the most clever of solutions. It takes (which I was later to learn) a great amount of courage to hang on until the very last moment when, unbeknown to most of us, Charles would snatch order and meaning out of ever growing clouds of confusion. He thrived on this dance with disorder and, by his example, taught us all how to dance. Making the Piazza was educational because amid the searching, confusion, and "scariness" we were always learning and exploring—never content with the direction established yesterday. Each day's work was a jumping-off point for tomorrow's explorations. Because design work was always done in a group situation, the

techniques for brainstorming and playing off each other's ideas became central to working together. The pooling of good thoughts and the sharing of bad ideas was a very liberating experience. Charles' self-confidence and his ever present ability to rescue and make wonderful even the most awkward of ideas helped everyone remain open and vulnerable.

I hope that such openness and vulnerability extends into the planning of the Fair. The ability to think and explore unconventional ideas and recognize the emergence of unconventional solutions has been invaluable. Whereas the Piazza process usually involved four or five individuals, the World's Fair planning involves the orchestration of 35 separate design and engineering firms. With so many people involved in design and with myriad philosophies available, carving out common ground for master planning and also allowing individual expression is crucial. The ability to orchestrate individuals, to allow them free reign to pursue their own intentions, requires constant high-wire balancing. While the potential for success is great, the risk of mediocrity is even greater.

It remains a little bit disconsolate, a surprisingly unattended place in an unlikely position. But that is part of the price to be paid for a public space that was built first to attract investment later.

Much has been made of, and much disputed about, the "Italianness" of the Piazza d'Italia. It was sponsored by members of the Italian community, its plan-shape is based on the map of Italy, its walls are embellished with various freewheeling versions of the classical orders, its colors hover around tones named for Italian regions, and, surely, its most important predecessor is the Trevi Fountain.

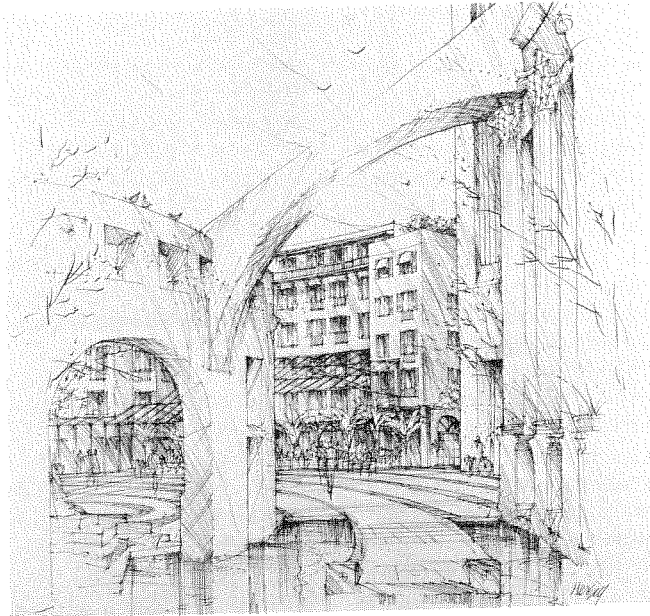
But the back-biting professional arguments that this place has spawned (mostly among critics who have never visited the Piazza) are curious. The use of the map of Italy is purported somehow to be an insult, the use of the orders is deemed a travesty—either because the Piazza contains full-blown, giant-order, classical details, which offends some unreconstructed modernists—or because these details are "incorrect" (if not outrageous) variations on the classical forms, which offends those recently reconstructed classicists who consider themselves guardians of the sacred trust. In either case the good-natured willful inventiveness of it seems to cause the most

offense. "Whimsy," we are told more often than we could possibly need to be, "has no place in civic art"—a point that was lost, apparently, on several generations of baroque sculptors.

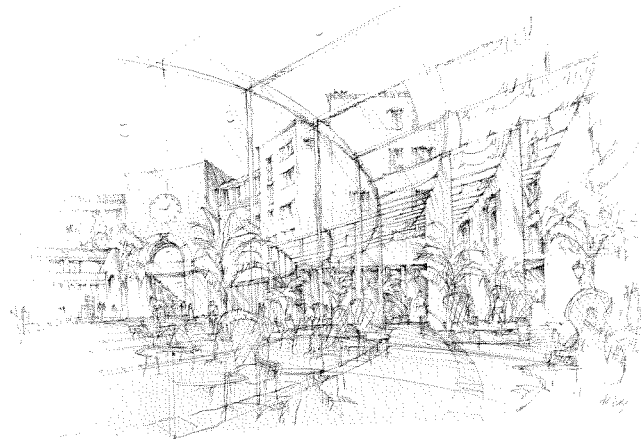
Being there, all that seems beside the point. The place itself is extraordinary, an evocative interweaving of form, color, and light that escapes categorization. It is, more than anything else, robustly present and paradoxically soothing. The layered curving screens offer an array of shifting views streaked with modulated sunlight; the terraced forms of the fountain mass invite clambering around and in the water; the water itself leaks, surges, splashes, sprays, and drips around and among sparkling black and white land forms, reflective sheets of stainless steel, and glowing stucco colors. It asks to be lived in; it beckons for attention. The real meaning of Piazza d'Italia is that it matters whether you are there. Its significance lies in the experience—in the opportunities for engagement that it affords—engagement of the eye, of the body, and of the mind. It offers opportunities to know our own human capabilities by seeing them reflected in a place intensely invested with imagination.

The surroundings will come later—those that are not already there. For the Piazza d'Italia is only a part of a

larger complex that includes a singularly dreary, recent office-tower that was already on the site, as well as remnants of earlier nineteenth-century buildings that have been kept intact as street frontage for the block. A large urban gateway has already been built, as has a passage through one of the adjoining, early brick commercial buildings. The rest of the project has floundered with the economy, so that as yet there is little activity in the Piazza except on fiesta days. But the adjoining properties are now being designed as a hotel, which should bring life and dollars to the area, albeit not for the community-based passaggio that may originally have been intended. The hotel will take responsibility for managing and maintaining the area, which will please the city hall budget-makers, but which also raises the worrisome possibility that the space will read more as a feature of the hotel than as a truly public place.



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20 Drawing by William Hersey

21 Drawing by William Hersey

Comments

Pelli: "In terms of its context, I wonder if that plaza would be any good there. You have this gigantic scale, but you really don't have a feeling of what the buildings are going to do for it. A project like this can't be judged until after it's built; if people use it, it's good, if they don't, forget it."

Ramati: "I don't know anything about Little Italy in New Orleans, but in Little Italy in New York they would love this. Although I'm not crazy about the way it's implemented, I like the concept, it is very imaginative and worth citing."

Appleyard: "It's different from all the other projects we've seen in urban design in that it's specific, and I like it because of that. It's also innovative; I haven't seen anything quite like it before."

Progressive Architecture
January 1976

"the piazza's fountain, and what a pleasant surprise! Its beauty is really eye-popping! There are huge columns and archways that looked to me like the grandeur of ancient Rome, but which an Interfest official described as "symbolic of the topography of all of Italy and Sicily with the River Po flowing in the center." So be it. But it's a sight you shouldn't miss."

Tommy Griffin
"Griffinanities"
Figaro
August 2, 1978

"The principles it forwards and its appreciation of our local heritage and environment should be studied as a responsive approach to design theory. The contemporary interpretations of the classical orders will offend some, while others will consider certain aspects trite and contrived, but the unusual excitement and experience the Piazza creates will offer an outstanding architectural work to our city."

Doug Ashe
A.I.A. New Orleans
Newsletter
November/December
1977

"Visited your St. Joseph's Fountain at Piazza d'Italia recently—it's fantastic! Besides being a monument to our American Italian heritage it will serve as a constant reminder of what great things can happen when Americans with a "Root in the Boot" get together for a common cause. I especially like the neon and steel touches because they remind us that although we have Italian "Roots" we are Americans first. Seeing the fountain reminded me of a photo of myself taken at the 1939 World's Fair in front of the Marconi Building by my father. He was so proud to show me something that reflected his heritage. I know that to parents and grandparents all over the U.S.A. the Piazza d'Italia in New Orleans will provide similar pride and inspiration for years to come. The Piazza d'Italia, that's what I like about the South."

Maria Gloria
Letters to the Editor
The Italian American
Digest
New Orleans
Summer 1979

"Piazza is becoming CBD's No. 1 People Place."

The Festa d'Italia, held last weekend, showed the Piazza at its best—as a gathering place for thousands of smiling, well-behaved people seeking enjoyment outdoors. Empty of crowds, the Piazza is colorful, Coney-Island-like and even consternating as an architectural tour de force. But only when crammed with people does the Piazza explode excitingly into life. Then, the complex awakens in visitors many national qualities of which the Italians are proud—warmth, exuberance, spontaneity and a sense of joy in experiencing life.

Both children and adults waded gleefully in the fountain, while groups of people sat on its raised topological sections, surrounded by water on all sides. The continuous sound of rushing water, combined with its insistent spray, made the environment distinctly un-serious, and it caused the grouped people experiencing it to become instant friends.

Roger Green, writer
The Times Picayune-
States Item
New Orleans
October 26, 1979

"I love it, because it makes me happy to go there; the neon and stainless steel and brightly-painted columns, the slate and marble, the water and the floodlights lift my spirits.

This is New Orleans . . . The warm wet air makes its own ruins here, softens all lines and harmonizes everything. So what better place could there be to recreate a ruin?

And then there's the wildly eclectic quality of the Piazza. It is art that is about art; it "quotes" from any and all styles . . . All that deliberate vulgarity, all that display purely for the sake of display, is just right for New Orleans' perpetually tongue-in-cheek presentation of itself. There is an affinity between the Piazza and Bourbon Street: as if the hawkers who cry "Boys, all boys, the most beautiful boys in town" might appear suddenly in the Piazza crying, "Columns, Pillars, Fountains, Ruins, original colors, the most beautiful ruins in town . . ."

Everything about the Piazza d'Italia speaks of the rich confusion of New Orleans."

Gary Esolen, columnist
"Standpoint"
Gambit
March 1, 1981

"As I sat marvelling at this culmination of 2,000 years of Italian art and culture, I couldn't help wondering how Michelangelo and Bernini were ever able to successfully complete St. Peter's without the benefit of all that classy aluminum siding and neon lighting. And that metal tower alongside, what luck! I thought the parachute jump and ferris wheel concessions had been awarded to Armstrong Park.

I can usually manage to perceive some humor in Italian jokes if they aren't too brutish, but this place is surely the unkindest cut of all.

Let our tax money be totally squandered on this indignity, perhaps one of our local entrepreneurs could be persuaded to convert it into New Orleans' first outdoor discotheque. I have a name for it already: "Disco Al Fresco Art Deco."

Thomas J. Blasi
Letter to the Editor
The Times Picayune-
States Item
New Orleans
November 1978

"Not all members of New Orleans' Italian-American community are enthusiastic about the Piazza, however. Said one, while observing the water and neon columns: 'We just wish he would have done something more Sicilian, and not quite so Roman.'"

Mimi Crossley
Houston Post Art Writer
January 28, 1979

"The Piazza d'Italia is a melange of architectural sterility and smartaleckism further vulgarized at night by neon lights. It is incredible that \$1.65 million of taxpayers' money should have been spent on such a project. If the City of New Orleans intended to honor its large population of Italian descent, it has failed to do so. . . . The humblest Italian descendant in this community, unaware as he may be of the artistic glories of his ancestors, possesses an instinctive love of beauty to which the Piazza d'Italia is an affront."

Augusto Miceli
The Times Picayune-
States Item
New Orleans
March 24, 1979

"As one who loves Italy, Italian art, architecture and civilization, I was appalled by the fact that the Piazza d'Italia no more evokes Italy and its glories than a pig pen evokes the Doges' Palace. I resent the Piazza d'Italia, of which, it seems some utter guff has been uttered in defense of its innate ugliness and sterility.

I ask you if that isn't the ultimate in nonsense? Go to Poydras Street and see the Piazza d'Italia for yourself. And if you go at night when the neon lights are on, you'll see vulgarity added to inanity, I have been told by responsible observers. I myself have not seen it at night."

Pie Dufour, columnist
The Times Picayune-
States Item
New Orleans
December 28, 1978

"Something of lasting consequence . . . a memorial to all Italian-Americans . . . and something very important to the (New Orleans) Central Business District."

Mayor Moon Landrieu
The Times Picayune-
States Item
New Orleans
May 1978

Place Debate: Piazza d'Italia

Editor's Introduction

There is no single reality to the way in which place enters into the lives of people. We intend, therefore, to publish a series of Place Debates. In each we plan to present divergent views regarding a single place, to foster controversy, and to consider various ways in which people encounter place.

With this first set of articles on the Piazza d'Italia we explore several (but by no means all) of the dimensions of judgment that an evocative place can bring forth. What characterizes each of our authors is an intent to learn. Each seeks to make experience of the Piazza and the process of making it become a part of our understanding about what to do (or not to do) in the creation of public places.

Piazza d'Italia is both an actual place and a media event. From its first appearance in the Progressive Architecture Awards program (where Donald Appleyard, who conceived this Place Debate, first recognized its provocative potential), the design has spawned controversy. Significantly, much of the discussion of the project in the professional press has been conducted by people who have not visited the actual place (one of our authors has not). Generally these critics judge the actions taken by the designer, since they



can only imagine the consequences. This leads to questions and observations that are rather different from those that are and might be prompted by a visit to the place itself. Of course, visitors—both strangers and habitués—bring with them a variety of predispositions and these too affect their experience and judgment.

Then there are the designers and the questions they posed to *themselves*. We have included articles in this set that are forthrightly anecdotal. The interplay of personalities is as vital to the making of public places as it is to the design of private domains, and it would be a disservice to obscure that dynamic.

This collection of articles is meant to stimulate reflection and further debate. We welcome your comments on the issues they raise and suggestions regarding places for subsequent debates.

Illustrations are of The Piazza d'Italia except where noted.

| Photograph by Alan Karchmer

Ethnic Design or Ethnic Slur?

Jay Claiborne
with Tom Aidala

There has been much talk of asserting and revitalizing ethnic identity through design. The issue arises in several different contexts: communities that obtain funds for a local design project—a park, a monument, a community center; communities that are being “upgraded”; and historic neighborhoods. Designers have taken dramatically different approaches towards designing in the context of ethnic communities. In some cases, the symbolism of a regional or national culture has been used to promote a commercial venture, creating the appearance of an “authentic” community, which may in reality no longer exist at all. Japantown in San Francisco has a pagoda and is filled with Japanese stores, but, in fact, much of the real Japanese community was displaced by the urban renewal that created the project. The town of Solvang in Southern California has evolved into a thriving commercial/tourist area on the basis of its Scandinavian design theme.

Other communities have taken a conservative approach in promoting ethnic identity, instituting historic districts and establishing strict design guidelines that require adherence to a historic or architectural style. Examples include Savannah, German Village in Columbus, and Santa Fe. Another approach

is to establish more general design motifs as in the Chinatowns of New York and San Francisco where there are “Chinese style” buildings, phone booths with pagoda roofs, and a park with red benches and paper lanterns. And now there is the Piazza d’Italia, a dramatic pastiche of Italian symbols for the Italian neighborhood of New Orleans. The differences between these approaches raise fundamental issues for designers.

Should ethnic design be “authentic,” and what makes it so? Are the design motifs and symbols valid rallying points for the community or simply stereotypes that insult the “authentic” traditions? Does such design encourage cultural identity, or is it kitsch? Is it offensive to use the ethnic symbols as a commercial, profitmaking technique?

Is the use of historical/cultural symbols/motifs of a particular ethnic group an appropriate response to a design project in such a community? There is a theory that, as a group becomes less secure about its identity, it comes under pressure to display that identity as a defensive mechanism. For example, Italian stores in San Francisco’s North Beach are under invasion from the Chinese community and are increasing their displays of Italian-ness with flags, maps of Italy, etc. Are expressions

of identity actually funeral rites rather than signs of a healthy identity? If a culture is dispersing, is it appropriate to try artificially to preserve it in design and symbols? Does identity naturally emerge or does it have to be created?

Who should design for ethnic communities? Is it appropriate to bring in well-known modern designers under the theory that truly honoring the community implies hiring the “best” for them? Should the designer be a member of the community’s culture, the theory being that authentic and sensitive “Italian design,” for example, is best achieved by a member of the Italian community? To what extent should the community itself be involved in the design?

The Piazza d’Italia provides a good example on which to focus a discussion of this issue. Tom Aidala, an urban designer from San Francisco, is one of those who have a profound dislike for the Piazza d’Italia—which he introduced by way of the following piece of curiously ignored American history:

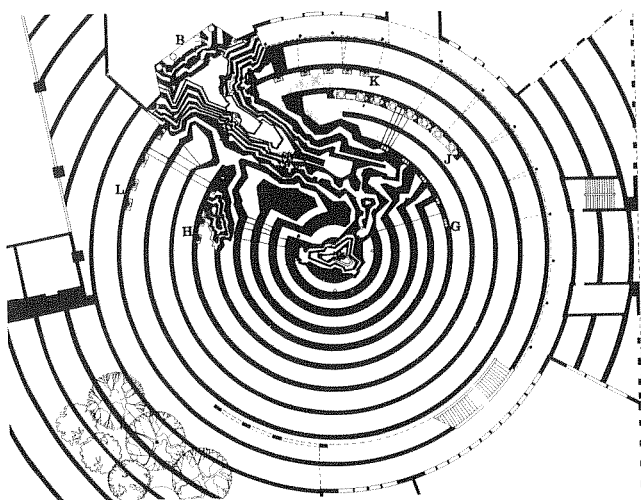
On the morning of Saturday, March 14, 1891, eleven men were taken from the New Orleans City Prison and murdered. They were taken by a crowd “. . . composed of lawyers, doctors, bankers, and prominent citizens

generally.” (1) Two of the men were hanged, nine were shot to death. The motive was hate; the reason was that the eleven were Italian.

David C. Hennessy, the superintendent of police of New Orleans, was killed by five men in October 1890. Supposedly, his dying words accused Italians. In a climate already disposed to prejudice, the local press generated even more public hostility and animosity towards the immigrant Italians that New Orleans looked upon “. . . as so many reptiles.” (2)

Nine Italians were brought to trial after the authorities had arrested over 100 suspects. Since there was simply no evidence that held up in court, the jury found six of the defendants innocent and voted no convictions for the other three. The verdict further enraged an already irrational public, and on the night of March 13, 1891, a committee of vigilance was formed. The next day, led by William Parkerson, fifty or so of that committee took the acquitted men from their cells as well as two other Italians who happened to be in jail.

Diplomatic relations were severed between Italy and the USA for a time. The



massacre was generally applauded by the public and press of this nation and served to further arouse public hostility towards Italians in all parts of the country. As far as I know, it was the single largest lynching in the country's history.

(1), (2) William Parkerson, from an interview in the *New York Illustrated American*, April 4, 1891.

To some, such a story may seem irrelevant to a critique of good urban form. Many would find the application of a note of moral outrage when judging a work of art a giant step backward into the nineteenth century. Yet, when artists, architects, and urban designers begin fooling around with imagery and symbols directly associated with ethnic identity, the point is very much that they are not necessarily being nice or even funny. As Aidala puts it, "It is best not to make public references to another person's mother, no matter how well-intentioned those references may be."

The so-called post-modern sensibility is pushing architecture toward a revival of metaphoric ornamentation. With literal allusions and reference to traditional cultural imagery, avant-garde buildings are becoming approximations of built language. Such approximations have appeal precisely because they

display imagery of a highly visual nature that belongs to a coherent system of symbols—a system which communicates, among other things, permanence and continuity. These symbol systems, however, have complicated histories and they bear meanings that are not always obvious. The architect who would exploit these symbols becomes responsible for hidden as well as intended significance.

Aidala would challenge even the use of such images as faddish, shortsighted, and, ultimately, antiurban. Great public places, in his opinion, should be neutral, like most Italian piazzas. Places like the Piazza d'Italia with their skin-deep specificity and stereotyped imagery may be appropriate for a World's Fair, but as permanent pieces of the urban fabric, they become profoundly insulting as a result of their cuteness—their shrewd, pretty appeal. Ethnicity can be celebrated as a pageant without being guilty of such an offense. The Columbus Day Parade and the Festival of San Gennaro in New York's Greenwich Village are wonderful events. However, the Piazza d'Italia in its permanence and its literalness would reduce being Italian to tarantella dances and spaghetti. For Aidala the Piazza is a full-scale monument to the same mentality that portrays Italians in movies as "happy children of the sun."

Remembrances and a Look at Ethnicity

Ron Filson

Those designers who, in this new age of the built word, freely cast about for imagery that carries a stock of cultural associations and meanings to give a building or a place special identity, fully deserve to have history and tradition thrown at them in judgment. Built-of-a-piece design that attempts to forge some specific identity through references to national origin very easily becomes a form of self-parody. Aidala puts the question this way: "How would you design a park for a black community in Georgia—would you do a watermelon patch?" He insists that this example is analogous to the explicit Italian references in the Piazza.

The idea of asserting ethnic identity through design is shallow unless it recognizes the importance of authenticity. Authentic ethnic identity is the product of the ethos of a people. It grows as a collective effort over time, and the forms that characterize it belong to a language that is common to several generations.

Piazza d'Italia, in Aidala's opinion, deserves the same scorn that Texans reserve for urban cowboys. A few columns and a fountain, even when they are in the shape of the map of Italy, do not make a place a piazza any more than boots and a Stetson make a person a westerner. In a time when people yearn to make

connection with their own history, it becomes doubly important to guard that our cities do not become filled with kitsch monuments to various developers' theme-ridden marketing schemes. A list of such examples in the San Francisco Bay Area alone is long and includes the cuteness of exploitative places like Pier 39 in San Francisco, the often discussed Tivoli Gardens for YBC, the Japantown Trade Center, and the original Hong Kong USA project in Oakland.

The spirit of ethnic identity, Aidala would contend, is not to be found in the physical forms of the culture. The display of ethnic imagery in a place like the Piazza d'Italia can result in an initial expression of ethnic pride, especially on the part of people who are themselves only superficially related to their culture. Such places, however, soon become offensive. They are jokes that will not go away. They are extravagant toys or stage sets that have nothing to do with the permanent business of cities.

During the last eight years since the beginning of the process of designing the Piazza d'Italia, one of the most controversial aspects of that process has been the "ethnic" nature of its design. Many a detractor has gone beyond the normal criticism that pastiche is limited and that there is historical "gimmickry"—comments easily associated with what has been labeled the post-modern movement—and attacked the scheme for the Piazza d'Italia, and more specifically the scheme for St. Joseph's Fountain, the major part of the Piazza d'Italia project constructed so far, for its reliance upon "ethnic" images for some supposed sense of significance and importance.

In an accompanying article Tom Aidala commented on the supposed insensitivity of the scheme, contending that it fails to respond to the true emotions and images of the Italian-American and thereby invalidates itself as a receptacle for community involvement of spirit and participation.

I understand that Aidala's concern for ethnicity reflects a kind of protectionism for attitudes and beliefs that are not generally available to and definitely should not be tampered with by anybody other than a member of the particular ethnic group for which any specific work of architecture is designed. My thesis in this article is that this proposal is blatantly

absurd. Most erroneous, I believe, is the notion that ethnicity is the private domain of a reserved group and only those who belong to that group can understand and, therefore, participate in the significance of its *own* architecture. This position suggests that the ability to understand the relationship between formal imagery, architectural symbolism, and cultural values is limited by membership.

One of the more interesting paths taken in recent architectural thought is that which allows the analysis and understanding of the relationship between architectural form and cultural values. As an artistic and intellectual endeavor this encourages understanding and interpretation of this relationship in numerous forms. To pretend that the *true* understanding of the significance of architectural form is only available to the initiated is antiintellectual and banal. The notion that the use of architectural elements with historic and/or cultural connotations implies complete ethnicity of any architectural proposal in the latter part of the twentieth century is, to say the least, a very shortsighted viewpoint. The independence, isolation, and fragmentation of ideas regarding interpretation and formal significance in music, literature, arts, and architecture since the late eighteenth century demands a viewpoint that would, it

Free Plan and Open Form

Christian
Norberg-Schultz

building is less convincing. The tower makes its homage to its grown-up neighbors, but struggles to be big enough at ground level to make an effective gate. The Piazza fragment, unlike Lovejoy, is perhaps too incomplete and has not yet made a whole center and a strong "inside." Perhaps it depends *too much* on what happens next around it. And the materials are not really surviving well. Marble ears have broken off column bases and stucco surfaces have not gotten the attention they need either to remain clean and fresh or old and comfortable.

The Piazza d'Italia ought not so much to be judged as to be studied. A generous and useful attitude would be to see it as an event in our "archaic" period: strong, vigorous, evocative, and awkward. In the near future it will undoubtedly be partly restored as it serves as one of the entrances to the New Orleans World Fair and to the river front. It may then survive and be increasingly satisfactory like the Portland example. Meanwhile, whether awkward and incomplete or not, it deserves our attention for its inclusiveness about direct experience and memory, about local and distant reference, and about both spatial and cultural continuity. It is not so good or bad, as it is simply very much worth having been done.

Surviving late-modernists tend to consider the Piazza d'Italia a case of reactionary historicism, and thus a confirmation of the tenet that post-modernism represents a break with the modern tradition.

In my opinion this interpretation is superficial and wrong. If one looks more attentively at the solution, the Piazza d'Italia reveals itself as a work of *modern* architecture, although it certainly embodies a content that goes beyond the relatively narrow limits of early modernism (not to speak of the limits of degenerate late-modernism).

Modern architecture was from the beginning based on two fundamental principles: the "free plan" and the "open form." The free plan serves the purpose of making us experience the "simultaneity of places" that is characteristic of the new "open world." Physically we are, of course, in one place at a time, but existentially we may be in several places simultaneously. The free plan makes this experience possible through a "virtual openness," that is, a spatial organization that implies interaction rather than self-sufficiency. The open form serves a similar purpose by admitting the juxtaposition of qualitatively diverse elements to constitute a collage-like totality. Thus, modern architecture became capable of embodying a more complex and contradictory world than the

"closed" stylistic systems of the past.

The Piazza d'Italia is based on the concepts of free plan and open form. The spatial organization takes a series of concentric rings as its point of departure. Within these rings different space-defining elements are placed. These elements, whether floor-patterns or "walls," do not, however, form static rooms, but rather articulate an open spatial continuum. Well-known modern means, such as overlapping and transparency, are employed to obtain this result. Symmetries also appear, but are immediately broken to counteract any closed effect. The overall centralized organization, however, creates a strong sense of urban node. Spatially, thus, the Piazza d'Italia is simultaneously a defined place and part of an open world. (I recall Paolo Portoghesi's analogous interpretation of the free plan during the 1960s when he based his layouts on interacting, centralized "fields.") The formal solution of the Piazza is evidently a case of "open form." Historical motifs indeed appear, but they are not composed in a traditional way. Rather they form a large, tridimensional collage that is truly modern. Thus, the motifs are characterized as "memories" that evoke a certain "world." It must be emphasized that the open form makes this use of memories possible, and the solution, thereby, proves

the capacity of modern architecture for self-renewal.

Before the advent of post-modernism, the free plan and the open form were used to create a kind of empty stage for human action. The stage allowed for modern life to take place, but since it was "empty," it did not offer many possibilities of identification. In post-modern architecture the stage has become populated by memories. Freedom and openness still exist, but, in addition, we find those *images* that give us a sense of belonging and identity. The open world is thereby visualized not only as a structure, but also as a universe of meanings. Genuine post-modernism hence represents a development of modern architecture.

The Piazza d'Italia offers a major example of this development. Although spatially and formally it is modern, it also significantly widens the limits of architectural symbolization. I do not have to repeat its well-known references to the Italian world, but might add that it also gives a new interpretation of the colorful character of the city of New Orleans. The world that is "gathered" by the Piazza d'Italia is, therefore, local as well as general, and the solution represents a most important contribution to the post-modern reconquest of an authentic urban environment.

Inquiry, Essence, Awkwardness

Robert S. Harris

Any commentary on the Piazza d'Italia might well begin by imagining the designer's inquiry: What is worth doing at a somewhat nondescript site, adjacent to a new and seemingly implacable office tower, but in New Orleans and related to the rich and complex ideas and values that are so easily associated with Italian communities? The problem for skillful designers is not so much whether things will come out all right, but rather, what is worth doing. The design of plazas and other public open spaces especially requires attention to such a question.

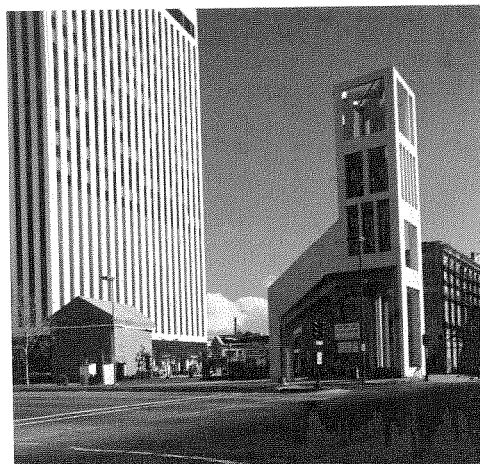
An obvious precedent for the Piazza d'Italia is Portland's Lovejoy Fountain, which was designed in 1963 by Charles W. Moore with William Turnbull and Larry Halprin. It also is in an urban setting that was incomplete at the time of the Fountain's design and construction. Now into its second decade, it has been well loved and has become even more successful through time as its urban surround has developed. It began as a fragment whose clear center and focus was strong enough and evocative enough to have significant presence while remaining rather open and incomplete at its periphery. The Fountain and its plaza can be very directly enjoyed in many ways. One can participate fully in the water play or observe quietly from a proper distance. And it is

possible to be on top, below, in the sun, in the shade, with others, alone, to be there in many ways. Yet, beyond such immediate participation, the Fountain also strongly evokes memories and associations. It is a kind of urban brook, easily associated by northwesterners with not only the waterways of forests, but also the sparkling light seen through canopies of wet leaves. There is no trite reference here as might have been present through rough stones, rustic beams, and a kind of "as-found" pretense. Rather the construction and materials are urban and contemporary, deliberately made and shaped of concrete and lead and wood. The Portland Fountain is a Northwest fountain. Perhaps it would remain appropriate as far south as San Francisco, but not in Los Angeles or St. Louis or Chicago. Maybe Minneapolis. Both in its laying out of opportunities for direct experience, and in its provision of possibilities for association, it belongs to its place and helps us to remember more profoundly where we are and how good it is to be here.

The fountain and plaza for New Orleans closely follows the Portland precedent. It is a fragment in its incomplete urban setting. It can be enjoyed in many ways quite directly and is sufficient without any reference to ideas or to distant places or to history. Yet it does readily



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7 Photograph by Marc Treib

8 Photograph by Marc Treib

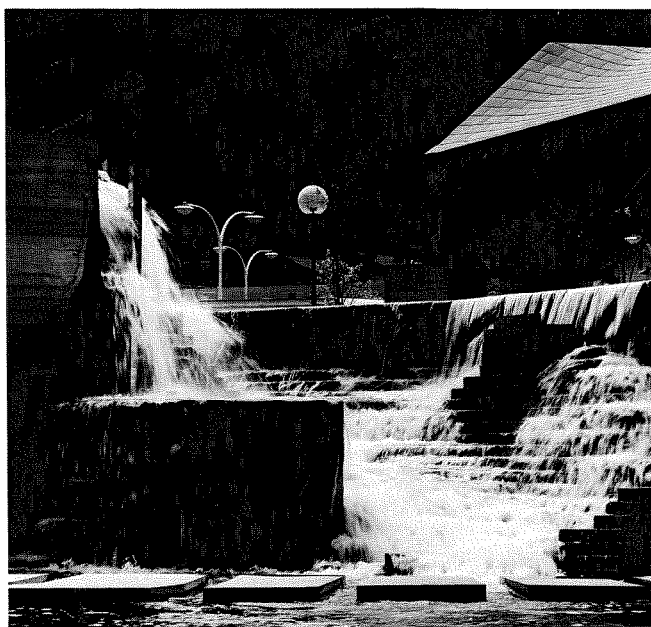
evoke and accept a wide range of cultural associations.

The Piazza d'Italia is particularly "of New Orleans." It offers the direct experience of color and light and water and sound of this city. It provides shade and comfort on a hot and humid day and sun pockets in the winter. It includes places for gathering, and for couples alone. And it includes the familiar architectural elements of the South. Its classical pieces are as much continuous with the South's neo-classical traditions as with any thoughts of Italy itself.

Moore continues Jean Labatut's encouragement to provide "something for the senses and something for the mind." The columns and arcades, the capitals shaped for water splashing and light reflecting, the highly stimulating contrasts and surfaces, and, as in Portland, the waterways to explore and to take minor risks jumping over or stepping through, all make the place that directly holds our attention and enlivens our existence. As a grandfather, one could enjoy an afternoon here with grandchildren without any reference to Italian heritage or origin. And yet, one could also show the children where on the water map grandfather was born, or where relatives still lived. Few persons recognize the central columns as remnants saved from a now-destroyed

building. But those who did know that building are helped to remember it. The opportunities for reference and association are not essential to the most fundamental pleasures of being in this place, yet they augment such pleasures and deepen experience. The references are both local and present, distant and historical, and culturally continuous across time. Not only can one make connections to New Orleans's own past, but also with memories of the Trevi Fountain and its colors and shapes, or with ruins of the Forums and their columns and arches.

The Piazza d'Italia is not just nostalgic. The temple-like portico is made of sonotube-formed columns and aluminum conduit. Like its antecedent in Portland it participates in the present in its direct existence. We supply the past, if we wish, from our own resources. Its heraldic tower owes very little to the past except, perhaps, by being a tower. Its shapes and openings not only catch our attention in the competition of the urban scene, but also attempt connections to the newest elements of New Orleans, its large office and hotel blocks. It winks at its neighbors, a miniature version of Italian temples that includes in its own fabric proportions and rhythmic openings of the buildings. On Poydras Street this gateway made by temple and tower thus makes its strong connections both to



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the present and also to the traditions and memories of Italian culture.

Like the Lovejoy Fountain in Portland, the Piazza d'Italia belongs to New Orleans. In Houston or Miami it would be merely the latest fashion. In San Antonio the cultural references would be confusing. In New Orleans it struggles to be essential and "worth building." In its incomplete setting it does have its awkward moments. Moore quite uniquely manages to use the strong rhythm of dark and light vertical stripes of the adjacent office building to advantage as it makes a surprisingly effective background for colorful arcades and columns. Yet, the alley-like space left between the arcades and the

9 Lovejoy Fountain,
Portland, Oregon
(Photograph by Morley Baer)

Free Plan and Open Form

Christian
Norberg-Schultz

building is less convincing. The tower makes its homage to its grown-up neighbors, but struggles to be big enough at ground level to make an effective gate. The Piazza fragment, unlike Lovejoy, is perhaps too incomplete and has not yet made a whole center and a strong "inside." Perhaps it depends *too much* on what happens next around it. And the materials are not really surviving well. Marble ears have broken off column bases and stucco surfaces have not gotten the attention they need either to remain clean and fresh or old and comfortable.

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Problems of Representation

George Baird

powerful, have nourished so many centuries and regions of good art and good building, that they can easily embrace one Jovian jest.

But the Piazza is not just an Olympian joke. It is also—I speak of its potential, not its actual state—a quite beautifully organized and orchestrated public space. Proportions, details, materials, and colors are combined even more scrupulously and (to my eye) pleasingly than all the celebrated references and allusions. It does not depend for its success on semiotic transliterations of its shapes, or on the insider's familiarity with architectural history. It is *not*, in its heart, a cynical dig at the classics.

These elements are present, and they may well qualify or on occasion reduce the freedom and healthiness of the overall pleasure of one's experience. Charles Moore, when set free from adult collaborators or control, can be incorrigibly and excessively clever—like other child prodigies who never totally grow up. Some of the jokes here, detached from the context of the pleasurable whole, do indeed appear (as hostile critics have called them) as architectural one-liners, with a very short half-life—as embarrassingly silly as the spitting Charles Moore heads on the mock Doric wall.

I offer my sincerest best wishes to the Italian-American patriots and to New Orleans's investors, on whose good will and hard work the future of this place depends. If the Piazza d'Italia *is* a stage set, it is the supreme outdoor stage set of our time, and I hope it gets treated with proper respect. It is suited not so much for *Cavalleria Rusticana* as for the daily human comedy of thousands of happy Italian New Orleanians and their families.

In the course of recent architectural events, the Piazza d'Italia has been both a watershed and a caution. With his sure sense of timing and his penchant for congenial polemic, Charles W. Moore brought an important architectural argument to a climax with this controversial project.

I have not been an admirer of the project, and have been asked to use this forum to give expression to my concerns. At the outset, I should indicate that I support many aspects of the proposal. It constitutes a central component of an urban revitalization scheme; it seeks to give expression to history—and to do so in an ironical, rather than literally revivalist way. It boldly addresses the question of symbolic expression in architecture. All of these are commendable intentions, which in my view even form an essential component of architectural design in our time. What then do I object to? It seems to me that my concerns have to do with three more specifically architectonic problems.

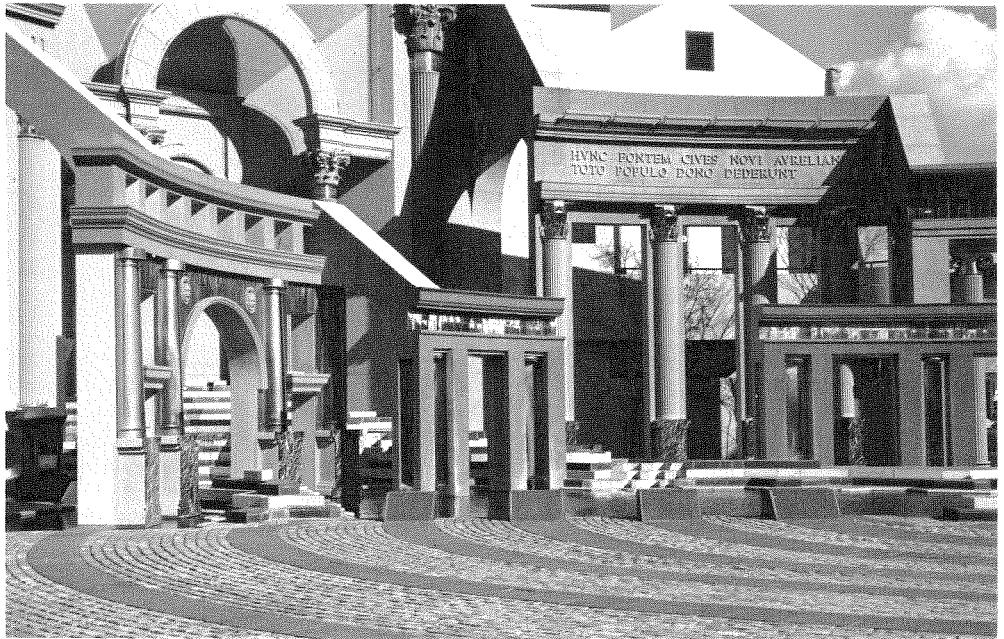
The Relationship of Background to Foreground Elements

Earlier works by Moore (such as the Faculty Club, Santa Barbara, CA; and Kresge College or the Burns House, Santa Monica, CA) all employ a vocabulary of rather austere and planar elements that connote

an almost vernacular architecture against which are set more elaborate and more expressive and/or more historical motifs. As a result, all these schemes embody a formal tension that results from the juxtaposition of these back- and foreground elements. At the Piazza d'Italia, on the other hand, the foreground elements modify and elaborate the background elements so extensively that the tension of the earlier schemes dissolves. As a result, both back- and foreground collapse into a single architectonic configuration, and one possible mode of dialectic is lost.

The "Aura" of Historical Elements

At the Santa Barbara Faculty Club, part of the visual array in the foreground consists of "real" antique furniture. At the Burns House, Latin-American artifacts and exotic carpets articulate one's spatial perception. At the Piazza d'Italia, on the other hand, the historical elements that create the project's "foreground" are themselves fake. Despite the generally recognizable Roman-ness of the references, the frequent material rendition of the motifs in stainless steel and neon makes their fake-ness disconcertingly evident. Thus, the observer is driven to conclude that the background/foreground relationship cannot parallel those of the projects just



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cited. Yet while this much is evident, it is not clear what alternative reading is intended or implied. The Piazza d'Italia does not even simulate the cozy iconography of Disneyland, although it skirts it. Ironical, fake, and self-mocking on all levels at once, the Piazza d'Italia loses iconographic control, so to speak. It possesses no "aura," and its putative meaning floats worrisomely free.

Distortions of Scale and Proportion

Frank Furness's Pennsylvania Academy recently struck me as a masterful example of distortion of scales and proportions of the elements of a previously known

architectural vocabulary. Furness takes the columns, pilasters, arches, etc., that we associate with an Italianate Gothic and subjects them to extraordinary distortions, sustaining at the same time a material expression of great power. It seems to me that this complex relationship of scale distortion to materiality gives Furness's work its strength. At the Piazza d'Italia, on the other hand, Moore subverts any sure sense of materiality while maintaining the scale and proportions of the historical elements mentioned with quite surprising fidelity. While the project iconography is uncontrollably ironical, its manipulations of scale are too cautious.

In summary, it seems to me that the Piazza d'Italia fails—despite its commendable ambitions. In the gap created by its problematic relationships of picture plane, scale, and iconography, it is hardly surprising that distressing imputations of cultural condescension have arisen.

Charles W. Moore

We had a party—a little festival—on August 18, 1983, in the Piazza d'Italia to celebrate issuing a poster for the 1984 World's Fair. It was very hot, and threatened to rain, most of the neon was broken, and most of the jets did not work, and the mayor did not show up, but there were tables set up with linen and luminaria and a 400-pound cake, and it seemed a fine party. These days the Piazza is in a fully Latin state of disrepair, apparently ignored by the city's maintenance people, but recently I received a heartening report from a friend who was walking there at 7 a.m. It seems that the benches, as usual at that hour, were covered with the sleeping figures of the vagrants who constitute the place's only regular inhabitants. Then one of the sleepers awoke and rang a little bell. Everyone got up, picked up all the trash, put it in the receptacles, and went back to hanging around.

This is, I choose to think, welcome confirmation that this public space is not just flexible, but special, and able (I think) to support the particular needs of groups with very different needs. In addition, it is built around a fountain. Surely, making a fountain is one of the most exciting chances to make a place. A fountain makes a place by manipulating the most richly evocative of all locations, where land and water meet, where a source of water has the uncanny

capacity to suggest all the water in the world. Fountains, being made of water, have the capacity (and have had since the beginnings of civilization) to suggest life, and death, and the creators of life and death; but they do not serve so well as satire or nursery rhymes do to develop political themes, or to reinforce insights into the stock market or the vicissitudes of, say, the Shah of Iran.

I was surprised, therefore, when an article about the Piazza d'Italia, published in *Progressive Architecture* with a very supportive critique by Martin Filler, brought an avalanche of mail (architects' avalanches of mail are of a size that would depress a rock star), much of it criticizing the Piazza d'Italia for failing to produce adequate political insights. A couple of the correspondents, indeed, blamed us, or me, for the excesses of the Shah of Iran, on the one hand, and his upcoming demise, on the other. There was, I was told, more mail about the Piazza d'Italia than about any other project report published by *Progressive Architecture* during that decade. I was pleased, of course, and my pride in the project was amplified by the vigor of the responses. I had noticed long before that what I regarded as the best works I was involved in had drawn the heaviest fire; that makes the Piazza our best effort to





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22 **Louisiana World Exposition**
(Photograph by Alan Karchmer)

23 Photograph by Alan Karchmer

date, with the Sea Ranch condominiums a close second.

What is for me a much more interesting phenomenon is a shift (which involves more than just us, and is neither good nor bad) from a high degree of abstraction in, let us say, Lovejoy Fountain in Portland (1964), to more literal references at the Piazza, to some veils of abstraction again in the Wonder Wall for the 1984 New Orleans Fair. When Lawrence Halprin, William Turnbull, and I were working on the Lovejoy Plaza, though we all had images of waterfalls in the High Sierra, we had no doubt that a built object should abstract those images: therefore, a set of 5½-inch steps, readily formed of concrete behind 2-inch by 6-inch board edges became our format, with the water itself splashing over the steps providing the family of fluid forms we thought a fountain needed. Ten years later it seemed appropriate, bolder, and stronger for Allen Eskew, Malcolm Heard, Ron Filson, and me to be more straightforward and less abstract at the Piazza: What could be a more Italian shape than Italy? And what more direct, and therefore effective, cultural reference in a piazza dedicated to the Italian community could there be than the architectural orders—Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite—which the

Italian civilization had developed after heavy initial assistance from the Greeks? Making the orders out of water seemed an adequate abstraction to keep us out of the lifeless blind alley of “correct” copying. Now almost 10 years later, most of us, plus Bill Turnbull, Leonard Salvato, and Arthur Anderson, are working on the Wonder Wall for the 1984 New Orleans Fair, which is only a few blocks from the Piazza, but is, I think, far bolder still, and has far more unbridled architectural fantasies.

In boldness there is almost bound to be a modicum of naughtiness, and I will not deny that I felt a tinge of excitement at having my Vignola out on my desk (the book open to Doric) at U.I.G., the practice arm of the UCLA architecture school, where the work was being done when the school’s accreditation team came by. (I had been educated at the right moment to regard the written-down orders as wicked sorts of bootlegged notes standing directly in the path of originality and innovation.) So maybe it *was* naughty (I am sure I hoped so) in 1976 to have those classical orders. I would not have liked, then or now, to have been pretentious or condescending with them: I was relieved a few years ago when a friend reported that he had seen a man with two small children at the Piazza, pointing at the fountain, carefully explaining the

differences between the Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, and other orders. Surely the orders give pleasure to more than just architects, even as someone who is not a musician might enjoy noting the difference between a sonata and a tone poem.

Perhaps it is in the same spirit that I am enjoying the shift (I will not call it progression nor retrogression) from our attitudes toward the givens (nature, the past) in work on the Lovejoy Fountain in 1964, to the Piazza after 1974, to the work on the New Orleans Fair of 1984. One of my favorite pieces of the 1984 World’s Fair is a set of seven Centennial Pavilions, gazebos of varying sizes apparently randomly disposed in and around a lagoon—that, from just one spot, snap into place to resemble (with considerable abstraction) the great main pavilion of the 1884 World’s Fair in New Orleans. It seems an appropriate comment on history to say that you have to choose your point of view very carefully to make any sense of the past.

Our three projects seem to demonstrate an increasing easiness and more casual familiarity in dealing with what is, in fact, in our minds (nature, the past, fantasy), and an increasing freedom from a reliance on abstraction to distance ourselves from a messy reality. How much

abstraction is needed? How much is enough? How much is too much? I do not know. Is a lack of abstraction an automatic ethnic slur? I really doubt it.

Waiting for the Water

David Littlejohn

My luck is such that in three visits to New Orleans between 1981 and 1983, I never once saw any water in St. Joseph's Fountain, and never more than two or three other derelicts, or architecture lovers, in the Piazza d'Italia. Moreover, the city of New Orleans has often refused to turn on the water and the lights, which are as essential a part of its architecture as marble, slate, and stucco. The local Italian-American Federation (original sponsors of the project) has them turned on whenever it can animate the Piazza with festivities—a total of three to four days a year. They have also persuaded the city to have the fountain operating and the Piazza occupied for other events, perhaps once every two or three months. (There is talk of using the Piazza as a setting for a production of Mascagni's Sicilian village opera, *Cavalleria Rusticana*.) But that leaves a lot of empty days in between.

As originally designed, the circular Piazza and its Roman fantasy fountain were to be surrounded by new and reconverted buildings—shops, restaurants, cafés, offices—which would embrace the Piazza's bright and illusionistic walls with more solid architecture, and surround it by people who could look into and learn to love its world of free-classical forms. These shops and offices were to be the start (like those of



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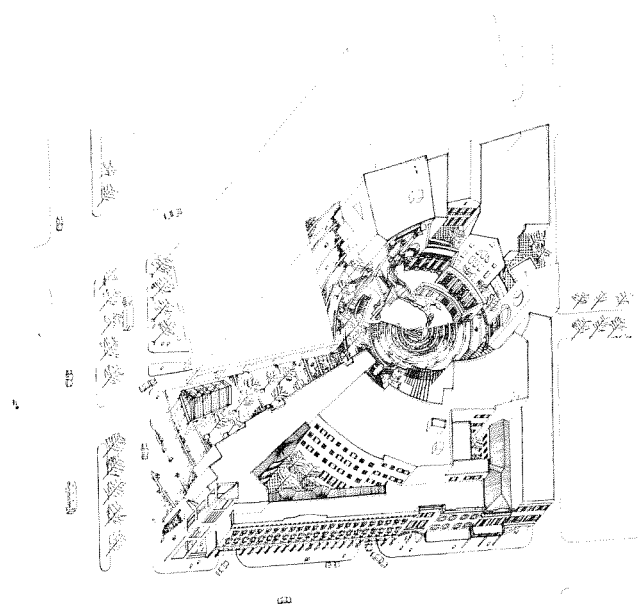
Ghirardelli Square in San Francisco) of a renaissance of the tawdry, half-abandoned warehouse district of the city. Had this occurred, the Piazza would have formed a welcome and colorful open space in a lively area between downtown and the waterfront, filled day and night with workers, shoppers, and tourists either passing through or relaxing, and restaurant patrons sitting at tables around its perimeter.

Instead, for much of 1978–1983, it lay quiet and alone behind the twenty-two story Lykes Building, its space frame “campanile” (without bells) and mock-temple entrance beckoning tourists in from the street to

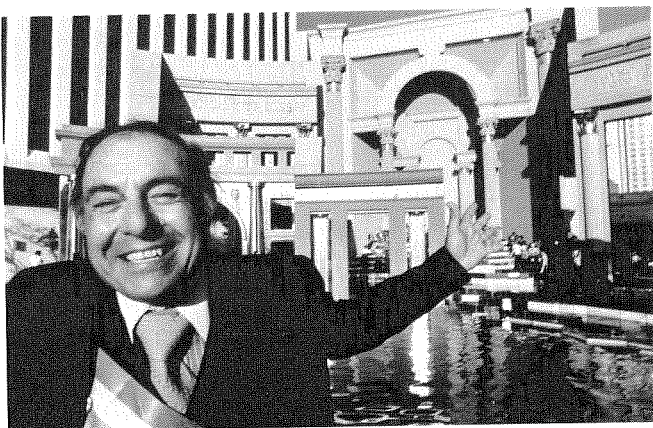
what looked like the leftover set of a long-finished movie. Without water or lights, a festive fountain makes little sense. Trees and vines meant to shade the Piazza (and form living “capitals” to some columns) were never maintained, so it can be unbearably hot during a New Orleans summer. Untended, the fountain saw green algae spread over its drained pools. With no real and occupied buildings behind it, the Piazza d'Italia seemed more thin and impermanent than it actually was. Made of steel frame and stucco, slate, marble, cobblestones, stainless steel, and tile, at a cost of \$1.7 million, the Piazza *isn't* a transient stage set. It just looks like one.

Originally, the city of New Orleans planned to lease out the surrounding rental offices, shops, and restaurants, which were designed by Perez Associates at the same time as the fountain and Piazza—many of them in restored old buildings—and then use this income to support revenue bonds to finance the construction of the project itself. When this proved to be unfeasible a private developer had to be found. It was presumed that the exuberant Piazza would have had private developers lining up for the chance to invest in the buildings around it. But costs mounted, recession set in, the area's reputation failed to improve; no developer showed up. The

(David Littlejohn's piece is a section from his forthcoming book, *Architect*, which Holt, Rinehart & Winston is publishing in June 1984.)



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2 Photograph by Marc Treib

3 Drawing by Perez Associates

4 Photograph by Alan Karchmer

Italian-American Federation, which had worked so long and so hard to make all this happen, raised more than \$1 million to construct an opulent renaissance palazzo (designed by Charles Moore) to fill one corner of the site. But inflation quadrupled the cost, and the palazzo had to be abandoned. (They now occupy one of the old buildings on the east side of the block.) Perez Associates came up with a scheme for a low-rise luxury hotel overlooking, and slightly spilling into the Piazza, which would guarantee it the life and attention it needs. Political delays made it impossible to complete the building in time for the Fair, which chilled the interest of a couple of hotel chains and developers.

All this, one hopes, will soon change. Love it or hate it, the Piazza d'Italia is simply too extraordinary a piece of urban design—now historic as well as “historicist”—to exist indefinitely as a ghost of its good intentions or decay into the self-mocking pretensions of a Venice, California.

What is one to make of all this? Professional architecture critics and theorists who have determined in advance that complexity and contradiction, or multiplicity of cultural reference, or literary wit are what matter most in post- (or anti-) modern architecture, seize

on the Piazza d'Italia as a perfect demonstration case for their ideas. Inevitably, they either ignore or exaggerate its function for the city of New Orleans, and what they imagine its “Italian community” to be.

Charles Jencks, the American/British critic who has set up shop as the definer of terms for architecture since 1960, sees the essence of “post-modernism” as what he calls “double coding”: one style or message for the masses, another for the knowing elite—the two deftly condensed into a single building. The Piazza d'Italia suits his definition perfectly. According to this theory, Italian tourists, or local mamas and papas, can enjoy the Piazza for its high colors, splashing waters, and vague recollections (or explicit celebrations) of *Italia* and traditional culture. The architectural cognoscenti, meanwhile, can smile at the punctured pomposity represented in the neon-edged Serliana and the visual puns on Vitruvius.

I venture three critical points. First, unless and until the Piazza d'Italia actually comes into service as a fully public place, it is irresponsible to judge its success. Since 1978, it has shocked and distressed more of the architectural world than it has pleased—including a few people who have actually visited it, and a



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5 Photograph by Marc Treib

very few who have seen it in use, water gushing, lights blinking, people swarming about—as well as the far greater number who know it only from impressive photographs in magazines and books. Very few of these people could possibly have been assessing the Piazza as anything more than a piece of theoretical, self-indulgent sculpture. It *is* in part that; but it was also intended to be an effective and evocative center of dynamic social activity, and it has not yet had the opportunity to prove either its success *or* failure in those terms.

Second, I find the concept of “double-coded” architecture—of private jokes or allusions in manifestly public works—to be questionable, even offensive. One may well and wisely mine the whole of the architectural past for ideas in a contemporary building. But to make the game of *spotting* those ideas a major part of one’s design intentions strikes me as decadent and trivial. Much too much of what has been written of the Piazza d’Italia (including some texts by Charles Moore) has concentrated on these arcane references and Society of Architectural Historians’ jests. If the Piazza d’Italia had to depend for its success on clever twistings of the tails of past masters, then I would declare it not only a public failure, but a patronizing insult. Unlike Hadrian’s Villa, or John

Soane’s house in Lincoln’s Inn Square—or for that matter Charles Moore’s houses—it was commissioned as a civic and public place, and it *must* succeed first on public, not private, terms.

Fortunately, and third, I think it does. (Or will. Or could.) It succeeds even now for me, *in potentia*, stripped of all these allusions and jests, and will succeed even more fully when it is complete. I take great pleasure in, and can imagine others taking pleasure in, the sheer exuberance of its colors and shapes, its illusions and allusions, its water games and steel games, and the grandeur, surprise, disposition, and finesse of its pieces—whether or not I or they know a triglyph from a tripod. The subtle color changes and the just-perceptible curve play against and modulate the proportions of these thin, Hollywood Roman-epic walls in ways I find exquisitely pleasing. The spaces between columns and openings in each wall, and the placings of the walls one against the other, are arranged with soul-settling tact and *mesure*. If it is a joke, it is a joke on a monumental scale, but in no way (as some have claimed) is it an insult to Italy or to our noble Western heritage. The immeasurably rich legacy of the region we now call Italy, and of the classic orders of architecture, are things so diverse and so

Problems of Representation

George Baird

powerful, have nourished so many centuries and regions of good art and good building, that they can easily embrace one Jovian jest.

But the Piazza is not just an Olympian joke. It is also—I speak of its potential, not its actual state—a quite beautifully organized and orchestrated public space. Proportions, details, materials, and colors are combined even more scrupulously and (to my eye) pleasingly than all the celebrated references and allusions. It does not depend for its success on semiotic transliterations of its shapes, or on the insider's familiarity with architectural history. It is *not*, in its heart, a cynical dig at the classics.

These elements are present, and they may well qualify or on occasion reduce the freedom and healthiness of the overall pleasure of one's experience. Charles Moore, when set free from adult collaborators or control, can be incorrigibly and excessively clever—like other child prodigies who never totally grow up. Some of the jokes here, detached from the context of the pleasurable whole, do indeed appear (as hostile critics have called them) as architectural one-liners, with a very short half-life—as embarrassingly silly as the spitting Charles Moore heads on the mock Doric wall.

I offer my sincerest best wishes to the Italian-American patriots and to New Orleans's investors, on whose good will and hard work the future of this place depends. If the Piazza d'Italia *is* a stage set, it is the supreme outdoor stage set of our time, and I hope it gets treated with proper respect. It is suited not so much for *Cavalleria Rusticana* as for the daily human comedy of thousands of happy Italian New Orleanians and their families.

In the course of recent architectural events, the Piazza d'Italia has been both a watershed and a caution. With his sure sense of timing and his penchant for congenial polemic, Charles W. Moore brought an important architectural argument to a climax with this controversial project.

I have not been an admirer of the project, and have been asked to use this forum to give expression to my concerns. At the outset, I should indicate that I support many aspects of the proposal. It constitutes a central component of an urban revitalization scheme; it seeks to give expression to history—and to do so in an ironical, rather than literally revivalist way. It boldly addresses the question of symbolic expression in architecture. All of these are commendable intentions, which in my view even form an essential component of architectural design in our time. What then do I object to? It seems to me that my concerns have to do with three more specifically architectonic problems.

The Relationship of Background to Foreground Elements

Earlier works by Moore (such as the Faculty Club, Santa Barbara, CA; and Kresge College or the Burns House, Santa Monica, CA) all employ a vocabulary of rather austere and planar elements that connote

an almost vernacular architecture against which are set more elaborate and more expressive and/or more historical motifs. As a result, all these schemes embody a formal tension that results from the juxtaposition of these back- and foreground elements. At the Piazza d'Italia, on the other hand, the foreground elements modify and elaborate the background elements so extensively that the tension of the earlier schemes dissolves. As a result, both back- and foreground collapse into a single architectonic configuration, and one possible mode of dialectic is lost.

The "Aura" of Historical Elements

At the Santa Barbara Faculty Club, part of the visual array in the foreground consists of "real" antique furniture. At the Burns House, Latin-American artifacts and exotic carpets articulate one's spatial perception. At the Piazza d'Italia, on the other hand, the historical elements that create the project's "foreground" are themselves fake. Despite the generally recognizable Roman-ness of the references, the frequent material rendition of the motifs in stainless steel and neon makes their fake-ness disconcertingly evident. Thus, the observer is driven to conclude that the background/foreground relationship cannot parallel those of the projects just

A World's Fair Primer

Allen Eskew

When the World's Fair opens on May 12, 1984, it will owe a great deal of thanks to the Piazza d'Italia not only as a significant architectural role model but also as a design-process teacher. The Piazza and the World's Fair have a number of things in common: the same city, the same historic neighborhood, and some of the same designers.

Along with Charles W. Moore, Ron Filson, and Malcolm Heard, I shared the design excitement of making the Piazza d'Italia. Now, nine years later, I find myself responsible for directing the master planning efforts of the World's Fair design team.

While the scale of the two projects is certainly different (one acre of tight fabric and occasional pedestrian visitors defining the Piazza versus 82 acres of open riverfront property and an expected 75,000 person-per-day attendance rate for the Fair), the two projects are almost identical in design concept and spirit.

While the debates surrounding the merits and/or indignities of the Piazza will certainly continue, I, for one, am very clear on the design lessons that the project extended. I doubt very seriously whether the World's Fair master plan, as currently being executed, would produce anywhere near the same kind of result if it were not for the first-hand experiences with the

Piazza d'Italia. That is not to say that there are not other ways to do this World's Fair—certainly the pluralistic view of World's Fair vocabulary is as legitimate as the pluralistic view of architecture. Yet, when I count the influences on the Fair's work to date, there is no question of the overwhelming role of the Piazza d'Italia. While the Piazza provided a wonderful opportunity to indulge in architectural gymnastics and free flights of fancy, there were two very important process issues that dominated the Piazza's development and subsequently shaped in a major way the characteristics of the World's Fair plan. The first was a claiming: the ability to make a set of physical spaces that not only encouraged but also demanded participation by the user. During the early design schemes for the Piazza, we discovered that opportunities existed not only for creating physical form through the expression of an elaborate fountain and a public plaza, but also for creating theater. Given the rather casual, functional requirements typically associated with the making of open, public space, we looked for every opportunity to invest the project with meaning and purpose. We were blessed with a very colorful user group in the Italian community of New Orleans. It was their ethnic heritage and love for the grand gesture that allowed

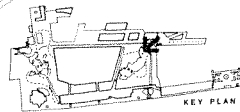
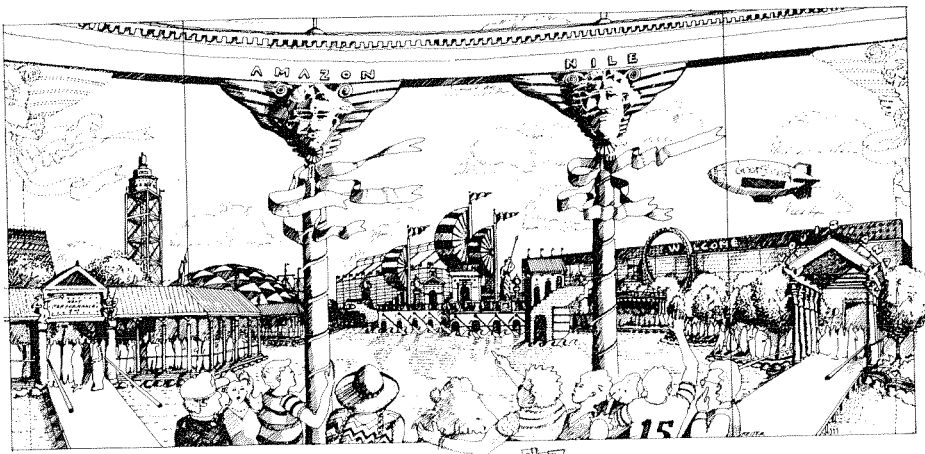
us to begin projecting some of the early concepts of public pageantry upon the physical layout of the fountain. The more we worked on the fountain as a participatory water toy, the more fascinated we became with the opportunities for performance embedded therein. However, we kept running into the problem of communications; how could we translate our design fantasies into actual user patterns? In an effort to bridge the gap between the design drawings and the Italian community's interest in using the space, we began a series of studies for the peopling of the Piazza. We began producing a series of possible scenarios for the fountain's use. Strangely enough, an interesting thing happened as these scenarios developed and were shared with the Italian community: the more scenarios we developed, the more we invented.

The five original scenarios acted as a catalyst for at least 20 casual possibilities. The scenarios became the tool to explain in laymen's terms how the space would be used in addition to how it would be viewed. They also helped as a communicating device in testing some early assumptions and including the user-group into the design process.

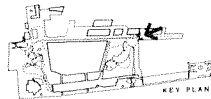
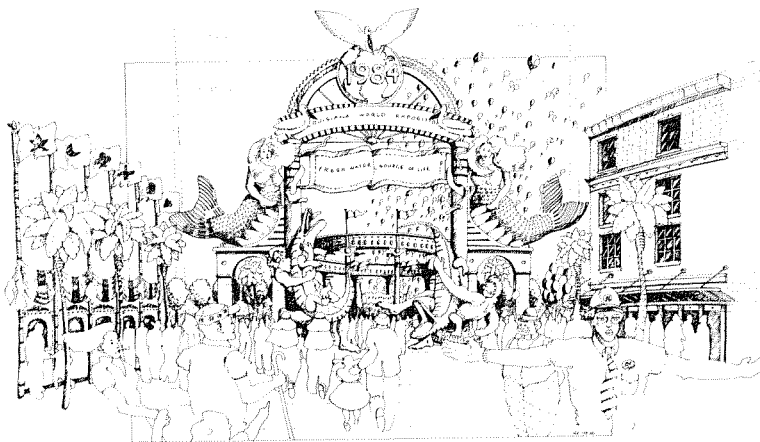
This process, when adapted to World's Fair work, took on the expanded role of site organizer. The scenario

techniques offer the opportunity to "game-out" various design options by studying architectural solutions as well as operational efficiency, entertainment venues, and pageantry possibilities. The scenarios were taken from cartoon-like diagrams of the Piazza version to fully rendered architectural images that were strung together into sets of drawings to portray walking tours through the Fair site. Only when we were able to string together a set of walking-tour images with the simplicity of hypothetical user scenarios were we able to communicate properly and forcefully the design intentions of the Fair's master planning. Prior to the use of these scenarios, the planning had been communicated as a stiff technical exercise in land use and utility infrastructure. The walking-tour scenarios became the most powerful tool for communicating design intentions. It now appears that we will also be able to test with the World's Fair some of the theoretical assumptions that we discovered and translated into those early Piazza scenarios. If the World's Fair is to be successful as a pedestrian event, the focus must be on the pageantry and parades and choreography.

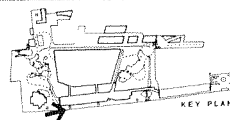
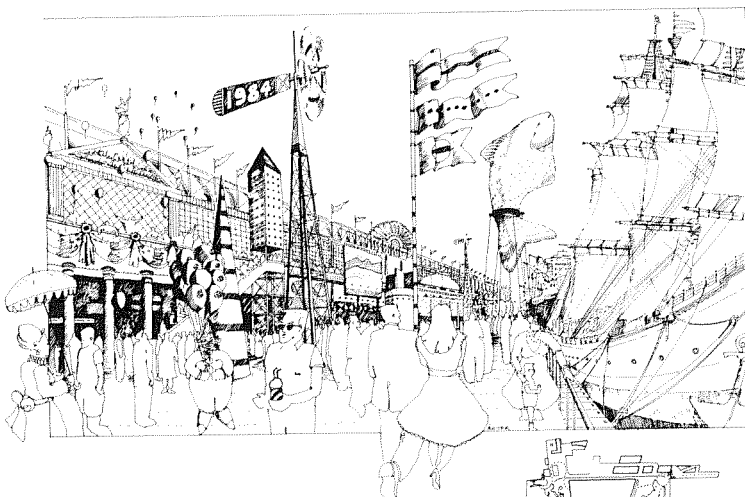
The second major contribution of the Piazza experience was instruction in the group-design process of



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17 Louisiana World Exposition
(Drawing by Perez Associates)

18 Louisiana World Exposition
(Drawing by Perez Associates)

19 Louisiana World Exposition
(Drawing by Perez Associates)

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Being There

Donlyn Lyndon

learning how to orchestrate and be a participant in a group activity, and of learning the importance of flexibility and vulnerability. The making of the Piazza both as product and process, was at times exhilarating, scary, confusing, and, most of all, educational. The exhilaration stemmed from the sheer fun of making an unconventional space with an unconventional set of rules and design parameters. The scary side came from working for the first time with a fancy guy like Charles W. Moore. This confusion always prevailed, because confusion is so much a part of Moore's existence. He thrives on the edge of disaster yet can always turn the most confusing of signals into the most clever of solutions. It takes (which I was later to learn) a great amount of courage to hang on until the very last moment when, unbeknown to most of us, Charles would snatch order and meaning out of ever growing clouds of confusion. He thrived on this dance with disorder and, by his example, taught us all how to dance. Making the Piazza was educational because amid the searching, confusion, and "scariness" we were always learning and exploring—never content with the direction established yesterday. Each day's work was a jumping-off point for tomorrow's explorations. Because design work was always done in a group situation, the

techniques for brainstorming and playing off each other's ideas became central to working together. The pooling of good thoughts and the sharing of bad ideas was a very liberating experience. Charles' self-confidence and his ever present ability to rescue and make wonderful even the most awkward of ideas helped everyone remain open and vulnerable.

I hope that such openness and vulnerability extends into the planning of the Fair. The ability to think and explore unconventional ideas and recognize the emergence of unconventional solutions has been invaluable. Whereas the Piazza process usually involved four or five individuals, the World's Fair planning involves the orchestration of 35 separate design and engineering firms. With so many people involved in design and with myriad philosophies available, carving out common ground for master planning and also allowing individual expression is crucial. The ability to orchestrate individuals, to allow them free reign to pursue their own intentions, requires constant high-wire balancing. While the potential for success is great, the risk of mediocrity is even greater.

It remains a little bit disconsolate, a surprisingly unattended place in an unlikely position. But that is part of the price to be paid for a public space that was built first to attract investment later.

Much has been made of, and much disputed about, the "Italianness" of the Piazza d'Italia. It was sponsored by members of the Italian community, its plan-shape is based on the map of Italy, its walls are embellished with various freewheeling versions of the classical orders, its colors hover around tones named for Italian regions, and, surely, its most important predecessor is the Trevi Fountain.

But the back-biting professional arguments that this place has spawned (mostly among critics who have never visited the Piazza) are curious. The use of the map of Italy is purported somehow to be an insult, the use of the orders is deemed a travesty—either because the Piazza contains full-blown, giant-order, classical details, which offends some unreconstructed modernists—or because these details are "incorrect" (if not outrageous) variations on the classical forms, which offends those recently reconstructed classicists who consider themselves guardians of the sacred trust. In either case the good-natured willful inventiveness of it seems to cause the most

offense. "Whimsy," we are told more often than we could possibly need to be, "has no place in civic art"—a point that was lost, apparently, on several generations of baroque sculptors.

Being there, all that seems beside the point. The place itself is extraordinary, an evocative interweaving of form, color, and light that escapes categorization. It is, more than anything else, robustly present and paradoxically soothing. The layered curving screens offer an array of shifting views streaked with modulated sunlight; the terraced forms of the fountain mass invite clambering around and in the water; the water itself leaks, surges, splashes, sprays, and drips around and among sparkling black and white land forms, reflective sheets of stainless steel, and glowing stucco colors. It asks to be lived in; it beckons for attention. The real meaning of Piazza d'Italia is that it matters whether you are there. Its significance lies in the experience—in the opportunities for engagement that it affords—engagement of the eye, of the body, and of the mind. It offers opportunities to know our own human capabilities by seeing them reflected in a place intensely invested with imagination.

The surroundings will come later—those that are not already there. For the Piazza d'Italia is only a part of a

A Youthful Tribute

Ron Filson

I remember how exciting and somehow naughty it was to fib to Charles W. Moore about the medallions on the Doric wall and tell him: "No, the windshield wipers were not possible; they were just too crazy for anybody, even the New Orleanians, and because of lack of imagination the only thing we could imagine were standard catalog 'dog heads' spouting water." All the while I was planning in secret with friends in New Orleans a private, commemorative plaque that represented our affection and respect for Chuck and physically and permanently stated the importance of our excitement in working with him on such a project. We planned all along for this surprise, so to have portraits sculpted that would reveal the true character of the man, elaborate excuses had to be made and cocktail parties invented to allow the plaster craftsmen to view the subject "up close." One of my favorite memories is having drinks and straining to refrain from giggles as mild-mannered craftsmen peered intently at the lofty wrinkles of Charles W. Moore's brow. Another favorite is the day that Allen Eskew, Moore, and I walked into the Piazza from Poydras Street and waited to see Charles' reaction to the plaster medallions that had been mounted on the wall. Allen and I lingered behind and let Chuck wander into the nearly complete fountain project. Although there was

no water, the majesty of the walls was becoming apparent. Moore strolled, hands clasped behind his back, looking upward, and smiling. He reached the far side of the Piazza, turned, looked back, and as he walked slowly toward the Doric wall a slightly more puzzled look appeared on his face. As he recognized and clearly understood what was mounted on the walls, a smile slowly appeared. Our hearts were beating quickly during all this but our effort was warmly received. I have never asked Chuck whether or not he had wind of these medallions although it was rumored that he knew about them. If he did, he did not indicate this in any other than the most appreciative way. For this I am grateful.



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24 Photograph by Allen Eskew

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The Creation of a Sense of Place: The Case of Preshil

Kimberly Dovey

Preshil is a private school that was founded in Melbourne, Australia, in the early 1930s as an experiment in progressive education. I first encountered it in early 1979 when I spent a morning there researching children's images of favorite places. Upon penetrating an overgrown wall of trees I found a labyrinth of pathways, buildings, gardens, huts, and courtyards. The diversity was astounding and compelling, a rich tapestry of places and forms. Everywhere the evidence of creative and intense activity was stamped on the place. The attempt to communicate this quality is problematic indeed. It is perhaps most nearly captured in a quote from a long-time member of the school community:

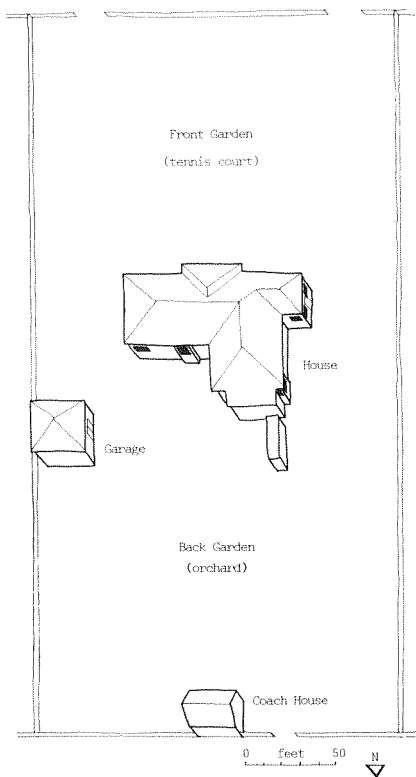
It's the informality of it, coupled with the complexity. Change in the school is almost always organic change rather than dramatic upheaval. There's a sense of evolution, of things being adapted. If there's a tree, a building will twist itself around it. Nothing is tidied up or ordered unless there is some purpose. The school seems to have succeeded in allowing what was there 50 years ago to still be apparent. There is a sense of thriving about the school, there seems to be purposeful activity behind every bush. People are surprised that in the heart of a place where there are concrete gutterings all over the place, carefully arranged thises and thats, here is an environment that seems less tramelled, yet with all this complex purposeful activity happening within it.

In the larger modern environment our shared places become increasingly managed, packaged, and regulated, and they often defy our attempts to care for them. It is easy enough to point out the insensitivities of designers, but perhaps more difficult to understand the conditions under which some shared places seem to thrive within such a barren context. My aim in what follows is to attempt such understanding through the case of Preshil. I have pieced the story together from interviews, observations, and historical records, but make no pretense at completeness. It is a personal view resting on my judgments of what we might learn. There is no rigorous documentation of environmental form nor an evaluation of its consequences. I was looking for clues for understanding the processes of environmental change over many years and the relationship between the community and the place that both engendered those processes and emerged from them.

Preshil began as a small cottage school, founded by a woman named Margaret Lyttle, and moved to the current site in 1938. At the time it was a fairly typical upper middle-class suburban house on a 400- by 200-foot site. Many physical changes occurred over the next 44 years. First, a classroom was transported from the former site and a new long classroom block was built. Thus, the backyard area was divided into three age-areas (the nursery school, the

"fives" and the "biggies") that survive today. In 1950 a transportable classroom building was erected, further reinforcing these divisions. By this time the founder had died and was succeeded by her niece (also named Margaret Lyttle) who remains in charge today. Plans for a hall began to fertilize in 1960, and it was built in 1962. In 1963 the house was extended into a new classroom for the "fives." In 1967 the long classrooms were rebuilt and enlarged; and in 1969 some retreat rooms were built. The transportables were replaced in 1971 by the larger "home rooms" acquired from next door. The last major change took place in 1976 when an upper floor library was added to the rear of the house.

Although this is the formal history of the Preshil environment at a glance, it does not give us the whole story. To broaden this understanding I want to consider the whole gamut of environmental change from the most formal buildings down to the small, everyday, informal changes. The idea of formality refers to the process of change rather than to environmental form. The formal changes mapped in the drawings require self-conscious foresight, plans, and contractors; involve significant economic commitment; and have long-range consequences. At the other end of the continuum are the everyday informal changes that are extraordinarily complex, diverse, and impossible to map rigorously. They range from the



cultivation of plants, to the laying of pathways and the building of huts. Informal changes occur everyday as part of the ebb and flow of school life. They mostly happen spontaneously without deference to any higher authority. Essentially they are small-scale changes with limited long-term consequences for the whole school. It may seem frivolous to stress such mundane changes, yet their importance to school life comes from their frequency rather than size. Between these two extremes many semiformal changes were made. Verandas and rooms were added here and there; play equipment, animal pens, and gardens came and went; and air-raid shelters were built during the war, later to become underground huts and then mud pits. These semiformal changes required planning, yet were generally undertaken by parent groups without drawings or contractors. To fill out the story a little and expand the basis for my argument I now want to discuss examples from either end of this continuum—first, the highly dynamic and informal activity of hutbuilding; and second, the largest and most distinctive of the formal changes, the creation of the school hall.

Hutbuilding

There is a long tradition of hutbuilding at Preshil; at any given time 30 to 40 huts can be found in various stages of construction or demolition, huddled against the boundary fence or infiltrating the

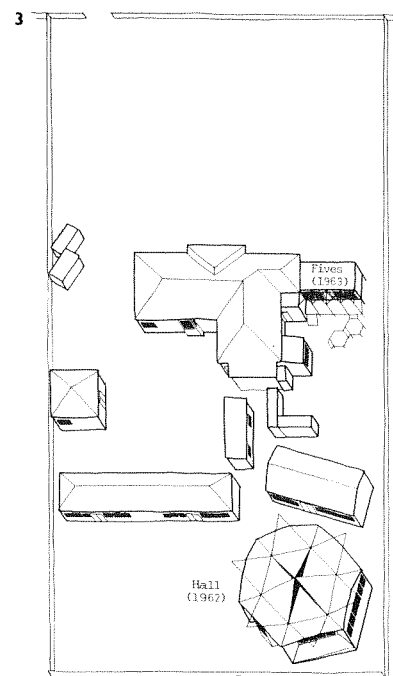
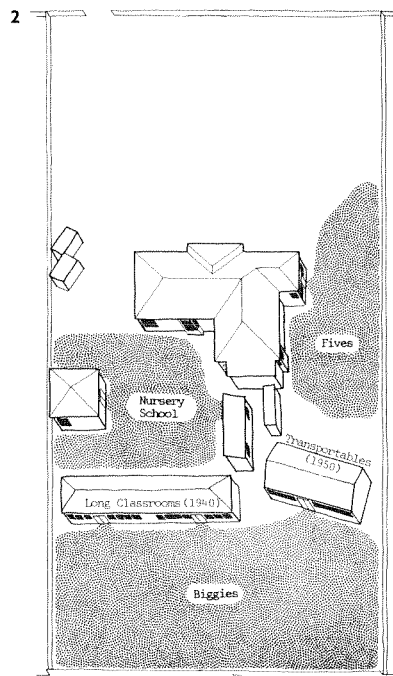
forks of the numerous peppercorn trees. Hutbuilding tends to be a personal activity for the younger children (five to six years) and more collective for the older ones in groups of up to five. Built very quickly from branches, boards, and sheets of plywood recycled many times, the huts are mostly crude enclosures large enough for the person or the group. The motivation for such activity is clearly linked to the creation of personal places within the communal grounds and to the expression of identity. “They need their own little places,” says Margaret, “because the world isn’t giving them that any more.” But more than this, hutbuilding cements the bonds of peer-group identity. And identity also means separateness, a retreat from the crowd achieved either by going up into the trees or by displaying private signs. Despite the claims of personal ownership, however, the huts are used surprisingly little once finished. An ex-student comments: “They were usually built, left for a while, then pulled down and another one was built. It’s the building process; getting there is all the fun.” Thus the huts are never really “finished,” but rather are stages in a dynamic cycle of materials, ideas, and activities that can transform the hut landscape in a week. At the same time it is a piecemeal process that molds itself to the irregularities of the school life and environment, gathering together fragments of material and time and exploiting opportunities where and when they occur. It

2 Preshil 1950

3 Preshil 1963

4 Preshil 1969

5 Preshil 1981



would appear at first that this dynamism and frequency of demolition is contradictory to the creation of personal places and the expression of identity. Yet the cycle of build-inhabit-demolish-build is in another sense very much a reflection of the search for identity that is going on in the personal lives of the children. They are exploring roles and relationships and abandoning them just as quickly as their huts. Like the games of everyday school life and the plays presented in the hall, the hutbuilding is integrated with this ongoing drama of creation and discovery.

Hallbuilding

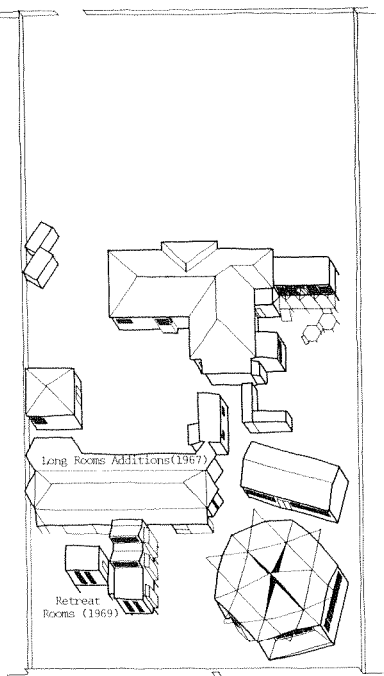
The creation of the school hall in the early 1960s was a remarkable phase in the evolution of the Preshil environment and community. It was at once a concretization and discovery of the school identity, and a significant learning experience for everyone involved. The hall was required for two reasons: first, as an expression of the school's identity and of the fact that, after 25 years, it was here to stay; and

second, as a setting for the numerous plays written and performed by the children for the wider community. The initial idea was that the hall would be built in the front garden, an open grassy area that had evolved as a place of privilege for the older children. Kevin Borland, a young architect/parent who became involved at this point, began with the view that "the children really were the clients." He aimed to involve them also in "an educative process as to what architects do," a process that was soon to reverse itself. The idea for the front-garden site had come largely from the adults, and it reflected their concern for image and display. Yet to the children the garden was a repository of meanings from everyday life that had accumulated in diversity and intensity over the years. They knew every inch of the place, its delights, secrets, and seasons. Despite the fact that the hall had been designed, these strong emotional bonds eventually led to a tearful plea that the hall be built elsewhere. The adults listened and a slower, more responsive design process ensued, giving legitimacy to

everyday experiences as seeds for design. A further series of design meetings produced another design, a star-shaped hall in the rear corner of the site. Interestingly, both Kevin and the children claimed authorship of the design, which is perhaps an indication of a shared discovery. Kevin admits that the hall became a learning experience for him:

I had great visions of everything that opened and shut, but that was contrary to the way that the kids and Margaret felt in relation to creativity. It can be a very restricting thing, it can't really develop spontaneity and invention.

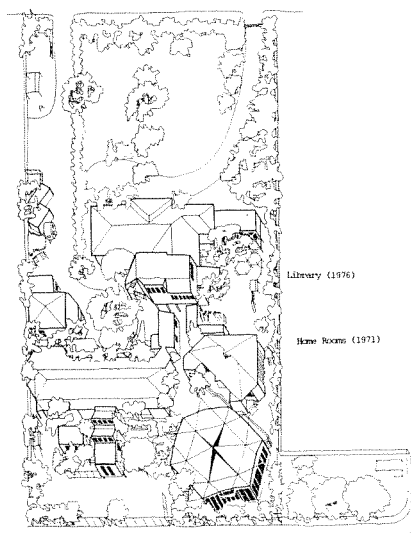
Although the front garden was saved, the back corner was also well-loved and verdant, and so when the bulldozer came the children gathered around and cried. Almost any change was bound to bring loss, yet now it was a negotiated compromise rather than an imposed expropriation. Some trees had been traded for a hall and perhaps the children's sadness was less than their delight with the new building. "I remember that there



was an immense pride in it," says one participant. "It was better than we expected it to be." From the start the hall became a special place, indeed a sacred place where shoes were removed before entering. And even though the overt quest for identity through a front garden display was abandoned, a different and more profound sense of identity grew out of the process that was adopted. "It really did have the spirit of the school," says an ex-student. "The school is individual and the hall represents it a lot. The fact that the hall isn't out the front as a showpiece reflects what the school is all about; you don't have to put all the wares in the window." Once the design process was linked into the everyday life of the place, that indigenous character and identity flowed naturally into the built form.

The Primacy of Everyday Life

I have argued that hutbuilding achieves a successful integration of personal learning and environmental change. At a much larger scale I believe that the success of the hall was largely a



result of a similar integration of communal learning and environmental change. In each case the environmental change emerged out of the ground of everyday life, with a myriad of activities, experiences, needs, hopes, and dreams informing the design.

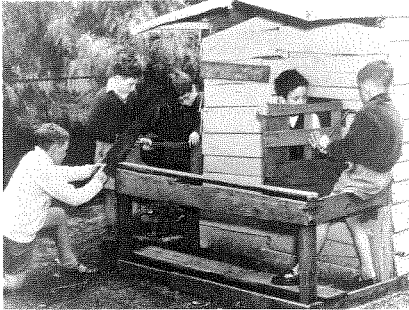
Whatever 'sense of place' may mean, it is through these experiences of everyday life that it is created and revealed. It is not the image captured in photographs or celebrated a few times a year; it is an ongoing lived experience. This is not to deny an aesthetic view of environmental quality, but rather to broaden it. From the eyes of the dweller, the aesthetic includes the beauty of the relationships that are being constantly acted out. Design problems emerge in everyday life and resolutions can only be tested there. In a process like hutbuilding this evaluative feedback loop is very short, we quickly know whether we are getting the change that we held (however vaguely) in mind. Yet the scale of formal design problems such as the hall requires plans, contracts, delayed evaluation, and a separation of the process from

everyday life. At Preshil a means was devised for allowing the formal changes to grow naturally out of the context in which they were needed. There is no simple way to describe this process. It consisted of, rather, a series of closely interconnected properties which are outlined below.

Properties of Placemaking

1 A Cohesive Group Mind

At the time of the hall design in particular Preshil was characterized by a very high level of community cohesion, which Margaret calls a "group mind." This is a rather vaguely articulated but strongly felt sense of sharing aims and directions. "We all seemed to work with the good of the school in mind," she says, "even though we didn't necessarily agree." The community shared enough in common that their joint efforts became meaningful symbols of group identity. Coupled with this community cohesion was a strong sense of caring for the place, an emotional bond rich with layers of memory such that any proposal for



6 Hutbuilding (c. 1950)

An expression and concretization of peer-group identity.
(Photograph from the Preshil Archives)

7 Huddled against the fence and infiltrating the forks of the peppercorn trees, the huts are crude enclosures large enough for their builders.

(Photograph by Kimberly Dovey)

8 The huts are never really "finished,"

they are stages in a dynamic cycle of materials, ideas, and activities.
(Photograph by Kimberly Dovey)

9 Children designed the hall (1961)

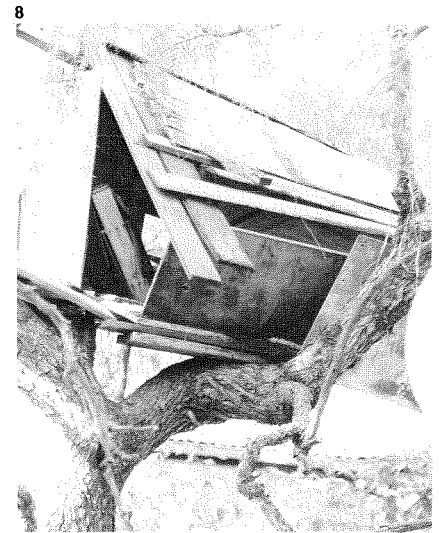
being clients was not enough.
(Photograph from the Preshil Archives)

10 The School Hall

"It was better than we expected it to be" claimed the participants.
(Photograph from the Preshil Archives)

11 The hall became a sacred place

"It really did have the spirit of the school."
(Photograph by Kimberly Dovey)



designed change aroused much interest. I believe that this cohesiveness, both between the people and with the place, was the fertile ground from which the entire process grew.

2 Active Involvement

It is tempting to call this characteristic "user participation," yet at Preshil the children were not merely consulted on alternate schemes, they were actively involved as initiators and designers and sometimes as builders. From the hall onward they made it clear that being clients was not enough. During the design of the retreat rooms in 1969 the process got bogged down, whereupon the frustrated children wrote and performed a play portraying Kevin as a doddering old man. As the process kicked off once more with the children's energy, Kevin lamented that there was no way to save some much-loved cypress trees. The children replied that they were sorry too but the trees must stay, and they threatened to lie in front of the bulldozer to save them. Ultimately the building design was juggled to allow one tree to grow

through a carefully placed bay and another through an access deck. Clearly the children saw themselves as both initiators and arbiters in the design process.

3 An Elaboration of the Professional's Role

The active involvement of the children did not eliminate the need for a quite sophisticated level of professional involvement. Kevin's role however extended well beyond technical and design expertise, as one parent commented:

I think he is the most exemplary architect, his gift of getting people to express themselves is very nearly unique. Lots of architects in my experience come with a very clear concept and they encourage you to say what they need to hear so they can then present their scheme. Kevin doesn't give that same air of manipulating things at all, there's a kind of openness and eagerness to be excited by the ideas of the people he's working with, it's very refreshing.

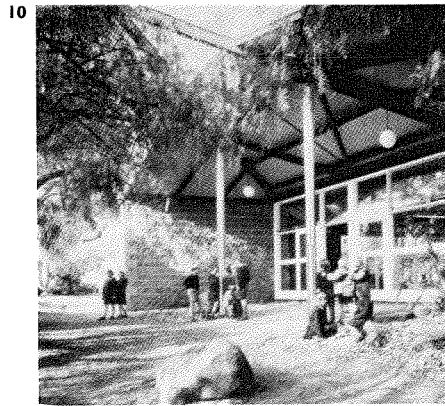
It is clear that the community responded to Kevin's ability to



work with others and to use interpersonal skills to elaborate the role of designer beyond its traditional boundaries. Yet he did not abandon his role of “formgiver” for which he had achieved a substantial professional reputation. Whilst there is a general appreciation amongst the school community for his design work, Margaret maintains a disrespect for anything that the children can merely look at rather than engage with: “The home rooms are not what we thought, Kevin’s architecture had taken over. He’s so wrapped up in his pine and exposed pipes.” Mostly she tolerates the architectural gestures but her heart is in the richness of learning opportunities that are generated or denied.

4 A Catalyst

Margaret has an uncanny sense for such opportunities and has played a central role in the evolution of the place, not as a shaper of form but as a catalyst of process. She is the one most in touch with the group mind and an understanding of the place as the children experience it. Explaining



that she cannot understand plans (“I can understand one room, but not the whole plan.”), she has insisted that the children design by telling stories about how they might use the place. This seems to me to reflect an insistence on keeping the communication connected with everyday life and understandable to children. Plans were produced eventually, of course, then recycled as art paper.

5 Creative Communication

For the users to engage actively in the process of creating and exploring alternative courses of action, a high level of creative communication is necessary. Interesting clues as to the kind of communication that was characteristic at Preshil are revealed in a transcript of a hall design meeting. It indicates that a highly sophisticated kind of designing was going on between participants six to thirteen years of age. Ideas flowed quickly and freely, were combined, adapted, and refined. An idea for trees in the middle of the hall shifted to trees behind the stage (this idea was used), which led to trees behind the audience, to



building the hall in the country. There were high levels of spontaneity and playfulness as various analogies and metaphors were invented and combined. The metaphor of the hall as a ball became that of a doughnut, a flower, and a mobile hall. The problem framework was being continually questioned as ideas such as mobile halls, multiple halls, no hall, and the re-use of existing buildings were introduced. The transcript reads like a “how-to” text on creative problem-solving and also reveals the best image that I have of the group mind at work. The sense of a shared dream is being discovered through design.

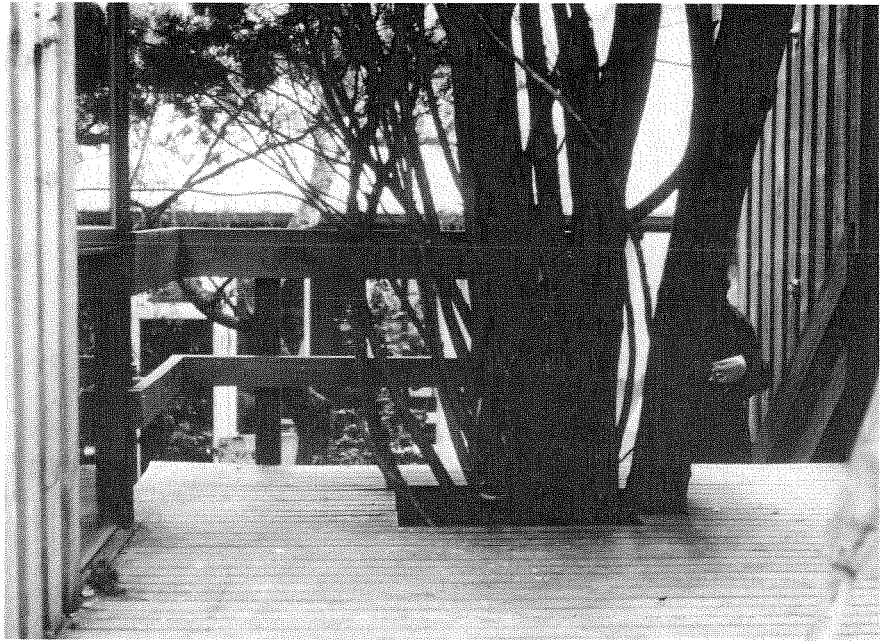
Edited Transcript of Ideas for the Hall (ca. 1961)

Make the hall like a ball and roll it around.

Build it like a doughnut with trees in the middle, natural scenery for plays.

We can make the back of the stage with just curtains over sliding doors and when we want a country scene, open up the doors and have real trees.

Have sliding doors in the back of



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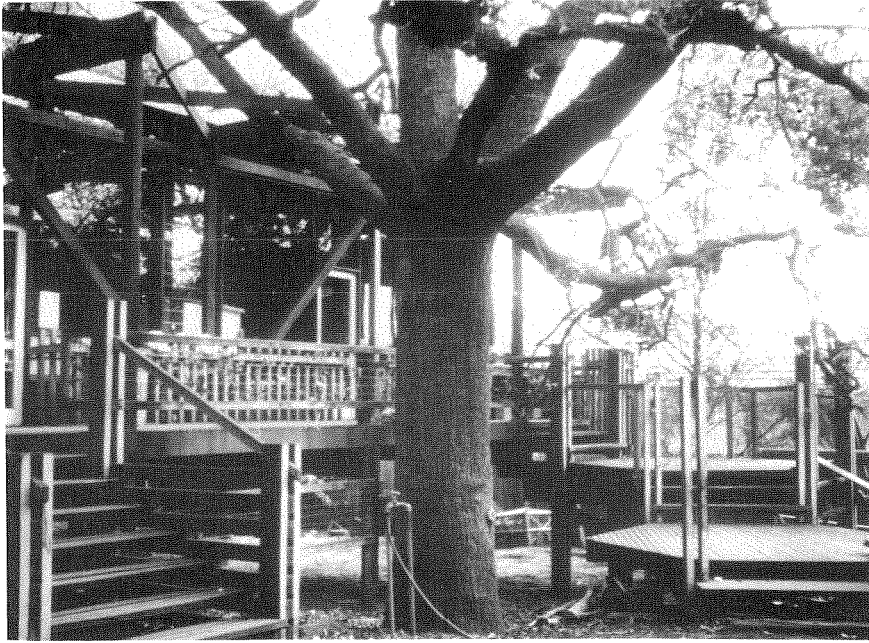
the hall, move chairs out and sit in the open.
 Sell Preshil and buy land in the bush.
 If we build the hall and feel dissatisfied we need to be able to move it.
 If we didn't want to take up any room we could build it above the nursery school playground.
 Why not make our rooms two-storied?
 Could we pull down the classroom and build the hall here?
 Yes, let's have a hall and no classroom.
 Have lots of little halls in one big hall.
 Build a huge plastic shell over Preshil.
 Spend money improving what we have.
 But we want a circular stage.
 Have it like a flower with a stage in the middle.
 Why not build it ourselves.
 Cut off the lower branches of the tree in the nursery school, build the hall around it.
 If it was a doughnut some people wouldn't see.
 That's where the change rooms are . . .

12 The Retreat Rooms (1969)

"The trees stay," said the children.
 (Photograph by Kimberly Dovey)

6 An Evolving Catalog of Options

The clues to this characteristic of the design process are also buried in the transcript that originally consisted of 78 ideas for the hall. Many of these ideas or variations on them were used in other buildings constructed many years later. The options of building on stilts, above existing buildings, around trees, as well as demolishing, renovating, and extending next door were all proposed for the hall and then used later in another context. It seems that through the process of designing, an unwritten catalog of options for ongoing environmental change evolved. The group mind came to embody not only a shared understanding of the place as it was, but also as it might become. These options, whether proposed by Kevin or the children, were being continually turned over as problems and opportunities arose. Design never began from scratch, but rather was built upon a massive accumulation of past experience. This unwritten catalog was, thus, a rich foundation for a participatory design process that, in turn, served to enrich and extend the catalog.



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7 Piecemeal Change

The large-scale formal changes at Preshil were carried out piecemeal with about eight major buildings and additions over the years. A process such as this has several advantages. First, the scale and, therefore, the complexity of each piece is kept to a minimum and the task is less likely to overwhelm the participants. Second, since the cycle from design through construction is relatively short, the possibilities for identification are enhanced because participants quickly see something for their efforts. Third, a higher level of adaptability is built into the system because the effects of environmental change on everyday life can be more quickly ascertained. The smaller the pieces are, the less devastating the consequences of error will be. And finally a piecemeal process keeps the catalog of options fresh within the group mind.

Preshil has never had a master plan; its order flows upwards rather than downwards. "Master plans destroy things," says Margaret. "What I feel about children now is not what I will feel like in five years' time.

Preshil is like water, it finds its own level." Without any stable basis upon which a master plan might have been generated, the piecemeal approach allowed adaptability and responsiveness to the dynamism of everyday life. And like water environmental change at Preshil flowed into whatever opportunities presented themselves and felt appropriate for a given problem. No master plan could have envisaged the result.

8 Changing in Midstream

This property implies an ability to adapt to cross currents where and when they appear both during design and construction. The complexities of formal design ensure that some problems will inevitably emerge. At Preshil they were always regarded as another opportunity to learn. During the construction of the "fives" classroom in 1963 Margaret realized that the scale would be overwhelming to the children. After an argument with Kevin the access stairs were redesigned, creating a series of stepped platforms to break down the scale. Reassessing commitments can easily lead to

13 The 'Fives' Classroom (1963)

The stepped platforms were added during construction to break down the perceived scale.

(Photograph by Kimberly Dovey)

conflict, but conflict can lead to fruitful negotiations. The upper-floor library built in 1976 was designed as a staff room and altered during construction. New opportunities sometimes become apparent only in midstream, such as when some gaps left in the walls by workmen were turned into windows because they seemed interesting. It is very often only when we have gone beyond thinking and begun to act that the consequences of our decisions become apparent. Only from midstream can we see where the river flows, and capitalize on any new opportunities that are revealed.

9 Taking Time

A slow rate of change is another condition for adaptability and responsiveness to everyday life. Margaret sees it as a central aspect of designing:

Time is the essence of everything, the hall was where we learnt that, it took two years of maturation. We'd be unsure until suddenly we'd know when it was right. When it doesn't happen that way it's wrong. It's like a gestation period. Every mistake we've made in this place is because we've rushed things.

Many of the other characteristics hinge upon this issue of time. If the design process is to be embedded truly in everyday life then considerable time must be allowed for the connections to be made. The dialogue between possibilities must remain open until it seems

that the process has run its course in terms of both design and learning opportunities. In Margaret's words, speed "outpaces the community's understanding of being part of the environment."

On Process and Product

These nine properties are those that I see as important to environmental change at Preshil and to the sense of place that was engendered. My somewhat arbitrary categorization masks the fact that they are highly integrated. Each property seems necessary to some degree, yet the entire nine are essential to the whole system. Without community cohesion it is difficult to achieve active involvement and creative communication; without creative communication the catalog of options is dull; changing in midstream is difficult if you are in a hurry; and so on. Taken together I believe that these properties begin to suggest how environmental design can be effectively integrated with everyday life. Perhaps they also provide some clues about the difference between a mere physical setting and a sense of place. If there is one word to describe the design process at Preshil, it might be called "indigenous," the etymological root of which means "produced or born within." Clearly I see this indigenous process of placemaking as more important to the sense of place than the form of the product. My neglect of form is not because I think that the formal product is trivial, but rather it is because of the danger that everyday life will be

ignored, denied, or purified when formal solutions are applied from above. The necessity for large-scale change renders mistakes in formal choice inevitable. And even highly appropriate formal choices may be undercut in time by shifts in the socio-cultural basis of everyday life. Mistakes, however, are less likely to emerge and are more easily mended if the process is piecemeal and involves the dwellers, and if they have the power and resources for ongoing adaptation. The key at Preshil was in connecting the processes of environmental change with the rich and surprising diversity of everyday life. Although the evolution of the place could have taken many forms, the design process contained the seeds of its integral quality.

Light and Public Places

Richard C. Peters

Light is of decisive importance when we experience public environments. The making of places means the interplay of light and space, light and form, light and surface, light and texture, light and pattern, light and color, and, most important, light and human activity. Light in this sense includes both natural and artificial illumination, a relationship which means that light is the great maker of presence and is of paramount importance in all man-made environments. Presence means more than that which merely surrounds us, it is a spiritual quality, a humanizing mood that uplifts our lives. It is an attitude that makes our day-to-day life, no matter where we are or what we are doing, a wonderful and personal experience. It takes into account all the idiosyncratic whims as well as the psychological amenities that people rely on in their workaday lives—and why should it be otherwise?

As architects and designers we have the unique opportunity of making environments for people, and by doing so we can immensely enrich their lives. Light and lighting are inseparably related to this obligation and it is our responsibility as designers of buildings, spaces, and objects to realize this in all our endeavors. We live with light and light must give presence to our lives.

The late Richard Kelly, dean of American lighting designers, once

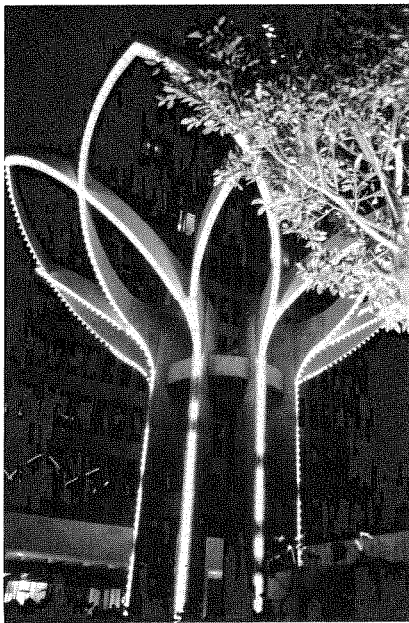


I Bandshell: Matera, Italy

(Photograph by Marvin Buchanan)



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2 Tapiola, Finland
(Photograph by Richard C. Peters)

3 Embarcadero Center
(Photograph by Anders Hensch)

said that every space could contain three qualities of illumination: “focal glow, ambient luminance, and the play of brilliants.” This poetic expression is a great challenge to architects and designers because it clearly describes the magic of light, a magic that is essential if we are to enjoy the places that surround us.

The challenge is often realized in the design of lighting for interior spaces, but I believe that little attention is given to the importance of lighting design in out-of-doors public places.

The interweaving of focal glow, ambient luminance, and the play of brilliants is essential to all public realms. Focal glow is like a sunburst through the clouds. It commands attention, creates interest, and separates the important from the unimportant. Ambient luminance is necessary for revealing forms and is vaporous, like the interior of a white tent at high noon. It fills people with a sense of freedom of space and suggests infinity. The play of brilliants is a ballroom of crystal chandeliers, a heaven full of stars,

or the magic of Christmas trees. It is fantasy; it excites us; it charms the senses. Each of these elements of light play, however, can be spiritless and distracting if used alone.

In the public realm the potency of this light play is too seldom recognized. Light can be the directive force of all our visual awareness, assisting in the creation of significant forms and spaces with symbolic meanings for everyone. Unfortunately, if misguided or ignored, the use of light can also allow chaotic visual stimuli to wreck our efforts to create the practical and noble places necessary for our humanity. Lighting of public places demands a demarcation of design intent and an elaboration of the specific needs and characteristics of the places themselves, and most important, of the participants within the place. Lighting should be focused on people. It should be oriented toward people in space. The general lighting design must provide the maximum sense of identification to form the place itself. It must attract people and stimulate activity. Lighting should be dynamic

without being gaudy, cheap, or banal, and it should provide areas of excitement and repose and points of emphasis and interest within the place, while satisfying our physical and psychological comfort and security.

The nightly radiance of cities produces an extremely exciting organization of forms and patterns. However, when one is involved at the personal level, these patterns can become indistinguishable amid the clutter of clashing, garish, over-illuminated forms and spaces. The formulation of an overall, comprehensive, lighting-design plan should expand the unique physical, visual, and emotional characteristics of a place. This does not impose a rigid order, but rather provides a framework in which many activities can take place and be understood. To flood everything in light is not the answer. By the imaginative application of light we can reduce the visual chaos of unplanned light and bring a sense of joy and enrichment to the public domain.

Let us imagine that we want all places to be beautifully illuminated. To most people that would only mean providing a great deal of light. How wrong that is! If people do not see very well, they demand more light. As designers we must persuade the public that the *quality* of light is far more important than the quantity of light.

I believe that lighting for the public realm should blend two systems of



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4 Concert Hall (Night)

Tivoli Gardens, Copenhagen, Denmark

5 Concert Hall (Day)

Tivoli Gardens, Copenhagen, Denmark



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6 Model: "Wonder Wall"

1984 Louisiana World's Exposition, New Orleans
(Photographs by Alan Karchmer)

7 Theme Pavilion: Osaka World's Fair

(Photograph by Richard Clayberg)

8 Elephant Tower

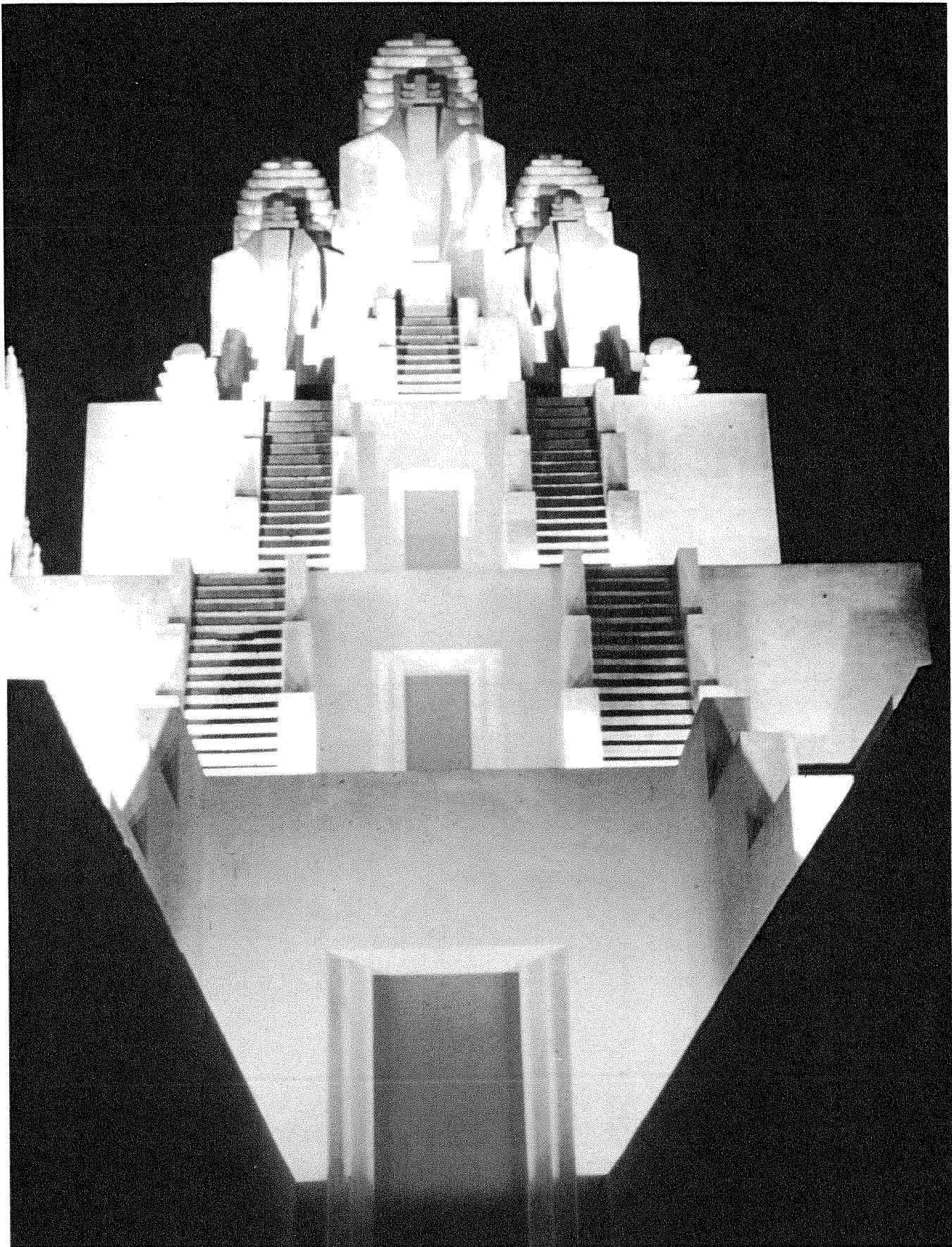
Golden Gate International Fair, San Francisco, California, 1939–1940
(Fair photographs from the collection of Richard C. Peters)

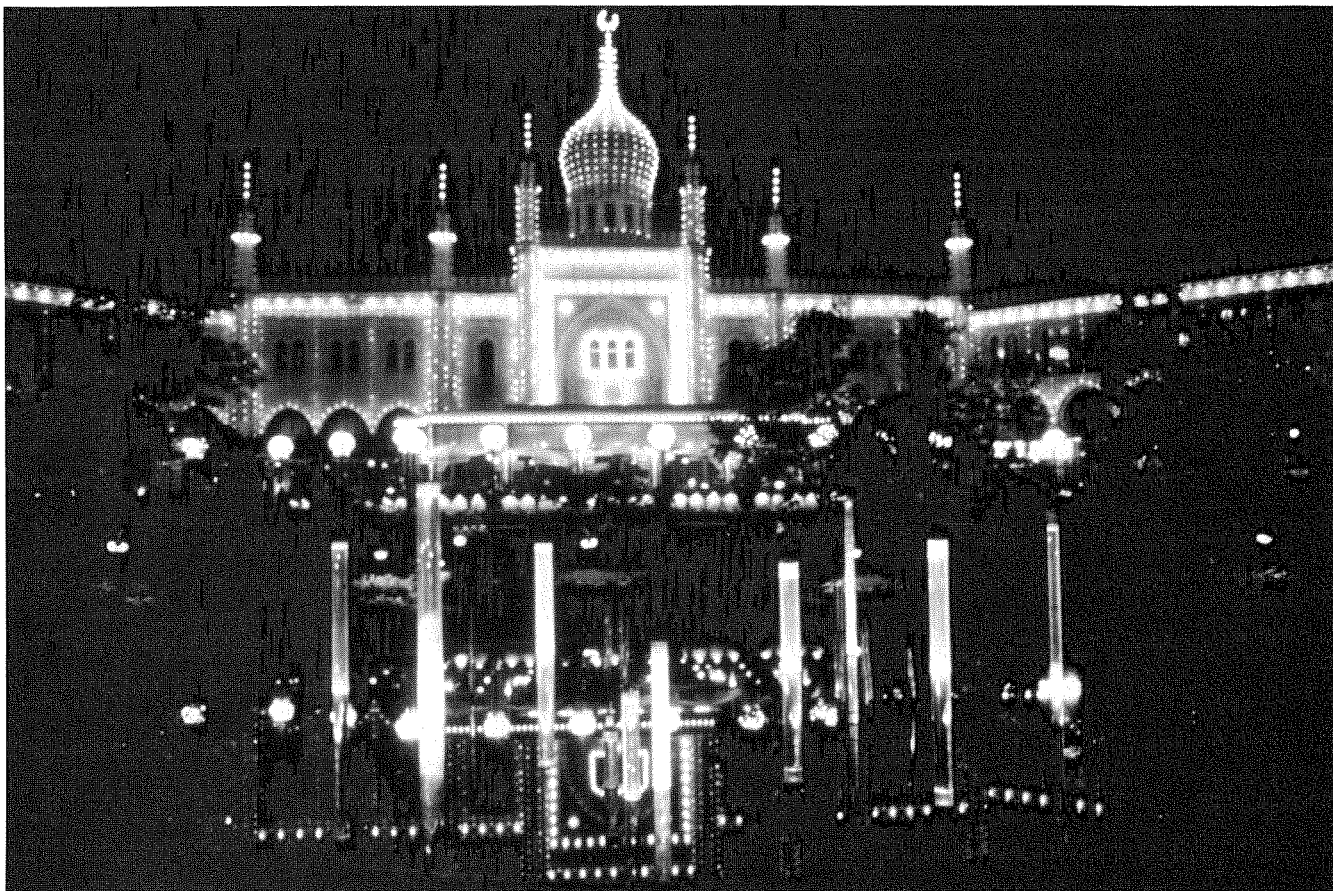
lighting: what I call "syncopated light," the vivacity and luminosity so necessary to the life of places, and "painted light," the background lighting to enhance the feeling of festivity and community.

Syncopated light is the "play of brilliants." It bestows on places an atmosphere of enchantment. It is light as lines, dots, sparkle, glitter, and glow. Syncopated light possesses a distinct character of intensity and color, and heightens all sensation.

One of the richest and best examples of "syncopated light" is Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, Denmark. The play of brilliants on decorated surfaces provides night illumination and gives an enchanting beauty to the intimate garden setting.

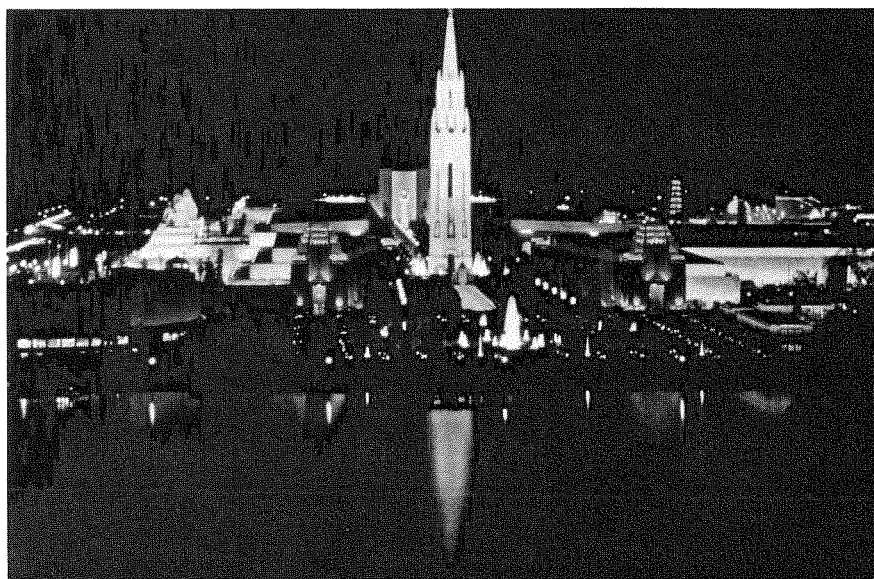
Painted light is ambient luminance and, as good background light, aspires to create a comfortable, restful, and reassuring place. Painted light is night color and does not reproduce the effects of daylight. It seeks to achieve by illumination an entirely new feeling of the place at night.





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9 Restaurant and Garden

(Photographs by Richard C. Peters)

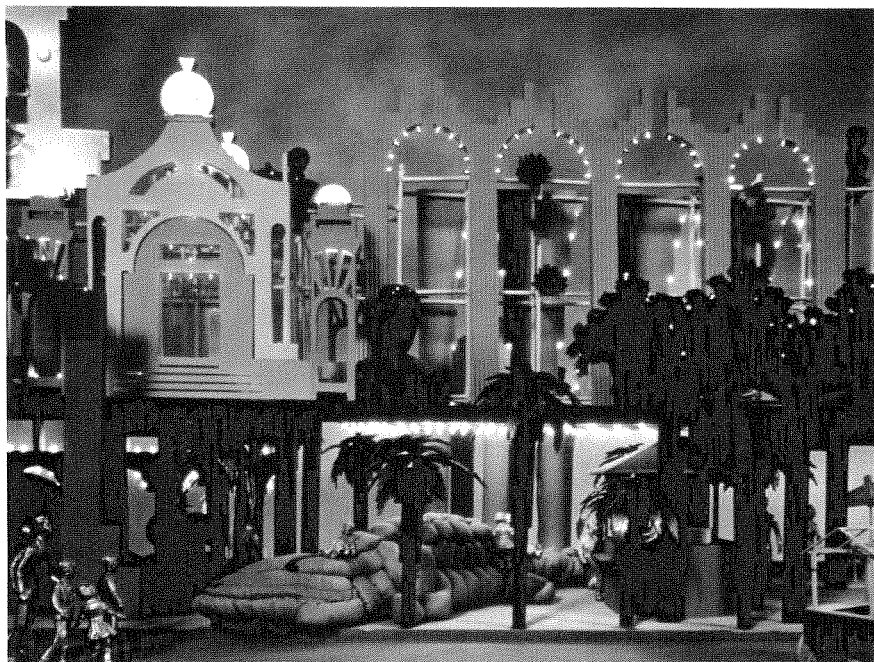
10 Overall view of Fair

Golden Gate International Fair, San Francisco,
California, 1939–1940

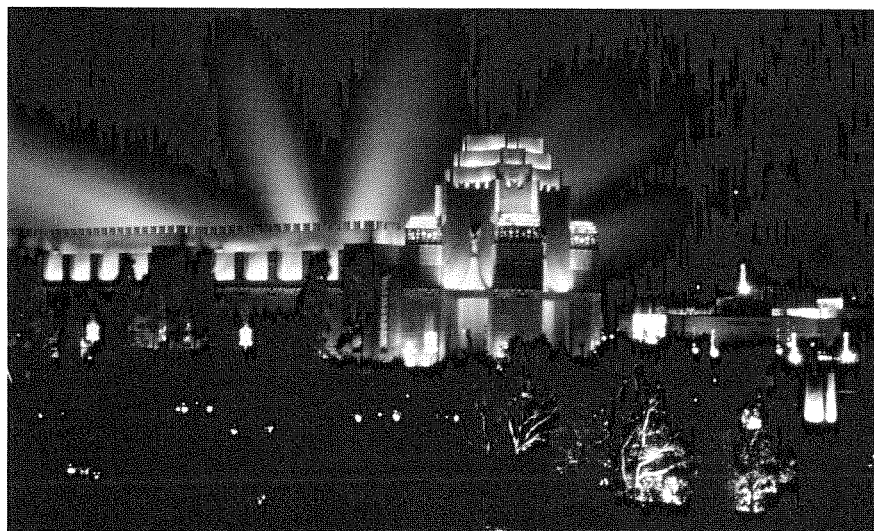
The Golden Gate International Fair in San Francisco Bay (1939–1940) was a dramatic example of “painted light.” The illumination formed an integral part of the building design, and color, light, and structure were composed with a personal scale and eloquence seldom achieved in the making of public realms.

With light, everything is showmanship. The perfect blend of syncopated and painted light will celebrate places and provide the diversity of light play. My lighting design for the Wonder Wall of the 1984 World’s Fair in New Orleans is such a blend of light play. Conceived to enrich the visitor’s experience, the 2,500-foot wall of fantasy and delight offers a sequence of light events. Ambient surfaces, glowing objects, and subdued light are woven together in a harmonious design. In moving through spaces, from light to light, emotions are excited, and highlights, shadows, and silhouettes are accentuated. The “wonder” of light provides the mystery of wandering and discovery and makes people feel good—no matter where they may be.

“Good light,” as it is called, is the ingredient for creating wonderful public realms. In the task of creating places of value, lighting can play a significant part and make us care about the places that we love.



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11 Model: “Wonder Wall”

1984 Louisiana World’s Exposition, New Orleans

12 Court of the Moon

Golden Gate International Fair, San Francisco, California, 1939–1940

Clearings

Barbara Stauffacher Solomon

A native Venetian can get lost on the straight streets of Turin. Someone born within sight of the Pacific needs sky and horizon. In Rome she seeks clearings, places, where the streets are pushed open to the sky.

Roman hilltops view the world, but in the center of Rome there are no horizons. Monuments block vistas. Heavy cornices compress the sky and cut the light into long, tight shapes. The sky becomes a precious commodity. Needing this rare light, Romans have persistently used clearings to catch the sky's brilliance. Places/piazzas/voids: The city is a network of inhabited walls enclosing the mirror images of streets and city pastures.

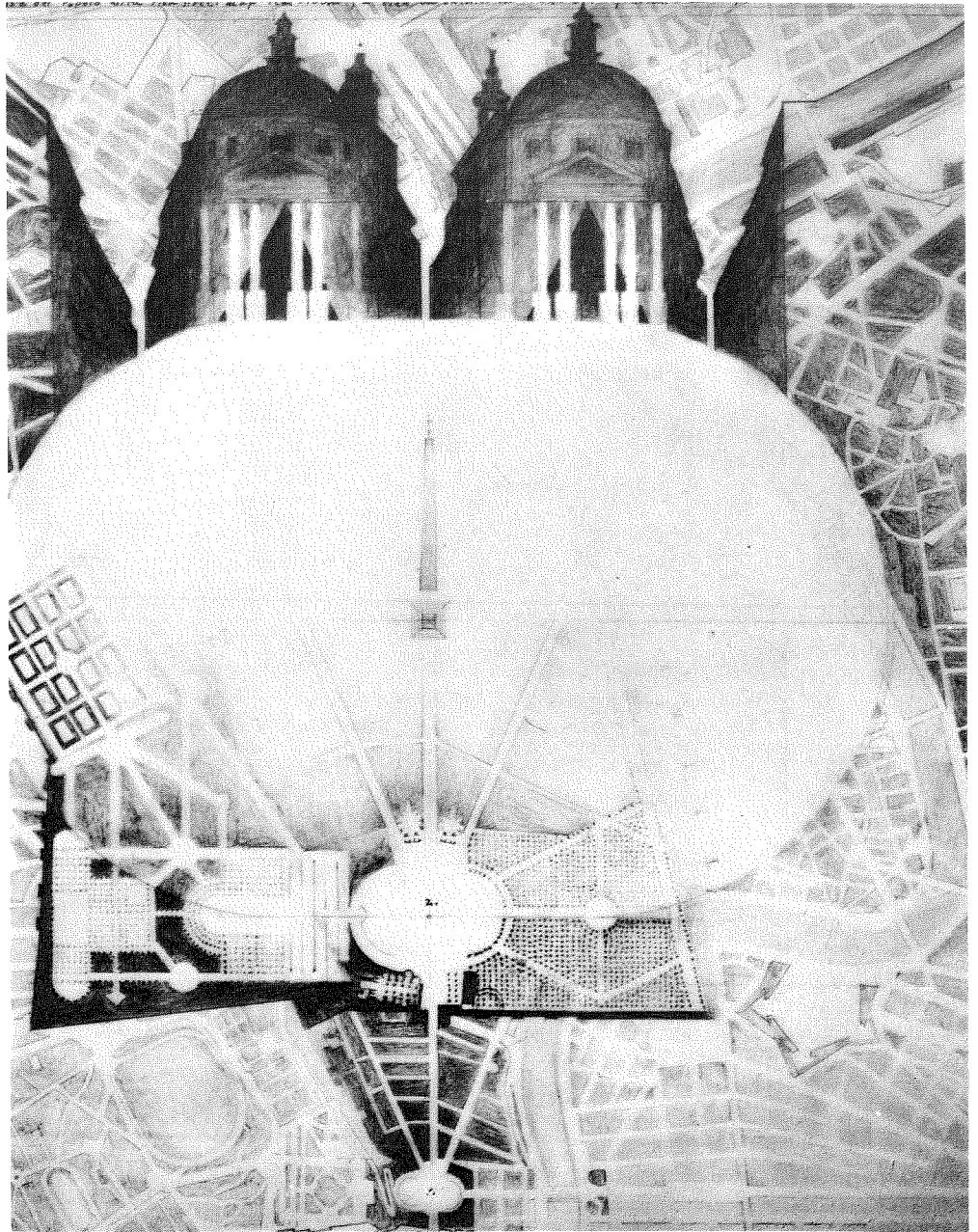
These four drawings are about clearings.



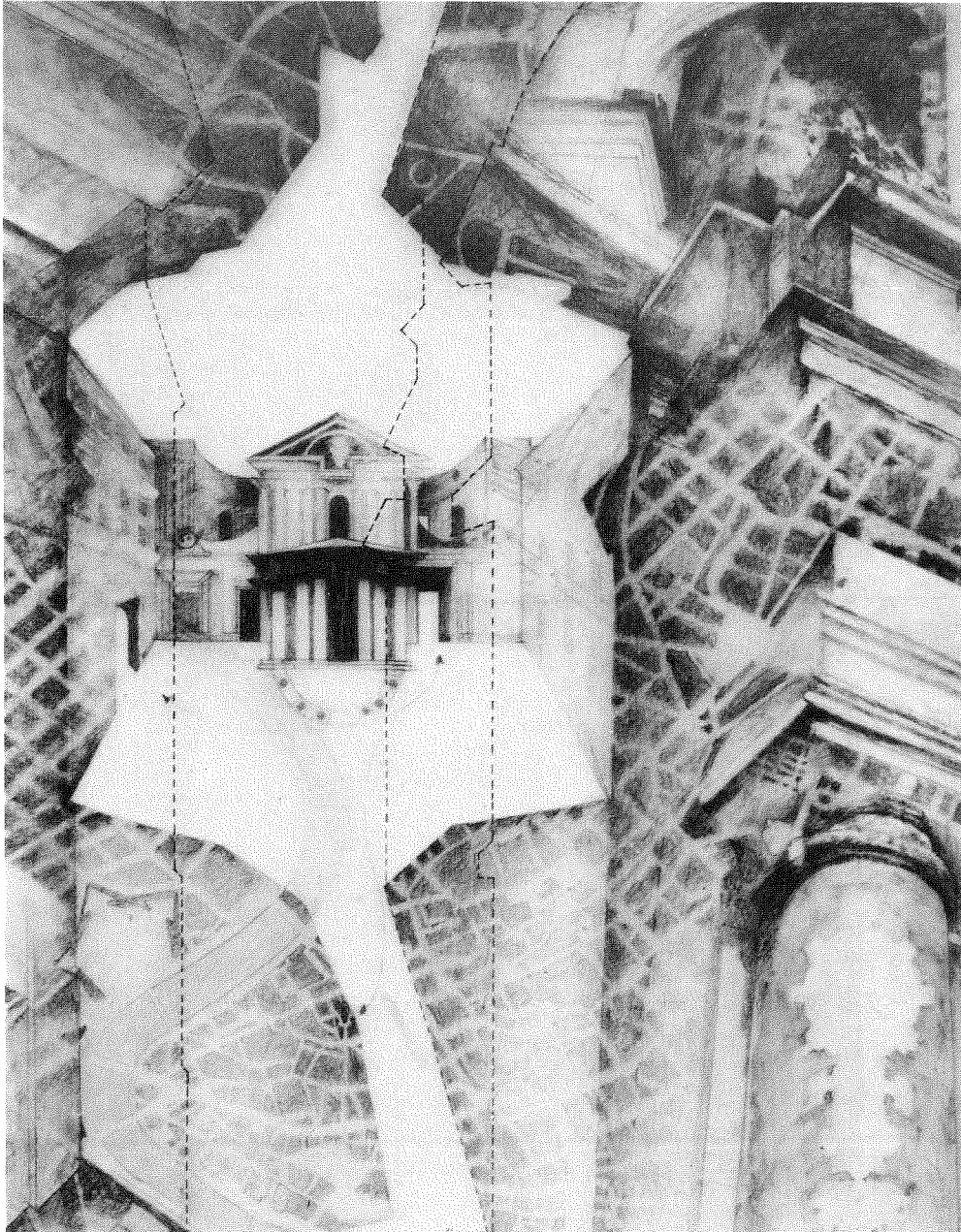
Piazza San Eustacio: A landscape is a place enclosed by buildings.



Piazza Farnese: Blue Mercury (flying from the Annibale Carracci interior ceiling above).



Piazza del Popolo was shaped to impress on visitors a blast of light and three vistas of Rome.



The Piazza of S. Maria della Pace was snatched from adjoining buildings for carriage traffic and a star-shaped sky illuming the facade and the viewer.

Milton Street: A Self-Portrait of Urban Change

William Carney, interviews
Sally Moore, photographs

We moved to Milton Street one hot summer morning, still surprised by our sudden realization that this “slum” was in fact a vital, closely scaled and textured neighborhood of brick Victorians overlooking downtown Cincinnati.

By first appearances, Milton Street is a neighborhood of blacks displaced by downtown urban renewal in the early 1960s. But there are also Appalachian families that the city’s industry attracted from nearby Kentucky during the 1950s. A few Irish and Italians remain from an earlier immigration. The buildings themselves were built by late nineteenth-century German immigrants who later “moved to the country.” Even the hillside’s original natural community is still represented by a few established maples and the hundreds of sumacs pioneering vacant lots and neglected backyards.

Now immigrants from the suburbs—mostly young, white, middle-class professionals—are again making changes on the street. They are attracted by the views of the city, the patina of the past, the challenge of urban homesteading, and the considerable money to be made in real estate.

We talked about this newest change on the front stoops and in the living rooms of neighbors who, we felt, represented the diversity of the street. Our work with tape recorder and camera was gentle, unstructured, and subjective. As



1 A New Downtown

2 Milton Street

3 Summer Sumac

4 Ronnie Hatcher

© 1976 William Carney and Sally Moore



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much as possible we wanted these to be self-portraits, registering the deeply personal connection of people to a place.

Like many American places, Milton Street is characterized by change. It is a place where human responses to change—pride, fear, greed, nostalgia, hope, resentment, denial—are as tangible a part of the environment as sandblasted brick, boarded windows, or raggedly lush sumac trees.

To understand and perhaps even to enhance such a place, it is first necessary to understand such attitudes. In doing so, we began to see how people make psychological use of a place, either projecting their emotions onto the environment or perceiving the environment as a metaphor for human concerns.

The interviews and photographs reproduced here are condensed from *What's Happening on Milton Street?*, a publication that we and the neighborhood children laid on every doorstep on the street as a way of stimulating more discussion. For a week, *Milton Street* was the homemade *Time-Life-Ebony* of the neighborhood. Using this material and a follow-up study as a basis, we now hope to publish a book-length account of the street.

Eating charcoal-broiled steaks on the fire escape (the only escape sometimes from Cincinnati heat), we spent many evenings discussing the social, economic, and

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psychological injustices involved in the gentrification of which we had become a part. We hope to widen this discussion by presenting these portraits in their present form.

Ronnie Hatcher
528 Milton Street

White people are moving in and buying buildings. And I don't think that's exactly right. People that are in the neighborhood, they can't stay. They ain't got the bread to fix the houses up.

I hear they got a bunch of long-range plans for the street. Build a park, you know, and make a pretty center. There'll be a gate up here and a gate down there that will be closed off, you know. It'll be a whole new thing. If it happens, what can I say, what can I do?

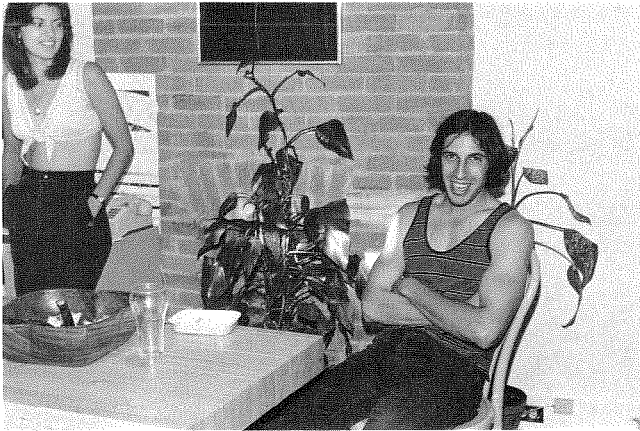
It's a drastic change. Like once last summer they were forming a block club. I listened to them rap. It was a whole lot of just blah-blah talk. Some of them maybe went to college two or three years, four, five or six years. I mean there are

certain people who can talk all day about nothing.

They were voting on a couple of things. And since they had the majority, it was, you know, "This is what we're going to do here." No regard for the people that stayed here, what they thought.

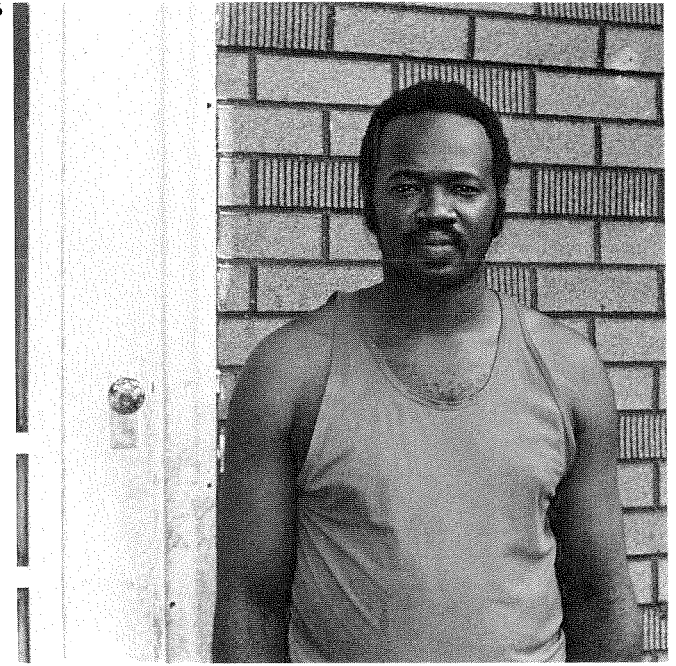
But you can't really stop the change. If I was in the majority, ok, the majority's cool. But you all know that green talks. It's going to be easier for them to get a loan or pick up some bread. Whereas the people that stay here, mostly black people, they just couldn't do it.

You make a home wherever you stay at. That's where you want to be. I wouldn't say the people up here are not interested. But you know, it's a white movement. I don't know these people. What are they saying? What's going on? Maybe I better get on out of here too while the getting's good.



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Phil Adelman
512 Milton Street

Every day I'd go out and look for a loan. It was rough, the first loan. The reason we got it wasn't that I convinced somebody that this was such a great area, or would be. But they're starting to get government pressure to equalize their loans from the suburbs to the city. I just happened to walk into a bank when they wanted to put an inner-city loan on their books.

You know, risky things are for people trying to make money. If we can do it here, we'll make a real name for ourselves and we can do it anywhere.

I think both blacks and whites should start realizing that if this neighborhood was 50 or 60 percent white, and if that happened all over the city and all over the suburbs, you know, this is the best thing. Because basically you want integration.

And one thing that's definitely happened, they've done a lot of work on their houses since we've

been here. And I don't care who owns the house as long as it looks good. I try to sell buildings to couples who are going to live in them. Owner-occupied is what gives stability to the neighborhood. You don't have all these tenants running around.

I'd get rid of all these sumac trees. I don't like those, maybe because they're everywhere. I think they're just like weeds. I'll get rid of a lot of the stuff here and put new ones in. The American way.

Feltus Dunn
449 Milton Street

There's so much I've seen changed. I seen the time when black people weren't allowed up here on this street after dark. Now you can go anywhere in the city you want to, and nobody says nothing to you. I think things are going to keep on changing for the better. I think as the world progresses, the prejudice is going to leave more than it was back in the olden time. I think people are going to learn to get along better.

We bought this place in 1974. This is the fourth place we've lived on Milton Street. It's hard to find someplace to rent with the children. We figured if we were going to live here, we should have a place of our own so we could do as we liked with nobody telling us when to move. And Milton Street was the best choice. You know, we talked to people. And they said the street was going to be improved. So we found a place and we bought here.

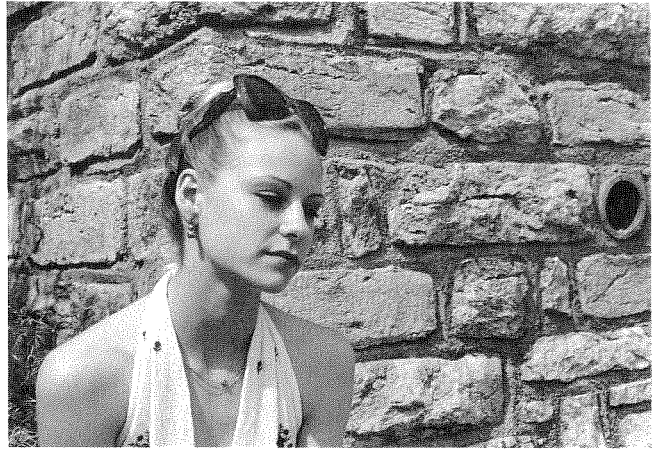
We're going to remodel the inside, fix it like we want it to be. We're going to tear all the walls out, knock the ceilings out. We're going to put aluminum siding on the outside. We're going to try to make it look nice. I do all the work myself. It's something I want, and I enjoy working on it.

I would say 10 years from now, you wouldn't hardly be able to afford to rent a place on this street. Course, if you want it bad enough, you'll pay the rent. If you don't, you can go somewhere else. You can go back down to the slums or whatever. But you've got a lot of blacks here and they'll stay here, unless someone would buy up all

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the houses and force them out. And you can't do that because it's against the law. You can live anywhere you want to now.

If somebody came up and wanted to buy the house and gave me a reasonable price for it, I'd sell it. I likes to live here, but I also likes money. If the price was right, I'd sell the house and move up.

Lois Adams
543 Milton Street

When I was very young, I was aware that this was a dirty neighborhood, trashy. Slum. I used to sort of wonder why people at church were always inviting me to their houses, but nobody ever came here. Of course, their houses were all out in the suburbs. People were afraid of this place.

I decided that I wanted to travel. I don't remember what I expected to find. I do remember that I had to find a home. I swore to myself that I was never coming back to Cincinnati willingly. Seems like everything I'd gotten from it

was negative. I grew to love the highway. Once after I'd run away, I came back here and my aunt took me in. And she let me know I had a place to take off my shoes and fill my stomach.

I took one little corner of the attic and fixed it up and wrote a lot about that. And I started to become aware of the changes here. At first I couldn't figure out why people were interested in this place. Then I started noticing the structures of the buildings, and I acquired my own love for it.

Knowing that other people were interested in it and doing something with it made me feel like I fit in. Man, did I ever have a sense of belonging. I started going to the meetings. And in the middle of one of the meetings I raised my hand and said I was available to do some renovation work.

I felt good about it because I was helping to preserve the structures I had come to love. Just the fact that something was being done was a good feeling. Because otherwise the neighborhood would just fall apart completely.

5 Phil Adelman and Cathy

6 Feltus Dunn

7 A Vacant Lot

8 Lois Adams



George A. Gover, Jr.
524 Milton Street

Anytime you're different you're going to be observed, especially in the black community. Most whites don't care that I live here. I pose no direct threat. I think the threat would be the difference between other blacks and myself. You know, is this better than what I am doing? If so, do I have to change?

And most people are afraid of change, because change means from something known to something unknown. What is the unknown? That is the threat, I feel.

Some blacks feel like they're being invaded. Because in fact they have made this street a part of their living room. Now you have moved directly into their living room. But if you get it together, it's going to be a beautiful neighborhood. People sharing ideas.

I've had people knock on my door and say, "Can I see your apartment?" Most of them say it's nice. Strange but nice, you know. They have a hard time dealing with

a dude who grows plants. This is not the thing for a black male to do. But then when they see you on the street, they speak. They say, "There's that guy who lives down the street. With the plants."

It could be very dangerous at the same time. If they view my plants as being of a certain gender, and also classify me that way, then I might be walking up the street one day and WOOF, you know. This is one of the chances that I take.

I love this fireplace. I guess it's the materialistic view of things. It's nice just having it. Opposed to somebody else who doesn't have a fireplace. I like looking at it. It's a beauty to me. I like it too much to burn wood in it. Then you have to clean it up, you know.

Al Ferrara
312 Milton Street

Beautiful. Beautiful. It was beautiful. Every morning people were out squirting the streets, sweeping their sidewalks, watering their plants. Oh, I mean it's so

different. Painting. I mean you just wouldn't believe it. Everyday there was a hose down there washing.

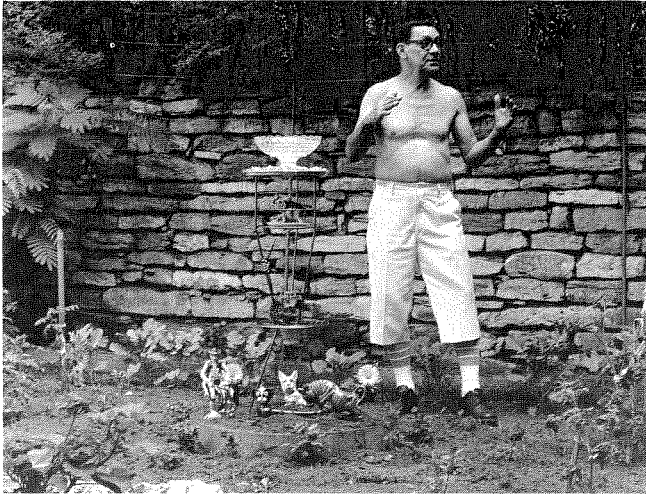
Then things got a little different, and the city used to come up and wash the street once in a while. And everyone would just throw their trash out and well, you just had to live with it.

My neighbor was ready to give up when he heard we were moving. He said, "Al, if you move from there, I don't know what I'll do." I said, "Art, I'm not going to move. I'll stay." He said, "Shall I do anything to my yard?" I said, "Fix it up." So he went on, and he's got a beautiful yard.

Why run? Why run? You live, let live. Enjoy life. There's nothing to worry about. I wouldn't feel at home anywhere else. After all, I was a youngster here.

Look at these. These are doing good. These are the eggplants. You see these little fellows, I put them out there the day before Good Friday. So I don't think it looks too bad. I work on it every day.

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Years ago there was nothing here. Then my Dad built this wall. I was a painter and worked at these construction places, and every day I would bring in about four or five bushels of topsoil and keep filling in. I think anybody who lives in the city, if they have any ground at all, I don't care if it's only two feet, put something in it you can eat. Instead of putting garbage on it. And you can't eat grass.

I abstract that wall every year. Paint one brick red, and one white, and one gray, and one green. And, oh, it just stands out so beautiful. And these geraniums I've just got to have all the time. My mother loved them. My mother said, "You got to have geraniums." I buy them at one particular stand the day before Good Friday. And I always have good luck.

Hurley Bonner
441 Milton Street

I just keep my mouth shut. I don't have nothing to do with nobody's business. I mind my own, cause I

know the police is not going to protect you. I don't have no protection. I'm an old man. I'm 71 years old. I can't get around here on this hill, can't walk up and down that hill. So I come out here and sit. The conditions which we're living under now is gone beyond man's control.

I've been here now for 15 years. It's changed here, changed everywhere. And it's going to get worse. It seems like Milton Street is the world, it's just like any other street. It's something you have to live with. I can't move. I don't know where I'd look for a better place. There ain't nothing to be found. Thieves, liars, murderers, they got enough transportation they can go anywhere they want.

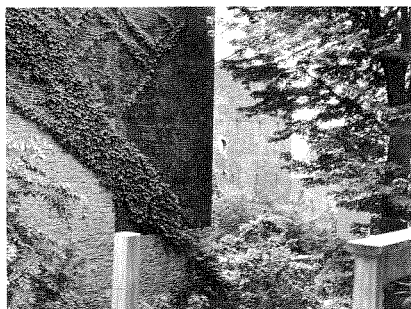
I don't want to be no part of it, this confusion and hatred and malice and the race prejudice. I want what Christ said he was going to give us. Go home and look in your Bible and read Revelations, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth. I saw the holy city of Jerusalem coming down from God."

9 George A. Gover, Jr.

10 Al Ferrara

11 Hurley Bonner

12



Essie Owensby
334 Milton Street

Lord, I'll stay here till everybody in the house is grown. I was moving so much because I was having kids. One place had four rooms. Then I had a kid. So I moved up to 508. It had six rooms. Then I moved out of there because the rats got in. Then we moved across to 501, and the man didn't want no kids in there. After we moved out, they tore the building down.

Then I moved in there at 417. And I don't know why we moved out of there. Oh, the front steps to the door were all broke. We almost had to jump out of the door. And it's torn down now. At 433, the landlord wouldn't do nothing for the house. The toilet got stopped up. So we called the board of health on him. And the board of health said we'd have to move out of there.

We were out at Winton Terrace for a year. But it was too far out. Four kids and myself all had to catch the bus every morning.



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I would like very much for this to be my last move. This is a beautiful building from the outside, you know.

The view is pretty overlooking the city. But I don't want them to come in and take my house, where I'm living at now, just for a view. I would like to live here the rest of my life.

I love that tree. Don't bother my tree. That's the best thing here. They say, "Where you living?" I say, "I live up there on Milton Street with the tree hanging out of the yard." Come round here invading us out of our house and we'll take our tree with us.

12 Trees in a Vacant Lot

13 Essie Owensby

14 Milton Street

Space into Place: Richard Fleischner

Katy Kline

Richard Fleischner is a well-known contemporary sculptor of large, environmental projects severe in their geometries and generous in their implications. From the very beginning his work has been grounded in the notion of Place. An early, pivotal piece involved an actual diner, peopled with life-size plaster figures and installed in a bucolic, rural field. Subsequent, small, imaginary, cast-metal landscapes evoked a primordial loneliness reminiscent of Giacometti's poetic environments. Fleischner's work gradually evolved from piece to place as it outgrew the dimensions of discrete objects to claim sites whose given elements became elements of the art.

A line of hay bales, for example, delineated the axis of a long field; other modular hay blocks described room-sized rectangles and mazes. Fleischner laid out huge, concentric rings of sod and mazes of chain-link fencing and sculpted long corridors through fields of tall grass. He has consistently based his approach on a geometry derived from the specifics of the site and put to the service of an unaggressive, but persuasive, affirmation of human experience.

Fleischner was interviewed for *Places* in his Providence studio in May and June of 1983; the freewheeling conversations were propitiously launched with the discovery that the interviewer's leading question duplicated word for word the projected title of a

book the artist is determined to write: "What Makes a Space a Place?"

He has traveled extensively and thoughtfully; the interviews retraced his path through both memory and geography to single out spots invested with singular significance. These places encompass both the celebrated and prepossessing, as well as the anonymous, eccentric, mundane, and even positively malignant. As his criteria for Place emerged in the discussions, his own artistic process for drawing forth and enhancing the quality of Place became clear.

Fleischner's disarmingly simple and humane prerequisites for Place may surprise those who associate his work primarily with a severe, formal elegance and tautness of design. He argues, it will be seen, as passionately for "fit" as for "form," for how we feel in a space as much as for the strength of its independent conceptual order.

When I think of Places, as distinct from spaces, that I have been in, those that have had the biggest impact on me are all designed in terms of the function that goes on in them. The process by which we are comfortable or not within a space, and whether or not it is appropriate to what we want to do there, is what determines for me whether it is a Place or not.

The quality of experience is determined by the degree to which

the Placemaker keeps his hands on the process of elaborating an environment, continuing to pay attention to issues of appropriateness, intimacy, user-scale, and physicality, as well as the unique quirks that provide every Place its personality.

In describing special sites, Fleischner refers frequently to "the gestures of the place that are always the most important thing for me to establish. I really feel that those basic gestures which are the first to go in and the last to remain are the gestures of the space. You can tell so much by that little bit." For Fleischner a careful reading of the gestures implicit in a space is critical to establishing an appropriate organization that will not become confused or diluted through gratuitous decoration.

To convey the substance and flavor of the somewhat discursive conversations, it might be useful to borrow the artist's method. The "gesture" of the interviews, then, could be located in the phrase "critical distance," which cropped up early and recurred frequently to describe the key determinant in Fleischner's definition of Place. The term carries several layers of significance and implication. It first surfaced in a discussion of one of the artist's preferred Places, a baseball diamond.

Critical distances. It's the distance from the pitcher's mound to home plate, the whole

notion of the double play. It's the time it takes to cover the distance—for a pitcher to throw the ball home and for a runner to go from first to second. It's that slight shift in time, the difference of a second or two, that determines whether the runner is safe or out. That is a critical distance, so the size of the field is a critical distance.

He also cited the example of the fields surrounding New England farms, which were established by means of a network of beautiful stone walls. "The space of the field is determined by how reasonable it was to carry stone. When you couldn't carry it any further, that's where you started to build the wall."

Fleischner admires these two types of organization not merely for their compelling and seductive geometry, but for the fact that the rules for both derived from specific human responses and physical involvement as much or more than from abstract, formal determinants. The term critical distance also referred to Fleischner's conviction that the definers and creators of Place cannot distance themselves from the process of building. Too often the offensive placelessness of the contemporary environment has resulted from the maker's removal from the specific context and a willful inattention to the idiosyncrasies that color and shape a Place.

So that if you walk into some

meadow that's in the middle of the woods, and you are carrying your picnic and you are with somebody you want to have a private picnic with, and it's a great day, then all of a sudden you come out, and here is this meadow that is a nice size, and you have your picnic there and you pack it up afterward, after you have spent a lot of time there and you go away—that's a Place. The whole experience of how you came there, the whole change of what happened in terms of light, being able to feel the sun after not feeling it being in the woods—those sensations are part of what would make that a Place.

In Fleischner's view, then, a space becomes a Place to the degree that it takes into account the quality of human experience occurring within its physical and psychological parameters. A Place is not necessarily gracious or accommodating; it can even transcend inadequate and unhealthy conditions, like the stonecutting factory in Bedford, Indiana, where Fleischner has the limestone blocks of his sculpture cut.

It was cold, damp, the dust was terrible for your breathing, but it was very much of a Place. It was beautiful; the relationship of all the people that worked within it to each other was incredible. The way that that place functioned was art. It was theater. It was dance. It was everything. You go from that into an office somewhere, and the temperature

is considerate, it's warm enough, but the light can be depressing, let's say all fluorescent lights, the air is thin, the windows don't open, there is something that is not healthy. And the relationship of the people in there to each other is very, very, different. It is not intimate.

A space that neglects or ignores these imperatives, which does not promote an intimacy of human exchange with or within it, no matter how thoughtfully conceived or elegantly realized, fails to achieve Place. Not simply neutral, it becomes a bad place.

Government Center in Boston would give anybody a *horror vacui*, which is Latin for a fear of the empty, because here is this enormous open area and it is *deadly*. St. Mark's Square in Venice, on the other hand, is much more open than Government Center. But in St. Mark's it is the detailing of what happens on the sides, it's the scaling down of how the light affects things, it's the quality of the sounds that are around, it has to do with the temperature, it has to do with the pigeons that are in it, it has to do with how it's occupied, and how it's occupied is a result of axial lines, sight lines.

A big space becomes defined down into a Place because for one reason or another we locate specific points—it could be a bench or whatever—that refer to the larger axes, to a larger

expanse. The viewer always is part of something that is either getting bigger or smaller. There are a series of destinations. In Government Center there are no cul-de-sacs where it makes sense to gather, so you are always potentially in somebody's way. Those are things that we are sensitive to as people. One is not apt to settle down in the middle of the street.

Fleischner frequently singles out a straightforward, directness of gesture and a lack of self-consciousness as additional critical attitudes that can elevate a space to the stature of Place.

Once when I was in Egypt in 1972 this cab driver who took us every day to dig for fossils was also the mayor of a little community. So he had a meeting house, and it was a long, narrow building with a bench on each side, and you came in at one end and on either side was a bench, and the building was not any wider than from here to there. You came in this door, it had a dirt floor, simple wooden benches along each wall, the full length of it, white-washed walls. At the end the wall went up and pitched with this diamond window in the end. And when you got yourself up off your knees you sat down on either of the benches where you had tea. And the distance from wall to wall was incredible because it was just far enough apart so there was nothing ill at ease about being too tight, and yet it

was this long space, people had to sort of lean forward. It was built for the specific number of people that had to use it, for nothing I am sure. The only source of light was the open doors and the window at the other end. It was incredible. It was one of the most special Places I'd ever been in. There was nothing self-conscious about that meeting house when they did it. It was direct and clean and to the point.

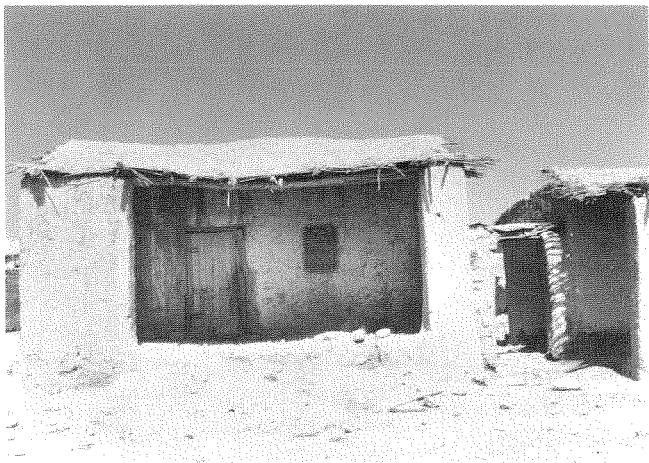
He delights in the impact of the comparison between the spartan facade of a dwelling in a Jordanian refugee camp and the elaborate pretensions of a Providence driveway and marquee. Their juxtaposition epitomizes the critical distance that separates a home from a house, a place that *is* compromised by extraneous, metaphorical trappings.

The things that show up in this comparison represent more than anything else I can think of the plusses and minusses, or the pros and the cons, of what I care about, and carry them even to an extreme. The house in Providence is silly; it is almost a caricature of everything you consider *nouveau riche*. It's an applied style, rather than the form actually being at one with whatever it is that had determined it. It is superficiality as opposed to integrity. Nobody using the new materials that are available today has shown the inventiveness maintaining the integrity of the material to the

extent that whoever made that refugee house did in determining how that material was used. When they did those columns out front to support the roof to protect it from the sun, their physical mass was related not only to the material but to the size and scale of whoever made it, so that it is very, very intimate. What I loved about that place and about that house was, on the one hand, the intimacy of each of those elements—I mean they were incredibly personal, but not in an embarrassing way. It wasn't like going through somebody's underwear drawer and thinking, "Oh, I shouldn't be looking here." It was very, very intimate, and it was very sincere. And the other image, of the house in Providence, is almost funny, because it's totally removed. So that if you take your notion of critical distance and apply it not in terms of dimensions but in terms of our physical interaction with that which we are building, whoever designed that Providence house was very far away. There was no plasticity, there was no dialogue between the materials and whoever it was that did it.

The dangers of retreating from involvement rather than plunging directly into the physicality or plasticity of the design dialogue are revealed by Fleischner's pleasure in an anecdote involving one of Gaudi's studio assistants. (Though his austere purism would at first

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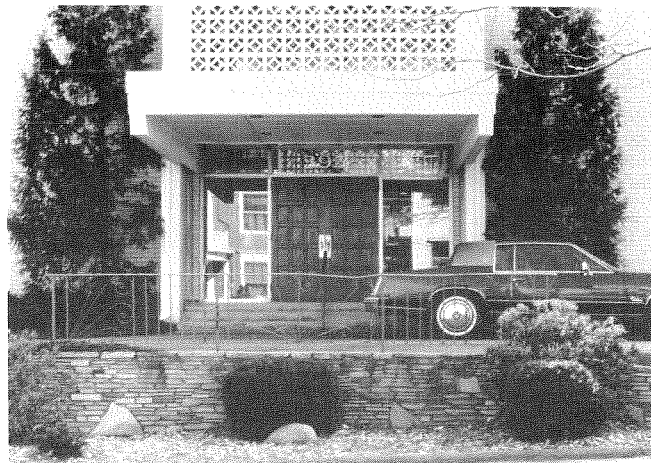


appear to be at odds with this Spanish master of extravagant embellishment, Fleischner admires the conviction and integrity of Gaudi's elaborate decoration.)

One of Gaudi's assistants had been spending more and more time thinking only, getting more and more cerebral. So Gaudi sent him for a time to work basically as a laborer for the stone masons working on a church. He later realized two things; one, how much he could lift, how high he could lift it, what the motion was, and how that movement, that doing, affected the way he walked and what he saw, where his eyes went within the church.

Fleischner's reverence for the unintentional and unaffected might appear to present a dilemma for an artist whose approach to problem-solving is so deliberate and whose geometry is apparently so rigorous and reasoned. Yet, the geometry that he savors in memorable Places and aims for in the creation of his own is never an end in itself, but is rather a means toward providing an appropriate context for a set of feelings. Geometry's precise

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delineations, which take their source perhaps from the rigid orthogonals of his urban childhood, betray the mind of man imposing his will on the irregularities of nature. In Fleischner's hand they are put to the establishment of a sympathetic scale and system of internal relationships. Fleischner's geometries do not exist as disembodied abstractions, but rather organize and bring to light the special eccentricities of a space, drawing forth and quietly illuminating its potentiality. His lines, planes, points, edges, angles, and axes derive not from his head, but from an extension of his personal and very physical interaction with the space. All his projects have involved plotting by plodding and acting out the measurements and arrangements. From the earliest interventions in the open fields, he has paced, reacted, sensed, visualized, and actually experienced rather than set down any *a priori* notion on paper.

Fleischner made, for example, numerous visits to a wooded grove adjacent to a federal building in suburban Baltimore and explored its original conditions before

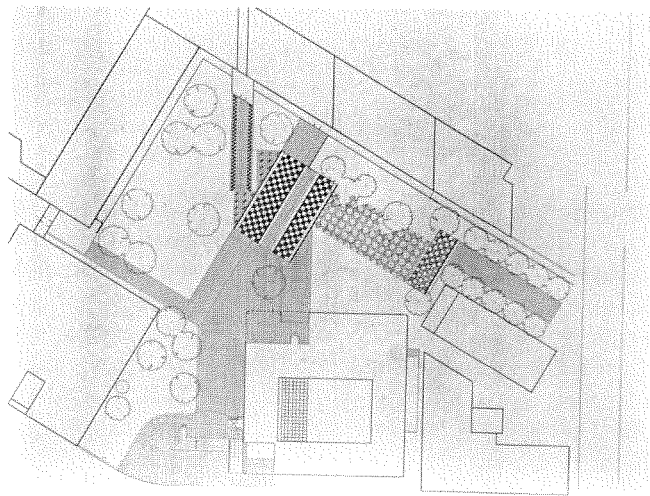
deriving the nature, number, and distribution of the steel and granite elements which he then set on the forest floor. This Baltimore Project (1978–1980) placed vertical planes (cor-ten steel column walls and a door jamb), horizontal planes (slab table, low bench, and threshold bar), and both actual and implied cubes along bisecting axes according to a plan that can be understood by the viewer only after recapitulating the artist's own process of exploration.

I went down to Baltimore easily 30 times before I really knew what I was doing. After, let's say, six visits down there, several days each visit, I began to see certain things and pick out certain axes through the woods, and defined spaces and places within it. This process—how specifically you look—you can do it with a square of the sidewalk; you can begin to isolate situations if you look. I really only wanted to deal with very simple horizontal and vertical planes that directed you in lineal, axial situations. That is very much the way a room would also work. It is sort of an

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abstraction of that. If you just take a street, what was a reasonable size for somebody's house is what determined the foundation. That was the first specific area or amount of space; then you needed so much room between it and something else before the next one started. Those are dimensions that we have become very accustomed to and acquainted with. So I am sure when I go into a situation, whether it is in the woods or out of the woods and begin to lay out elements, I am very influenced by those distances.

Fleischner has six major public projects currently underway: a courtyard in the new Dallas Museum, a grassy plaza at a subway station near Temple University in Philadelphia, a second rapid transit station "garden" in Cambridge, a series of modular blocks around a soccer park in Jerusalem, another set of modular geometries on the campus of the University of California at La Jolla, and a sequence of interlocked exterior courtyard spaces at MIT. Unlike his earlier projects, which were conceived and born in the

studio or on the site with a minimum of midwives in attendance, the current projects, most in the works for nearly three years, have all involved a phalanx of architects; landscape architects; traffic, planning, and engineering consultants; bureaucrats; and miscellaneous interested authorities.

His strategies for combating the distancing between original notion and attenuated process have depended, as we have seen, on a physical interaction with the space that precedes and supersedes any paper plan-making, as well as a close involvement with the actual builders and fabricators. In a recent competition for a major public commission, Fleischner proposed another original means of maintaining an intensity of artistic energy. Rather than relying on a single artist to bear the entire logistical and strategic burden, he proposed selecting other artists of compatible though individual and varied vision, to whom he would assign parts of the larger whole. "One person can only spread so thin. In other words, you have this concentrated energy and you

1 Jordanian Refugee House
(Photograph by the artist)

2 The Providence House: Driveway and Marquee
(Photograph by the artist)

3 The Baltimore Project, 1980
(Photograph by Joel Breger)

4 Site Plan: MIT Project, 1982
(Drawing by the artist)

contain it in this glass and then you spill it out on the floor; it really will dissipate.” The concept of involving many makers, however, challenged professional norms, and he was not awarded the commission.

The Dallas, La Jolla, and MIT Projects present a spectrum of the artist’s approaches to the problem of making an individual statement within existing architectural and natural conditions. Both Dallas and La Jolla involve the strategic placement of large, modular-block pieces to define axes, edges, and zones, in the tradition of the earlier Baltimore project’s geometric elements. At MIT, on the other hand, the signals of the artist’s intervention will be less immediately visible.

At the Dallas Museum, designed by Edward Larrabee Barnes, the problem was to take one of a series of inner courtyards and make it into a Place from its original definition as a passing-through, transitory space. Fleischner at first intervened nearly anonymously, making changes only in grade and planting patterns and integrating existing axes so tightly that his presence would hardly have been discerned. In the final scheme, however, he asserts his hand by mimicking one of the entrances to the space, setting a monumental, gate-like, modular-stone piece directly opposite.

At La Jolla the blocks of dimensioned stone assume an even greater significance. (These large

blocks, which the artist first worked out full-scale in particle board in the studio, are curiously reminiscent of the children’s classic educational Froebel blocks that won notoriety in the nursery of Frank Lloyd Wright. While their internal relationships are all carefully and exactly proportioned, their overall dimensions are not at all standardized, but rather were fixed upon by the artist entirely intuitively.)

In deliberate juxtaposition to a rolling, green, two-and-one-half acre site, Fleischner has placed a series of tall, geometric granite groups. Two sets are positioned in alignment with the undergraduate library, while a third planar group derived from Picasso’s *Bathers* reiterates the line of a row of eucalyptus trees.

Then there are some peripheral elements scattered around. And in the center of the whole space is going to be an imposed solid plane which is not level, but which is flat, so it rolls with the land. It doesn’t undulate, it’s tilted. So this plane is almost like a rectilinear footprint that is pressed into the same grass as everything else. And that came from the Bedouin I saw in Israel who had swept out an area in an orchard and then very gently put in a plane so that he would have a flat place for his tent. It had a lot to do with that. That functions as a central place within this whole project.

The geometries at MIT derive from

an architectural context rather than a natural one and are not embodied in freestanding sculptural pieces. The artist’s actions will not be perceived from a distance but instead gradually sensed with the actual experience of the place.

In Japanese thought the term “Ma” accords essence and meaning to the “space between.” At MIT, Fleischner’s attention focuses on the irregular, L-shaped space between two major buildings, Mitchell/Giurgola’s Whitaker Medical Complex and I.M. Pei’s Arts and Media Technology Facility. By drawing forth the potential personality of this impersonal mid-ground and organizing its competing axes and entrances, Fleischner creates a Place to be, rather than one simply to pass through.

As in the Baltimore Project, Fleischner made numerous site visits to begin to sense the conditions of the space, pacing out measurements, stringing up perimeters, and shifting garbage cans to establish critical distances. To create territories within the larger space the artist devised a sequence of differently scaled and patterned geometric inlays of granite pavers. These function either as thresholds to orchestrate arrival and departure or as interior “rugs” to establish new situations. Though the flat schematics of these geometric swatches have historic references—particularly a dramatic black and white mosaic from Ostia

Antica—Fleischner’s intentions are not decorative.

His means are subtle; whereas in Baltimore the granite entry slab was clearly felt as a potent interruption in the soft forest floor, the MIT inlays will flow smoothly and be experienced more quietly. The sequence of inlays sets up a stately cadence that culminates in a center as significant as the inclined plane at La Jolla. This center is a broad expanse of stairs that divides the original, neutral terrain into two distinct levels of exterior atrium: a sculpture court below and a grassy green above.

At MIT you have a structured space that’s even, to a certain extent, flowing. It’s contained, its outermost perimeters are the building planes which begin to establish a certain geometry within themselves. The distances between elements, which are very important to me, ended up best being defined by points, lines, and edges. Those different inlays, the changes of material, become the means to set up a particular scale—going back to that notion of what feels good. So that if we set up a plane within a plane within a plane, without changing any of the elevations of that plane, or want to make a distinction between different parts within that whole, then that geometry, in conjunction with the change in material, ends up working real well for me.

Geometry versus the lack of

geometry in some situations becomes a really important juxtaposition. At MIT there is a lot of grass and then the granite, and within that the dimensioned versus the looser stone. For example, you take a tree and that tree is in relationship to, let’s say, geometric inlay. They really do something to each other that, if I were not using that geometry in my working context, would become totally lost because it is so subtle.

Fleischner is serious, single-minded and far from sanguine in assessing the quality of the contemporary environment. He was unable to come up with a single example of a good contemporary Place to pit against the plethora of bad or nondescript environments that fail their moral obligation to enhance human experience.

It is the loss of significant experience that Fleischner mourns and works to counteract in his own environments. He deplores the indifferent lack of attention brought to bear by the “fast food mentalities” on questions of human scale, properties of materials, workmanship, and the eccentricities of every site. Fleischner sees beyond the visual placelessness of the contemporary scene to its dispiriting implications for a humanity searching for moments of value and meaning. He finds it ironic that many of his models for successful Places evolved unintentionally (“a slap in the face to what I’m doing”) and that his

task has become to emulate consciously unselfconsciousness.

In the Places he admires, as well as in his own process, Fleischner acknowledges several different continua: the continuum of creative effort from the generative impulse through to its consistent and energy-filled execution; the continuum of materials from their origins to their final incorporation; and the continuum of the Place springing from the very nature of its original conditions. In making a Place he channels each of these continua toward human use, wrestling with the need to liberate experience through the apparent contradiction of defining actual physical conditions. By setting up connections and reverberations he deepens the initial experience of the site, whether natural or built. As one critic has written of his Baltimore project: “The initial experience of the natural effect is simultaneously doubled through the artist’s sensitive reading of context and place.”

Fleischner’s claim that he wants to create Places that feel good is disarming and somewhat misleading in its transparent simplicity. He aspires to a confirmation or affirmation of human dignity and a sensing of larger connections. His Places do feel good, but reverberate far more profoundly than a pleasurable sensory tingle.

Inflected Landscapes

Marc Treib



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Even the architects most committed to modernist imagery have admired the quality of anonymous folk architecture. Though their evaluation might have been based primarily on building shape or the appropriateness of materials and construction technology, the relation of folk buildings or villages to their sites rarely failed to elicit appreciation. Yet now, late in the current century, the isolated structure which stands in contrast to its landscape backdrop, with only the comfort of some transitional planting, represents the most common approach to siting the detached building. Were we to reconsider the range of possible building/topography relationships, we might realize that the object, in contrast to the landscape, is but one of three categories. The other two, often more harmonious, are the *merger* of building to site and/or the *inflected* landscape.

In spite of extended discussion of the “order of nature,” that order, at least in visual terms, is difficult to apprehend. The ordinary person, for example, finds little apparent pattern in the depth of the forest. The trees seem irregularly disposed; the mix of plant species belies no grand plan. From a vantage point sufficiently distant from the forest floor, however—high above in an aerial view or one afforded by a neighboring hill—an indisputable sense of order in the landscape emerges. Trees are seen to grow primarily in the narrow valleys or ravines where the excess runoff of the rains or underground seepage

provides more reliable sources of water. Certain species of trees thrive in these conditions, perhaps growing on just one side of the hill where the sun, wind, and moisture are most favorable to existence. Smaller plants occupy analogously appropriate locations on the land, deferring to the predominance of the trees and directed by other environmental factors. An order to the natural environment does, indeed, exist; but it is an order that may be understood better in conceptual, rather than perceptual, and biological, rather than visual, terms. Only with sufficient distance, or, conversely, with the extreme closeup of the microscope, is scrutiny rewarded with comprehension.

Industrial society tends to favor strong statements upon the face of the land whether by intention or benign lack of consideration. Because the sense of order is most difficult to perceive near the human scale, those making places have devised effective strategies for making order manifest. One approach dismisses noncontributing elements, fashioning gardens or sacred spaces by *omission*. The dry gardens of Japan, produced under the influence of Zen Buddhism within the Shinto religious tradition, evoke presence by actions such as clearing a plane within a forest, leveling a plane of territory, or arranging rocks as the subject within this contrived void. By reducing the garden elements to rock, gravel, and a few bits of moss, a garden

1 Ryōan-ji. Kyoto, Japan.

A classic example of the garden of omission: natural material within a framed void. (Photograph by Marc Treib, 1978)

2 Vaux-le-Vicomte. France.

Andre le Nôtre, c. 1660.
The garden of restatement: all elements refer to and augment the presence of the axis. (Photograph by Marc Treib, 1975)



such as Ryoan-ji in Kyoto eliminates extraneous distraction and focuses attention internally.

Restatement occupies a second category: the repetition of related forms and/or their alignments within an explicit ordering system, designed so that each fragment restates and contributes to the power of the whole. The line and the geometric figure are vehicles commonly employed to render this repetition apparent. The French formal garden, perfected in the seventeenth century by landscape architect Andre le Nôtre, is the principal representative of the type. The axis provides the overriding structure to which each element is referred, analogous to the bass line of the three-part, baroque musical composition. At the estate of Vaux le Vicomte, le Nôtre extended the primary axis from the oval salon of the château beyond the horizon. The geometrically rendered plant materials, clipped in a severe topiary nearest the château, reinforce the architectonic concept of the linear order. The treatment of the landscape becomes less mannered and more naturalistic as one moves away from the central

line and eventually dissolves into the surrounding woods.

In both instances the notion of garden implicitly constrains the relationship of the building to the landscape. At Ryoan-ji the garden exists only to be viewed: a trapped field of gravel and lithic composition, encircled by an oiled earthen wall. The space remains untrampled seen only from the veranda, a platform for meditation. At Vaux le Vicomte the garden and château are more firmly integrated, disposed along a single axis that weds natural to constructed elements. In both examples, however, the building stands free on its site, perceived as a discrete object.

In the past architects, builders, and landscape gardeners have also attempted to create picturesque or naturalistic landscapes and even naturalistic buildings. Gardens intended to replicate nature are more easily realized and are found in both the East and the West. The intention of merging structure with landscape, on the other hand, has rarely been achieved in an ideal form. Works such as Frank Lloyd

Wright's Kaufmann residence, "Fallingwater," or the Parc Guell by Antonio Gaudi probably interest us precisely because of their inability to merge completely with the natural contour—as if the very imperfection of the merger forms the basis of its success in terms of perceived order.

It is doubtful that a natural order could be truly replicated by architectural means. The act of construction, as the creation of places for habitation, work, worship, or pleasure, distinguishes these places from the preexisting order almost by definition. "Fallingwater," in spite of the prevalent myth, is hardly coincident with the landscape. The white, horizontal planes of the composition easily distinguish the house from the tone and form of the surrounding woods. As a balanced assembly the central fireplace-mass counters the sweep of the horizontal terrace-planes, locking the composition into equilibrium. Interestingly, these vertical masses, perpendicular to the ground, are constructed of field stone as if to diminish the disparity between intention and realization.



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3 "Fallingwater." Bear Run, Pennsylvania.

Frank Lloyd Wright, 1938.

While striving for merger with its landscape, the structure is simultaneously distinguished from it.

(Photograph courtesy of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy)

4 Parc Guell. Barcelona, Spain.

Antonio Gaudi, 1914.

The naturalistic forms and materials of the retaining wall soften the regularity of the order but cannot hide it.

(Photograph by Marc Treib, 1967)

5 "Double Negative." Nevada.

Michael Heizer, 1969–1970.

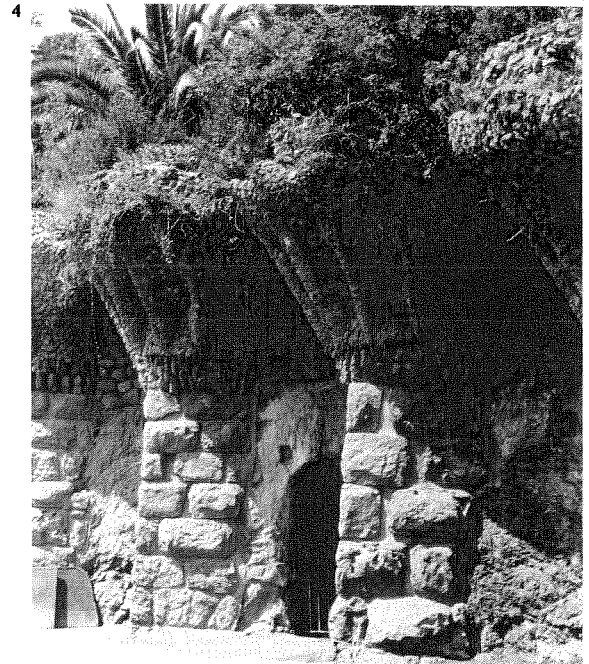
The sculpture is earth reformed.

(Photograph courtesy of Xavier Fourcade, Inc.)

6 Cliff Palace. Mesa Verde, Colorado.

Anasazi culture, eleventh to thirteenth centuries. The limits of the cave structure the ordering of the individual cells.

(Photograph by Marc Treib, 1981)



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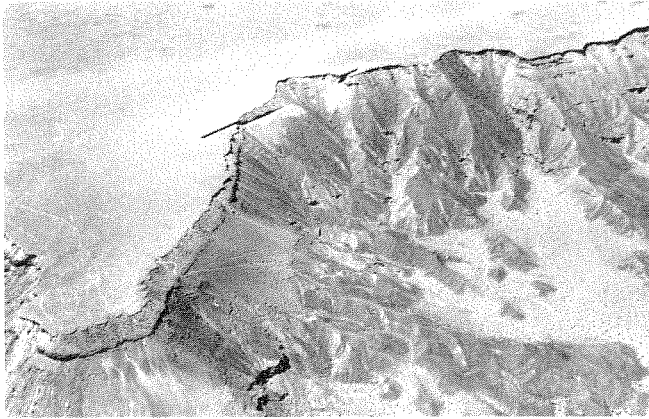
The composition, thus, deals with architectonic necessity—the selection of building materials with the intention of joining the house to the site.

A second example, the Parc Guell in Barcelona, was conceived as the first phase of a housing estate that was never completed. Built to designs by Antonio Gaudi and constructed by 1914, the meandering features of the park grow from the topography and native vegetation and would never be mistaken for natural surroundings. Even the most rustic of the park's constructions, the stone retaining-wall with its crude caryatids, must be seen as an inflection of the land rather than a recreation of what had previously been present. Indeed its power—aside from its formal or chromatic beauty—lies in this *departure* from nature. Inflected landscapes such as this occupy that middle zone between the natural and the made, creating a state of soft tension that evokes a perceptual ambiguity between the identities of both the natural and the constructed. Contributing to this ambiguity, the exact nature of their

interrelationship seems to shift and change under differing environmental or temporal conditions.

A gradient of possible construction/natural site relationships might situate *merger* or coincidence (at least as an aspiration) at one end, and *distinction* at the opposite. Certain heroic modernist structures such as Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye (1929) are examples of the latter category, although even in this striking instance the distinction of building from site is not absolute. The roof garden, the siting of the house, and even the rigid block geometry of the villa reflect on the landscape through contrast and contradiction. Definition derives from opposition: what the structure is not. Merger, on the other hand, is most clearly represented by the picturesque garden type, with the contrived park blended into the wooded surrounds. Constructed caves or follies serve as architectural examples in this instance, as do the more contemporary "bermed" or buried energy-concerned structures. Somewhere between the two extremes, though closer to merger, lies the landscape

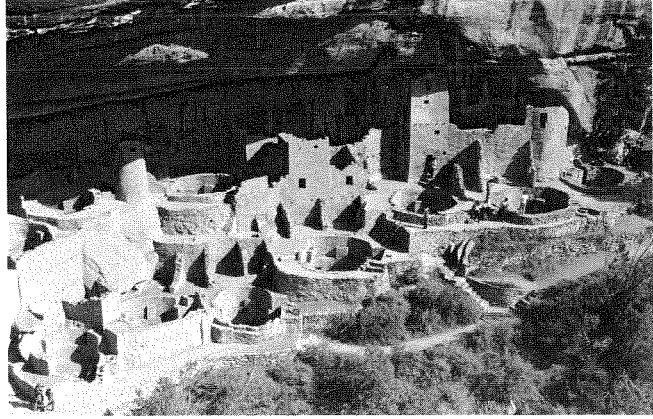
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of inflection: places that retain in part the natural order or material while articulating an order distinct from the natural form of the land, a distinction sufficient to generate a sense of entity.

In terms of pure landscape, works by sculptors such as Robert Smithson or Michael Heizer serve as excellent examples of this last category. In Smithson's "Spiral Jetty" (1970) the eloquent construction of natural materials into the controlled form of the spiral demarks a place that simultaneously occupies both zones of perception. The materials are native, common to the place, unworked; the order suggests metaphysical intention by the artist. Heizer's "Double Negative" (1967), formed of the earth it serves to articulate, consists of a simple cut into the surface of the mesa that aligns with a second scraped channel on the opposite slope. The gesture is simple albeit powerful; a gesture whose reductive simplicity contrasts obviously with the rugged and irregular edge of the mesa and the strata of the earth that comprise it. In both works the act of ordering, rather than the

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reforming and finishing of those materials employed, is basic to the making of the place.

Released from the burdens of function these earth sculptures are intended to be approached as art, and the ritual for their perception is preordained. Functional places for human habitation are another matter, though as strictly formal compositions both share common properties. The architecture of the Anasazi, built mostly from the ninth to twelfth centuries in the Four Corners area, closely parallels the mood of the earthwork sculptures. For the cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde the cave itself provided the superstructure, the frame into which each piece of the village was fit, each part adjusted to the whole. In this example, too, the construction material is the same as the mesa; but in the act of piling, chinking, and plastering the builders have fashioned regularly shaped dwellings within the irregular confines of the cave. At Pueblo Bonito in Chaco Canyon the ordering device is the formally conceived plan. The arc of the layout is developed in three major stages over time; only in its mature

phase does it complete the D-shaped composition of multistory apartments and round subterranean *kivas* that loosely face south.

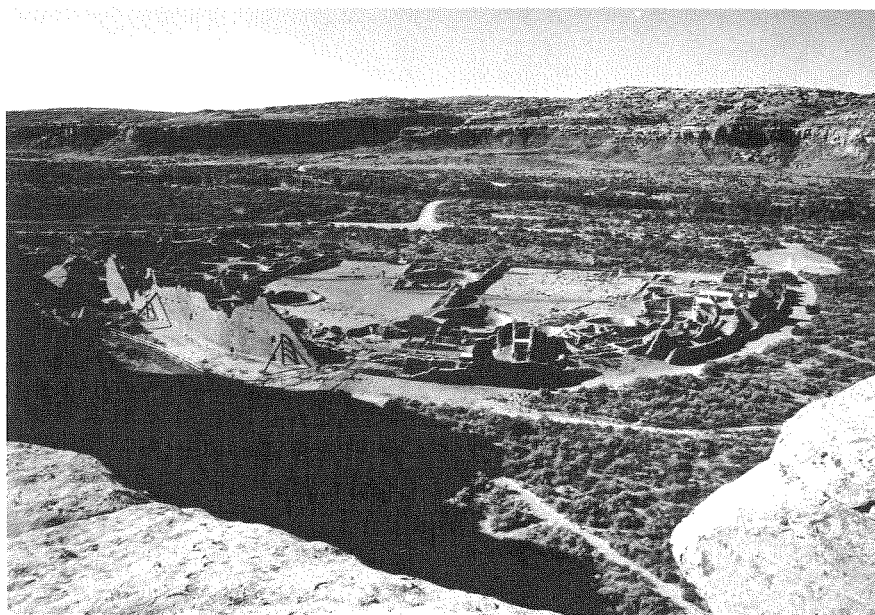
The issue of appropriateness of building to topography, of merger or contradiction, arises here. Yet the very distinction of morphological orders, the *differences* rather than the similarities, I would suggest, are the sources of their power. Imagine in the place of these structures a naturalistic construction of an irregular cliff adjacent to the true escarpments. If the imitation were so perfect that it might be mistaken for the prototype, it would still possess none of the sense of history and record imbued in the natural strata. Would this imitation evoke the same sense of suitability or even awe that these native communities do—even in ruins?

But these dwellings are part of history. Technological and ecological necessity constrained their construction, restricting the builders to utilize the very materials of the site. What, then, might be parallel case studies from the modern era, in which the

7 Pueblo Bonito. Chaco Canyon, New Mexico.

Anasazi culture, eleventh to thirteenth centuries. The loosely south-facing D form of the grouping integrates the living cells and round subterranean kivas.

(Photograph by Marc Treib, 1983)



complexity of the twentieth century vastly complicates the problem at hand? There are two places in Scandinavia—of necessity in at least *semi* rural settings—which provide instances from which we might learn. In the first, the extension to the South Stockholm or Woodland Cemetery by Gunnar Asplund and Sigurd Lewerenz, the buildings and landscape serve as the balanced articulation of one another and in so doing announce their presence. In certain places the buildings form a literal edge to the forest—both distinct from the vegetation yet curiously akin to the trees. At the Villa Mairea, the second example, the relationship changes from a literal to an analogical or even metaphorical one. The structure of the house rationalizes and reinterprets the structure of the trees in the forest. A romantic appropriateness results, with the interior and its structural system maintaining a continual dialogue with the surrounding pines.

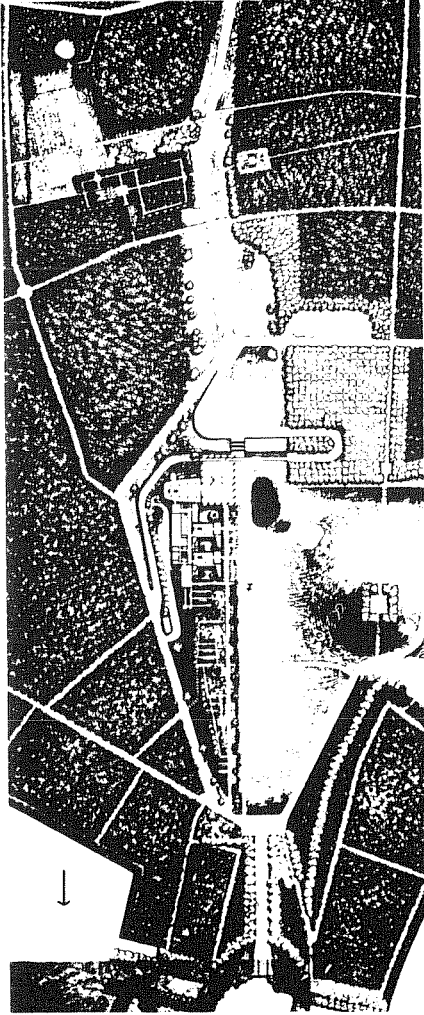
Erik Gunnar Asplund occupies a pivotal position in the history of Swedish architecture. As it had to Alvar Aalto and Erik Bryggmann in

Finland, the task of “converting” the Swedish population to an acceptance of modern architecture fell to Asplund, Sven Markelius, and several others. He accomplished this through his writings and, primarily, through the object lessons of his buildings. Today he is remembered for three major projects that crossed from modernism to classicism to a unique blend of the two. The first project, the Stockholm City Library of 1929, fused the heroic forms of Ledoux with the elegance of the modern idiom. Asplund also served as chief architect for the 1930 Stockholm Exposition, the first large-scale flowering of modernism in the North. And third Asplund’s work at the Woodland Cemetery exemplified his ability to conceive and execute a narrative landscape of trees and stone.

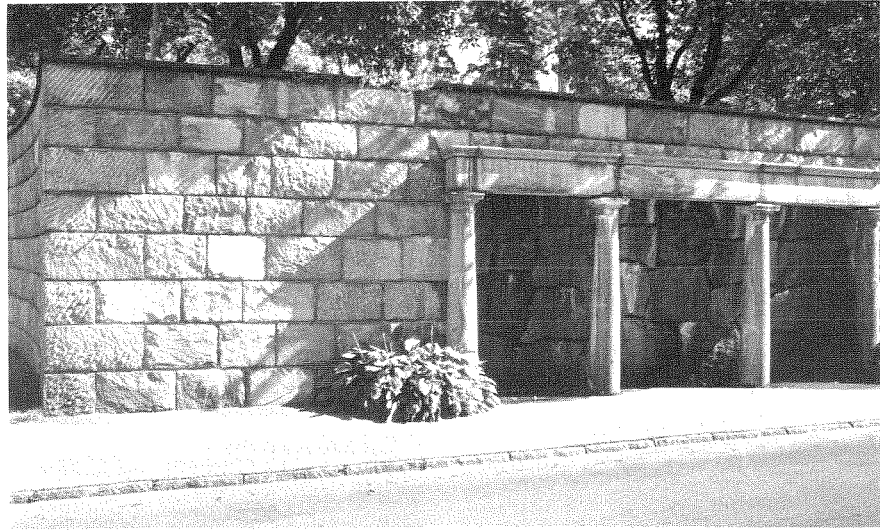
As early as 1918 Asplund had joined with Sigurd Lewerenz to design the cemetery and chapels for Skogskyrkogården or Woodland Cemetery. The buildings that he and Lewerenz built there, and their entire setting, constitute a superb representative of the use of contrasting orders. The preexisting

landscape of the site was covered with some stretches of pine forests, and a portion was cleared and used as a quarry. The first phase (1918–1920) included a master plan for the site that suggests little of its eventual complexity and detail. It contained some roads—some windy, some straight—and a neoclassical chapel by Lewerenz whose nave lies perpendicular to the axis it terminates.

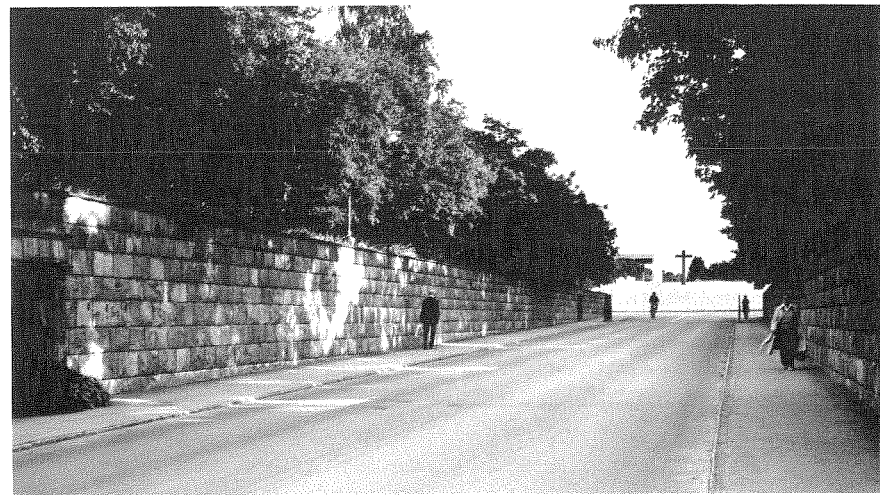
Asplund’s own architectural contribution from this period, the tiny Woodland Chapel, exemplifies an attitude toward building in the landscape that is characterized by an extreme sensitivity to both place and occasion. The form of the chapel suggests the wooden, country churches that dotted southern Sweden in the seventeenth century. Its sophistication reflects the polish of the Liselund villa in Møn, Denmark (built from 1792–1795 by Andreas Kirkerup), which was popular in Scandinavian architectural circles early in this century. The use of wooden shakes as a covering material determined the steeply pitched roof that dominated the image of the church.



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8 Woodland Cemetery. South Stockholm, Sweden.

Erik Gunnar Asplund and Sigurd Lewerenz,
1915–1922.

Plan with entrance below.
(Plan courtesy of the MIT Press)

9 Woodland Cemetery

The slowly dripping fountain built within the
ashlar walls.

(Photograph by Marc Treib, 1982)

10 Woodland Cemetery

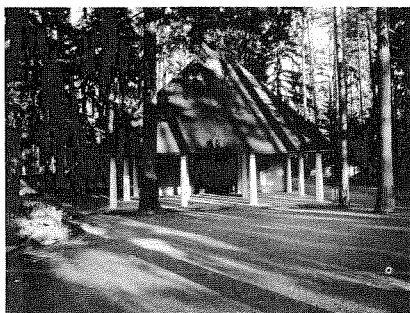
The high stone walls serve as blinders to
focus vision ahead, into the void.

(Photograph by Marc Treib, 1982)

11 Woodland Cemetery

Emergence into the void: the meditation
knoll to the right and the Chapel of the
Holy Cross to the left.

(Photograph by Marc Treib, 1979)



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12 Woodland Chapel, Woodland Cemetery.

Erik Gunnar Asplund, 1918–1922.
The chapel's profile recalls the country churches of seventeenth-century Sweden, but its execution is more decidedly classical.
(Photograph by Marc Treib, 1979)

13 Woodland Chapel

The crypt, literally of the earth, reinforces the release of resurrection.
(Photograph by Marc Treib, 1979)

14 Woodland Chapel

Within the small chapel, the pure world of the hemisphere and the flood of light invoke a sense of the celestial and pure.
(Photograph by Marc Treib, 1979)

15 Chapel of the Holy Cross, Woodland Cemetery.

Erik Gunnar Asplund, 1935–1940.
Seen from the knoll, the portico and chapels strengthen the edge of the forest while retaining their own architectural identity.
(Photograph by Marc Treib, 1982)

16 Woodland Cemetery

The open atrium of the portico admits light to the sculptural group and allows the eye to rise upward unimpeded.
(Photograph by Marc Treib, 1982)

17 Woodland Cemetery

The trees on the knoll read as the natural precedent for the columns of the chapel's portico.
(Photograph by Marc Treib, 1982)

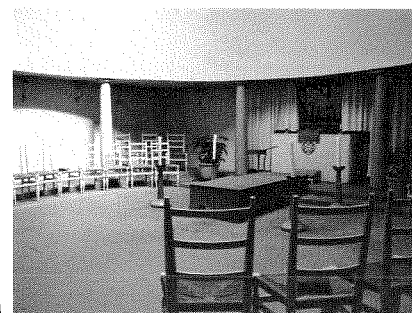


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Simple columns of a proto-Doric order elegantly support the shingled roof of Asplund's chapel. More important is the integration of the chapel compound with the remainder of the forest site.

A circumferential wall secures the chapel's courtyard, a wall too high to see over, too solid to see through. And yet, almost in the Japanese manner, one perceives the roof even beyond the wall. As one enters the gate, the expectation of a controlled world or the courtyard of omission is unfulfilled. Asplund has permitted the forest to penetrate and continue into the confines of the court. The architect typically spurns a simple yes or no decision and substitutes an ambiguity and a softness created by the admission of the trees into what should be a more formal space. The wall and the resulting courtyard inflect the texture of the forest, but they do not create a presence defined by an opposition to it.

Within the walled area in front of the chapel a crypt has been dug into the earth. Asplund sought no conflict with the chapel; the resurrection of the soul and hope for the living, not the mortal body, was consequential. By burying the crypt Asplund reduced it to a mere inflection of the earth's surface. Architecturally a parallel transition occurs, though its progression has been inverted. From the rough, shingled exterior of the chapel one envisions a folksy, dark, brooding wooden interior in the manner of the country churches. In its place,

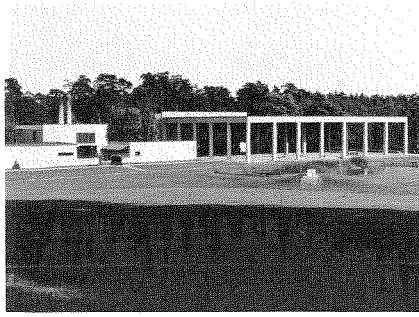


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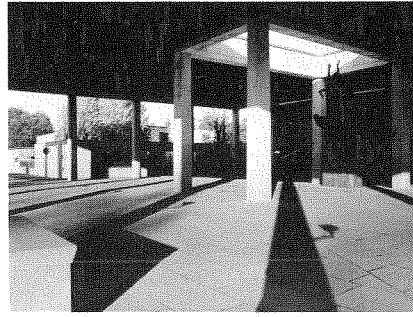
the chapel radiates the rationally pure vocabulary of the cube and the hemisphere. Light pours down through the rooflight, flooding the dome and the interior beneath it. The eye is drawn magnetically upward. The architect orchestrates the sequence of movement and view; the path leads from the natural, to the inflected natural, to the highly wrought, to the celestial.

Asplund worked at Skogskyrkogården from 1935 to 1940 to complete the transformation of the landscape and the construction of a series of larger chapels. The canonical view of the largest of these, the Chapel of the Holy Cross, is justifiably famous, and the place is imbued with a sense of the religious earlier than the iconography of its stone cross. In totality, the cemetery is marked by repose and silence, by the uncanny calm that Ingmar Bergman depicted in his film *The Seventh Seal*, the calm that comes just before the first rays of dawn, just after the first snowfall, or when twilight turns to night.

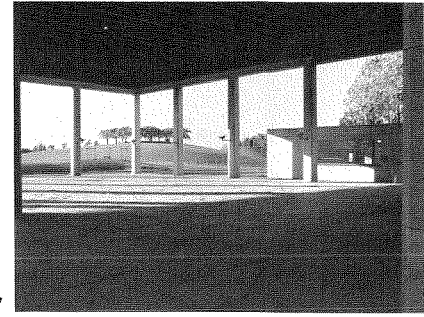
The site-plan of the complex shows no real axes though the straight wall of chapels and burials provide the planar splint that structures the landscape as an entity apart from the natural pattern of the pines. Around the entryway to the cemetery the design is uncompromisingly rigid, but, again, in the Japanese manner, it softens to semiformal and informal order within the precinct of the cemetery proper.



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Today one disembarks from the subway train at the station “Skogskyrkogården,” Woodland Cemetery. The station and its immediate environment are typically modern; nothing much marks them as special. To the right of the station a small flower stand provides the first hint of the cemetery’s presence, and beyond it extends a formal row of pleached trees, clipped and fixed in time, that defines the spatial corridor leading to the semicircular exedra of the main entrance. From this point the road leads directly into the cemetery grounds. Two stone walls frame the road and entrance; the iron gates are left open during the day. A fountain is built within one wall and housed in a small, classical portico. The fountain neither drips nor flows; the slow movement of its waters is barely sufficient to mark the passage of time—there is something eternal about it. Looking through the confining stone walls one is led into the void and to the grass below and the sky above.

The order feels natural. From the rigidity and the straight geometry of the stone walls, which like blinders focus the eyes directly ahead, one is pulled to the soft undulations of the gently rolling valley. In summer the grass is very green and the sky is very blue. Powerful cloud formations often pepper the blue dome and give it contour. But our attention falls almost immediately on the stocky, stone-cross icon; detached from the chapels it stands as a monument, an element, and an independent entity.

Quickly now we are drawn to the structures, to the line of chapels and their stone walls running to our left, paralleling the path—a line across the land that runs over the hills, through the woods, to the horizon. But to our right, atop the knoll, a formation of trees feels too regular to be natural, yet its vegetation appears too unkempt to have felt the hand of the gardener. The knoll straddles the edge between the natural and the made.

We proceed to the left along the stone path through which the meadow’s grass meanders. Along the way the rhythm of the graves within the court emerges. Our eyes, directed straight ahead, rest in the interval between the cross and the chapel; the view remains untruncated. Nearing the building we note the portico, the sculptural group thrusting through the open atrium that provides both the needed illumination and a hint of the impending resurrection. We move from the open field, to the restricted spatial channel, to the roofed portico, to the open sky above, through the doors to the chapel. The totality is contrived with consideration.

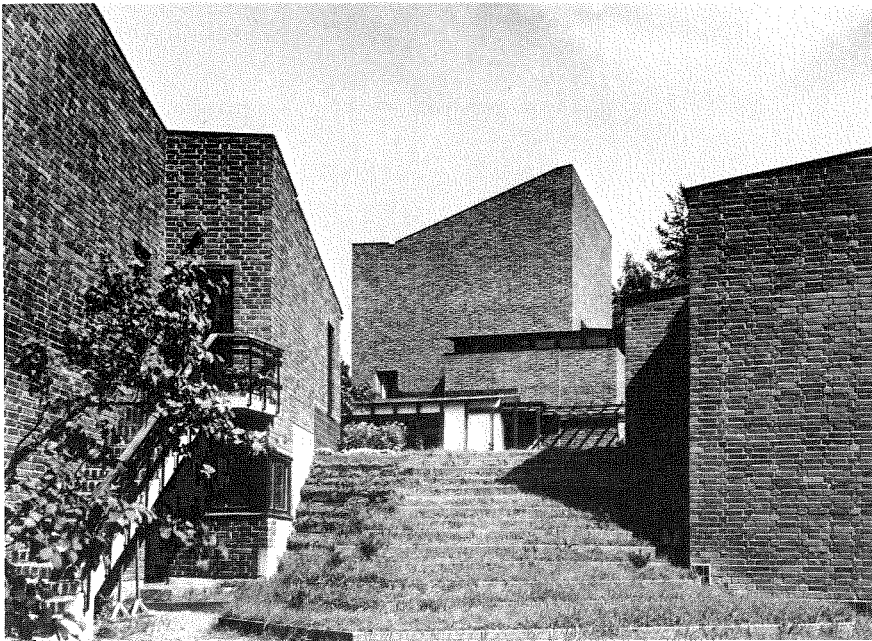
From the knoll one can look back to the Chapel of the Holy Cross and view the buildings that are so carefully fitted into the landscape—and, yet, so strongly expressive of the architectonic order. A patio ringed by low fieldstone walls and a square of trees crown the knoll, a configuration apparent only when seen on the crest. It, too, shares

both orders. The grove of birches we pass through seems natural at first, although it has been laid out and planted with the mathematical regularity of an orchard. Its order reflects, in natural materials, the rhythm of the portico colonnade that it addresses across the meadow. But this is summer.

In winter another world emerges. The green is now white, and the buildings are the darker rather than the lighter forms. It is beauty of, perhaps, an even higher order, particularly in the afternoon when the sun slashes across the land and almost parallels its contours. Trees that were mass are now linear skeletons. Light defines the soft topography of the surface. This place would feel sacred even to someone lacking an understanding of Christian religious symbols.

At Woodland one senses the coexistence of people and nature as part of a continuity. One order comments on and, in turn, defines the other—like the figure and ground of a two-dimensional composition. It is difficult, almost impossible, to look at one without looking and sensing the existence of the other. This continuous reflection and alternation of perception, rather than the architectural forms alone, ultimately yields a state of harmony and equilibrium.

Across the Gulf of Bothnia in Finland, Alvar Aalto began his private architectural practice in the 1920s. During the decade he



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18 Town Hall. Säynätsalo, Finland.

Alvar Aalto, 1952.

Rationalized contours shape the grass stairs, which reflect their granite counterpart on the court's opposite side.

(Photograph courtesy of the Museum of Finnish Architecture)

19 Villa Mairea. Noormarkku, Finland.

Alvar Aalto, 1938.

The combinations of saplings supporting the entrance canopy—still with their bark—introduce the theme of the column.

(Photograph courtesy of the Museum of Finnish Architecture)

constructed two landmark buildings: the Turun Sanomat newspaper offices and the Paimio tuberculosis sanatorium. Like the Stockholm Exhibition that influenced Aalto, the sanatorium introduced Finland full-tilt to modernism—in a manner and to a degree that would never really be equaled.

Just as Asplund appears uncomfortable with the severely architectural order within the natural setting, so Aalto shares an equal distaste for the completely rectilinear. As early as the Paimio project he displayed some of Le Corbusier's delight with the contrast of the curve against the "rectilinearity" of the main block. The foil of the free-form entry canopy or the later reception booths play against the straight planes of the walls, as does the sensuous wave of the lecture hall ceiling at the roughly contemporary Viipuri library.

One could find no better example of this particular formal predilection than the "typical" Aalto libraries at Seinäjoki or Rovaniemi. In these buildings the rectangularity of the offices, class rooms, service rooms, and entrance oppose the fan-shaped, phototropic angularity of the principal reading rooms. One can see that, like the made versus the natural, the presence of the straight defines the presence of the curve and vice versa.

Aalto, in an analogous manner, uses

architecture as an orthogonal contrast to nature and the natural as the mitigating force against architecture. In his studio in Munkkiniemi, for example, the interior court is a grand bite carved from the quiet rectangular block that fronts the street. Within this concavity, the earth terraces in boarded contours to fashion an architecture of earth. A more dramatic application appears in the great grass staircase at Säynätsalo, where the steps actually geometricize the natural slope, or those contours resulting from filling the central court. The earth is permitted to ooze out from the upper level in a rather controlled and rationalized manner.

At Seinäjoki the earth mounds against the south wall of the town hall in sweeping angular contours that appear in profile as the roof of the council chamber. The fluid curve of nature becomes, in Aalto's hand, the segmented curve, more easily constructed, rationally determined, an appropriate transition between nature and architecture.

The Villa Mairea, built in 1939 near Noormarkku in western Finland, illustrates many properties of Aalto's involvement with the curve and the inherent order in nature. The villa was constructed for Mairea and Harry Gullichsen, noted patrons of the arts and the inheritors and builders of a considerable industrial conglomerate. As a family estate the site already possessed two major

residences including a sprawling villa built about the turn of the century. Pine woods cover the land; grass grows underfoot. The topography exhibits few dramatic changes as the land slopes slightly over the granite bedrock.

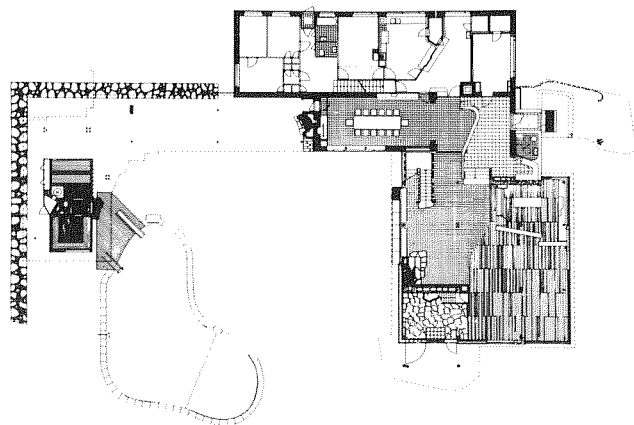
A nearly regular grid of columns supports the interior spaces of the house and augments the bearing provided by the walls. The treatment of the columns, however, betrays little regularity. Aalto has rationalized the forest; from the very first to the very last, no column has been left untreated: modifications link one column to another or distinguish it from the next. Some columns are primarily structural, yet are treated aesthetically; others are used only for architectonic purposes.

Approaching from the south we see the principal facade with its angled bay windows and the free curve of the projecting entrance canopy that recalls Paimio. Upon closer investigation we see that the canopy is curiously supported: On the right is a thick concrete column, no doubt the primary support. But the column has been wrapped with unpeeled saplings. On the left side a group of poles of slightly larger diameter, that have been joined by lashing, contribute to the structure. One recalls the more romantic aspects of Aalto's work such as his pavilion at the 1937 Paris Exposition, and the earlier Turku Fair, and the period from 1880 to 1905 that is known in Finland as national romanticism, during which

various architects and artists built their own villas in the manner of vernacular farmhouses.

Entering the house at the lower level, the view is controlled. A railing reads as a wall from the entry side; a number of nonstructural poles form a screen and suggest the saplings outside. Some fall on the entryside and some on the opposite—Aalto obscures the clarity of the intervening wall, and the spaces begin to blend. Stepping up the few steps toward the living room, a black lacquered column comes into sight. It is wrapped with split rattan, a treatment that Aalto would use in many later projects, particularly when he substituted in civic buildings marble or granite for the fragile rattan. Further along are double columns bound in tandem. Throughout the lower floor no two columns seem alike although they are regularly placed and share the same palette of materials.

Turning back, one sees the main staircase to the second floor inserted between the living and dining rooms. It is contained within its own forest of poles, some of which are plugged together like the canopy saplings at the entrance. The vines have overgrown the staircase and complete the naturalistic metaphor. The structural approach is augmented by a myriad other, considerate details used throughout the site, such as the fence and hillside that articulate the pool area in a



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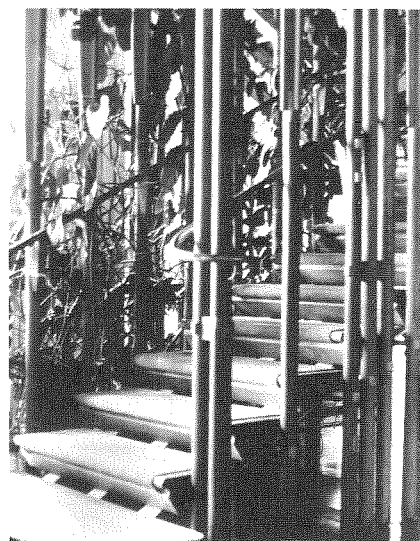
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20 Villa Mairea

Plan. The regular spacing of the columns structures the individual, unequal treatment.
(Photograph courtesy of the Museum of Finnish Architecture)

21 Villa Mairea

A screen of poles at the lower entrance level—stripped of bark in this variation—leads to the living room beyond.
(Photograph courtesy of the Museum of Finnish Architecture)

22 Villa Mairea

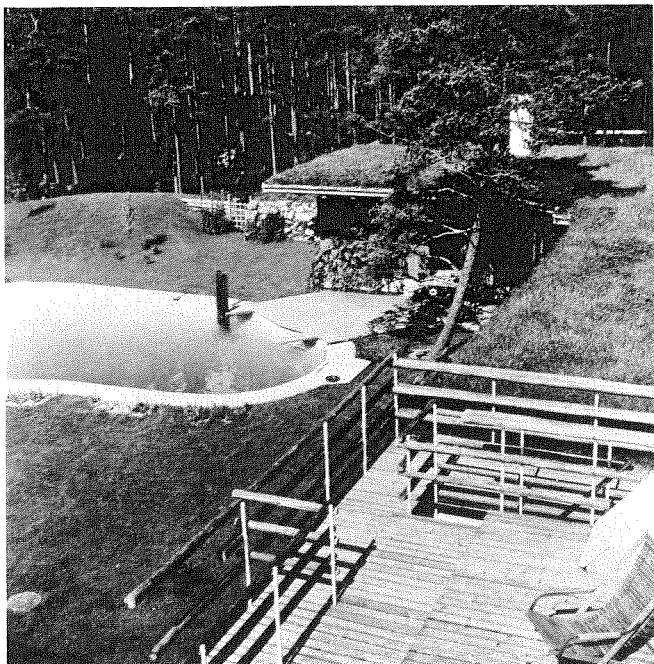
The twin black-lacquered columns in the “winter” area of the living space are bound in rattan to the height of the fireplace mantel.
(Photograph courtesy of the Museum of Finnish Architecture)

23 Villa Mairea

In the “spring” area of the living room the columns vary in clustering and wrapping.
(Photograph courtesy of the Museum of Finnish Architecture)

24 Villa Mairea

The vines covering the principal stair complete the metaphor of the column and the forest.
(Photograph by Marc Treib, 1967)



constructed mound, or the sod roof on the sauna and connecting loggia.

Reminiscent of the path from the forest to the light at Asplund's early Woodland Chapel, Aalto brings the natural order into the house, reforms it, and rationalizes it through a gradual and consistent restructuring of its form. The transition is smooth. The house is articulated not only as a place with its own order and sense of identity but also as a place that shares certain morphological sympathies with the forest around it.

At the Woodland Cemetery and at the Villa Mairea the construction of places exists apart from the natural order and yet fits comfortably within it. The structure is not an isolated machine in the garden; a synthesis of the pieces and their orders exists. The edge between the two is ambiguous and blurred. As one squints at the pieces certain parts of the setting come sharply into focus and other parts soften and become cloudy. In the end, we cannot quite rest in a state of complete knowledge nor can we accept the information given as exhaustive and unchanging. Nor

can we accept as given and finite the reactions and emotions to which those perceptions are linked.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the following people for their help in the preparation of this article: for critical review, Professors Lars Lerup and Mary McLeod; for sharing his knowledge of Sigurd Lewerenz's work at the Woodland Cemetery, Professor Janne Ahlin, Lund Technical University, Sweden; and for photographs, Kristiina Nivari and the Museum of Finnish Architecture, Helsinki.

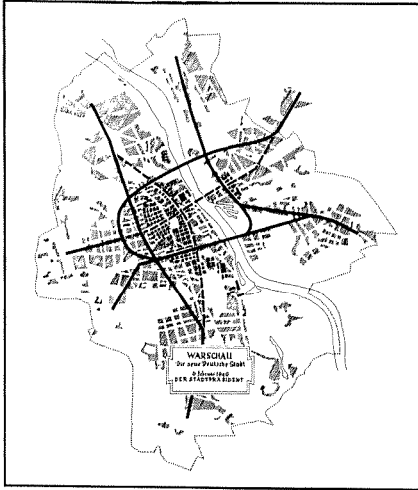
Travel and research for this study were aided by sabbatical funding from the University of California, Berkeley, and a Senior Fulbright Lectureship from the U.S. Educational Foundation in Finland, 1982.

25 Villa Mairea

To soften the profile of the house against the landscape, sod covers the roof, the sauna, and connecting passage.
(Photograph courtesy of the Museum of Finnish Architecture)

Urbanism in Warsaw: Solidarity and Beyond

Alexi Ferster Marmot



- 1 1940 Pabst Plan for Warsaw
(black) Superimposed on the Pre-War City
(hatched)
- 2 Marszalkowska Street, the Central
Shopping Area of Post-War Warsaw, the
"Functional City" of CIAM. (Photograph by
the Polish Interpress Agency)

In 1981, 3,000 architects assembled in Warsaw for the triennial congress of the International Union of Architects (UIA). We came from 90 countries, from the prosperous West, from Eastern Europe, and from the Third World. We had gathered together primarily to discuss international trends in architecture but also to visit Warsaw. We found ourselves in Poland at the height of Solidarity's power, and could not help but be diverted by learning of Poland's struggle for economic and social reform. What sort of a city is Warsaw, and how is its development affected by the Solidarity movement?

The Second World War and its aftermath are the major forces shaping the city of Warsaw. Though the city was established 700 years ago on a defensible rise on the banks of the Vistula River, its built heritage was almost totally destroyed by the Nazis. By the end of the war, two-thirds of its inhabitants had been killed or died from disease and starvation, and 85 percent of its buildings and infrastructure had been devastated. Most damage to the city occurred not during the invasion, nor during the ghetto and Warsaw uprisings of 1942 and 1944, but during the last months of the war. Warsaw was then systematically dynamited and cleared following the plan prepared by the town planner, Pabst, for a segregated city of Polish laborers and German rulers with only one-tenth of the prewar population.

Liberation from the east by Soviet-led forces heralded a different future for the city. Several avant-garde Polish architects and planners had been active in CIAM and CIRPAC in the 1920s and 1930s. Under their influence, plans for Warsaw's redevelopment that had been prepared before the war or in underground studios during the years of occupation could now be implemented. All of Warsaw's land was nationalized for this purpose. As in Rotterdam and other bombed cities, young planners grasped the opportunity provided by wartime destruction to reshape Warsaw as a "functional city" characterized by separation of land uses; provision of extensive, recreational, open space; housing in tall blocks of flats; and emphasis on provision for rapid transportation. But at the same time, the need for connection with the past, for urban memory, led to the decision to reconstruct faithfully the Old Town, significant streets, palaces, and national monuments.

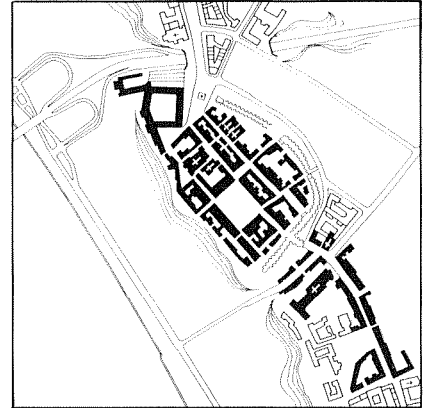
The reconstructed areas serve two important purposes. First, they are a concrete statement of the Poles' refusal to accept the elimination of their national heritage. Second, they provide relief from the large-scale, vehicle-dominated city of the present. In Old Warsaw one finds intimate pedestrian streets, well-proportioned squares, and a delightful variety of detail in building form, material, and decoration so lacking in the newer areas. Modern Warsaw does have

generous and well-landscaped parklands, but it is not a very human city. Roads are wide. City blocks are vast. Buildings are monotonous. Although the quantity of vehicular traffic is quite low, roads have been designed primarily for the speed of motor vehicles and pedestrians relegated a noisy walk to infrequent underpasses or crossings. Public transport is frequent and cheap, though overcrowded. Underground routes projected in every plan have yet to be realized though the last decade saw large investment in a major central-railway terminus and several motorway schemes.

Housing is provided in two main forms; the predominant mode is repetitive apartment blocks on large estates built from the industrialized panel systems that dominate the construction industry. Space standards within dwellings are low by comparison with Britain or the United States, but in the best estates the provision of community facilities—kindergartens, shops, schools—is generous and is well-integrated with the dwellings. Apartment buildings include stripped classical blocks built in the Socialist Realist 1950s, crudely functionalist assembly-line blocks of the 1960s and 1970s, and some recent examples of blocks of varied height, form, and color that allow residents to personalize balconies and ground-level gardens. The second mode of housing provision accounting for about 10 percent of new dwellings in Warsaw and

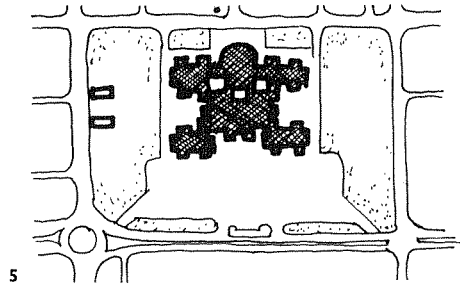
40 percent in the country is cooperatively- or owner-built, single-family housing on minimally serviced land purchased from farmers. The maximum allowable size is 1100 square feet per house, and the dwellings display the ingenuity and varied tastes of those working outside the main housing system.

Warsaw's town center is distinctly marked by the 700-foot high Palace of Culture in which the UIA Congress took place. Designed by the Russian architect Rudnyev and built between 1952 and 1955, it is remarkably similar to Moscow's University and Ukraina Hotel. The building was in fact a "gift" from the Soviet people to the Poles. Apologists claim that its bulk is due to Polish greed in requesting that the gift contain extensive accommodation for congresses, the Academy of Science, theaters, museums, and restaurants, and that its decoration is derived from Polish sources. But to most Poles the building is an inescapable symbol of the influence of their eastern neighbor. They resent the building's scale and aloofness, and the sterilization of several city blocks that it has annexed to surround itself with the biggest open carpark in central Europe. The act of designing changes to the building and its setting is one way of expressing disapproval. Several Polish architects have suggested new streets around the Palace composed of low-rise, mixed-use building (e.g., Andrzej Duszka's



3 Reconstructed Old City of Warsaw, a Contrast with the Vehicle-dominated, Post-War City

4 The Palace of Culture and Science, a Gift from the People of Russia (Photograph by E. Paszkowska)



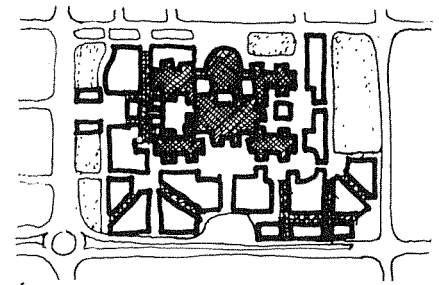
project in *Architektura 78/79* and the project by the DOM group). Hong Kong students at the UIA Congress proposed that the building's plan area become an open square while fragments of the carved-up building could be redistributed to define parks, lakes, and new city blocks.

The rise of the Solidarity trade union in 1980 helped create a climate in which criticism of Warsaw's post-war urbanism could be unleashed. The DOM group ("Dom" is the Polish word for "house" and the group's name also stands for "house and city") of enthusiastic young designers produced a Charter printed by Solidarity in June 1981. In it they describe Warsaw as a city destroyed by war and also by the "meeting of contemporary urban doctrine with totalitarian socio-political doctrines." They argue against the repetition of forms on a large scale, against the pervasiveness of the architect-bureaucrat. They also plead for the right of people in self-governing communities to express their own personality through design, for increased attention to architectural aesthetics instead of architectural technology, for the creation of cities based on streets and squares, and for architectural practice to allow choice of client by architect and architect by client. "An architect," they eloquently state, "does not have to build at any cost; it is better to be silent than to lie or to give consent to the degradation of his art under the

pressure of casually fulfilling needs."

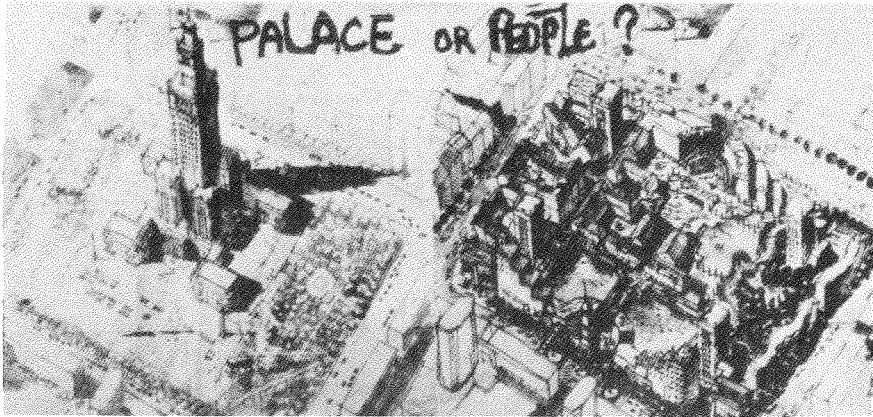
There are many ways in which Solidarity began to influence architects and planners as trade union demands extended beyond the workplace to more general community issues. The Gdansk agreement, signed in August 1980 by Solidarity and the government, included demands for housing improvements, particularly a reduction in the waiting period for housing. In Cracow, the protest of workers against urban pollution from a large aluminum plant resulted in plant closure while anti-pollution measures were implemented. In architectural and planning offices throughout the country Solidarity branches were formed and began exposing incompetent or corrupt practices such as the private sale of newly completed cooperative housing to those not on the waiting list. They also began questioning the professional standing and integrity of their bosses and replacing political appointees by democratically elected candidates. The branches actively sought the means of making local planning and local government more responsive to the needs of residents.

Before much change could be realized, the declaration of martial law in December 1981 abruptly terminated Solidarity's period of glory. Many were arrested for "subversive" activities. The spirit of open criticism of state failings



came to an end. Today Poland's economy is in tatters, the result of years of inept government policy exacerbated by the political upheaval since 1980. Investment in housebuilding and urban services is at a standstill. Far from meeting Solidarity's demands to shorten the waiting time for housing, official figures now suggest that there will be an absolute shortage of 4.5 million dwellings by 1990 even without upgrading existing stock or improving space standards.

Official policy now encourages housing cooperatives so that people will help construct their own homes rather than rely on state provision. Many organizations including architects criticize this policy. They argue that the policy cannot be implemented because the necessary institutional and financial arrangements have not been made. It is difficult to purchase land; serviced land is extremely scarce; building materials are desperately short; stagnant wages do not match the five-fold inflation in the price of materials; and few loans are available for housebuilding. Most people are reluctant to commit time and resources to private homes because they are uncertain about future attitudes to owner-builders in a socialist state. They fear being forced to pay large wealth-taxes on their homes or being victimized in other ways. It is likely that Polish cities and Warsaw, in particular, will see little expansion or improvement in the built fabric for many years until drastic



improvements in the economy have been achieved. Solidarity's demands will seemingly remain unfulfilled.

At the close of the UIA Congress in 1981, the Warsaw Declaration of Architects was presented following the tradition of CIAM's 1933 Charter of Athens. At first glance the Warsaw Declaration appears to give no useful guidance to designers since it is filled with general pleas for unquestionable goods such as human welfare and international peace (e.g., "Governments should stop production for war and use their resources for the improvement of conditions for all humanity"). But buried within the statement are several departures from the urban design tenets of the Charter of Athens. While the earlier charter considered only the European city, the Warsaw Declaration is concerned equally with the problems of the emergent city in rapidly industrializing countries, and with the demands made by all urban dwellers on the natural environment. The need for energy-conscious cities is espoused. Instead of CIAM's functionally segregated city made up of distinct buildings,

we should "create integrated multi-functional environments treating each building as part of a continuum"; instead of destroying the past to revel in the new we should "protect and develop the heritage of the society . . . and maintain continuity of cultural development"; instead of designing for the needs of the private motor car we should "subordinate the private automobile to the development of general public transportation systems"; instead of imposing professionally designed end products we should work with others since "citizen participation in the building process should be considered as a basic right." Time will tell if the Warsaw Declaration has a significant effect on the future practice of urban design.

5 Existing Plan of the Palace of Culture

6 DOM's Proposal to Encircle the Palace with Defined Streets and Arcades

7 Proposal by Hong Kong Students for a Recreational Area of Palace Fragments

NOTES

- 1 The author would like to thank the British Council and London University's Hayter Travel Award Committee who made the trip financially possible and the Polish architects and planners who helped to interpret the city. Danuta Jachniak kindly helped to update the information to mid-1983.

Parts of the article appeared in "Warsaw Impressions '81" *Urban Design Quarterly* (August/September 1981), pp. 3–6, published by the British Urban Design Group. The Group was established in 1978 to promote high standards of performance and interprofessional cooperation in planning, urban design, architecture, and landscape design in Great Britain, and to educate the relevant professions and the public in matters relating to urban design. Further information on the Group may be obtained from Francis Tibbalds, 39 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0AW, United Kingdom.

- 2 For a more complete account of Poland's housing policy and design see Marmot, Alexi F. "Polish Housing" *Housing Review* 30, no. 6 (November–December 1981): 180–182.

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1. Architecture and politics

The conflict of forces shaping the human environment is a natural process. The responsibility of the architect for the problems of environmental pollution, the model of industrialization, or the housing question make sense, however, only in the socio-political sphere. The International Pact of Human Rights must be a fundamental guidepost for resolution of the emerging dilemmas. As citizens we have to defend these rights and demand that Governments fulfill their undersigned obligations. The reference of all environmental conditions directly to architecture is purely declarative and blurs the actual professional responsibility—architects are fully responsible for the shape and consequences of their designs in the sphere of culture.

2. Between collectivism and individualism

It is necessary to bring back the features of personalism to human contacts which today are split between the extremes of collectivism and individualism. Its basis is the personal treatment of a human being, as well as the creation of communities respecting private and authentic social property. Nationalization in the name of struggle with chaos, harmonization by increasing homogeneous structures and ordering by the repetition of forms is absurd from the viewpoint of personalism.

The development of space favours social life only when it is combined

with the ownership of territory and self-governing communities based on personal ties and forming intermediary institutions between the family and state.

3. Responsibility for the crisis of architecture

The main feature of XXth century architecture—totalism—is the result not only of socio-political systems. The uncritical belief in progress, mythologizing of science and technology, magic of big numbers connected with demographic growth, identification of pluralism with chaos have brought forth the conviction that man by himself does not know how to dwell and live, and that it is only the architect who can design one's living. The ideas of standardization and prefabrication on a utopian scale and not according to real needs have not been imposed upon the architects. Neither have they been coerced to isolate pollutions instead of neutralization of their sources, nor to neglect the law of value in urban planning. Moreover, nobody forced them to submit life to spatial systems which divide and segregate an integral whole. Architects are responsible for the present state of the relationship Man—Architecture—Environment to the extent in which they have undertaken to accomplish these ideas.

4. Continuity in architecture

The greatest mistake of the architecture born of the spirit of the Athens Charter was the breakdown of the continuity of

culture. We cannot forget that the destruction of the traditional city was carried out in the name of lofty ideals: the right of man to a radiant life, sun and contact with nature. The heritage of the past was reduced to a Skansen museum. The architect of our century opposed ideology to life, and designs to reality. Instead of practicing the profession in an ever more complicated manner and increasingly remote from reality, it is necessary to restore continuity of architecture by bringing back concepts of the architect's trade such as style, modus and canon.

5. Urban planning

The thesis about the necessity of dispersal of buildings as a remedy against the inhuman concentration of the XIXth century cities has led to the transition from one extreme to the other. The extensive development of cities made possible by the motor-car led to the disintegration of the traditional urban space, wastage of terrain and deterioration of the energy balance. Concentration is a generator of social life in the city. There is a threshold of building intensity below which the development of technical and social infrastructure and mass transport becomes impossible. The development of cities faces the choice: a concentrated system with decentralized workplaces and services, or a dispersed system whose centre is choking with the influx of the population from districts forming a housing monoculture. The concept of the

city as a hierarchical system of autonomous structural units, neighbourhood units or social settlements is an unsuccessful compromise combining the faults of village and town but deprived of their advantages. The essence of wise planning should be anticipation and stimulation of desirable phenomena instead of wishful thinking: decreeing life by the imperatives of plans. Urban planning must release forces imparting dynamism to the natural development of the city and to limit its adverse effects by the prohibitions of law.

6. Monumental architecture and urban tissue

In the name of aesthetic uniformity the architect cannot deprive individuals and communities of the right to express one's own personality, as well as the right to spontaneous actions and free choice. The totalitarianism of XXth century architecture has sterilized both monumental architecture—sacrum of the city—and the urban tissue—its profanum. The division into private and public space has become diffused. The fascist style and social realism have changed into pure decoration of the regime buildings such as Palaces of Culture. Both the causes of the chaos and the monotony of architecture should be sought for in social life, and not in aesthetics. The city is simultaneously a composition and a collage. The concepts of monumentalism and urban tissue exist only due to the

contrast. A human settlement is not any concentration of dwelling houses but only that in which social life finds expression in the buildings that serve it.

7. Architecture is an art

The conception of architecture as a science and technology deprives it of its culture-forming and myth-forming role. A discriminant of architecture relative to building is the degree of aesthetic sublimation. Aesthetic functions are the reason of existence of architecture and simultaneously fulfilment of the social role of the architect. The purpose of practising architecture is not to create new concepts but to give continually new interpretations to the age-long phenomena of house and city. In a democratic society there can be no art without competing artistic endeavours. There are no dwellings, houses and cities for everybody, only architecture for everybody is an art.

8. The language of architecture

The architect is neither an omnipotent creator nor a slave of universal or local spatial-cultural patterns. The proper role of the architect is to interpret them within the framework of civilizational continuum. The reduction of architecture to a purely utilitarian function deprives it of its role of social mediator. The moment when the new-speak of blocks, settlements and pavilions substituted the language of patterns, the city became illegible,

monotonous and dead for its inhabitants. The city can be built only on the basis of the elementary patterns of interiors, houses, streets and squares.

9. The social role of the architect

An architect does not have to build at any cost; it is better to be silent than to lie, giving consent to the degradation of his art under the pressure of casual fulfilling of needs. For the same price one may have or have not architecture. This is not a question of affluence but of the social situation of the profession and broadly conceived culture, wherein the architect is even not always indispensable.

The practising of architecture as a social service requires, however, limitation of the state monopoly in building, reasonable competition in the profession, possibility of the choice of a client and architect, briefly the status of a free and creative profession.

10. Memento

We proclaim this Charter in Warsaw, a city destroyed not only by war, but later also by the meeting of a contemporary urban doctrine with a totalitarian sociopolitical one.

The solidarity in face of totalitarian danger both to the nation and individual reminds us today that architecture can be human and beautiful only when it is created by free citizens serving a free society.