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Caring About Places

The sense of place is not within the grasp of the architect alone.

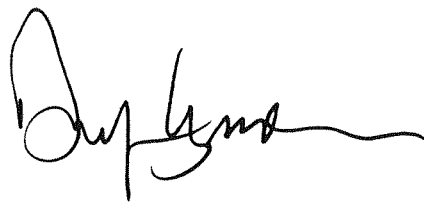
It is not the designer who creates the sense of place. It is the user or observer. The designer merely sets out opportunities for others to use—to make distinctions, to perceive connections and to take advantage (or not) of the structure of thought that is there.

Places enter into our lives in many ways: as a general surrounding for our acts, as a matrix of opportunities for social encounters, as a treasure-house of ideas and associations, as the recipient of our continuing attention and investment. We may at any time be conscious of none, all, or only some of these, but they are all of consequence. As environmental designers we must consider places in all these ways. We must also take into account the full range of scales. How does each of our works contribute to the larger place of which it is a part, how do our works achieve distinction within themselves as places of public encounter or private dwelling, and how does each work accommodate our primal need to see reflected in the work around us forms by means of which we may measure ourselves.

To be able to imagine places we must draw connections—and the deepest, most fundamental connection is to our own body, its forms, its stance, its way of moving.

An aedicula, the person-sized enclosure, the canopied, columned, platformed niche (home for a saint in medieval cathedrals) is a suggestive representation of the most intimate of places. It is most definitely inside, at once refuge and outlook, nest and perch, the four corners of the world brought close. We find it on buildings of all eras, in furniture of some, in paintings, in gardens, in windows, in parks. The root imagery is of the body—upright, feet below, a dome above. Through such surrogate devices (the column is another) the body infiltrates places and our minds chase after it, to seek lodging in the world at large.

We need to bring ourselves close to places. Even the most public places should embody private imaginings, secret ruminations that are there to be discovered if we will. Places that harbor no secrets whisper that none are allowed.



We owe Richard Fernau multiple apologies for mistakes in his article “Ramona’s Terrace” which we published in Volume 1, Number 4 (p. 64)—without benefit of either headline or byline. More grievously still two paragraphs from the succeeding article migrated into his article and appeared to form its conclusion. They do not; most especially the phrase “opening day was also closing day” could not be further from the truth. Ramona’s Terrace is more than fulfilling its promise as a sunny social center for the College of Environmental Design and its neighbors. The splendid drawings that accompanied the article were provided by Fernau & Hartman, and are further evidence of the skill and craft which they bring to their work.

Affordable Housing: Livable Communities

Richard Bender

Housing is one of today's most persistent problems. From the "experts," there has been no shortage of answers. Over the years we have tried them all. But space-age construction methods, ingenious financial techniques, increasing subsidies, and lowering standards have done little to improve the quality, quantity, or affordability of housing. The problem is not that we have overlooked some new angle, or good idea, or a form of construction, financing, or subsidy that will allow us to make housing more "affordable." It is that we continue to engage each of these issues in isolation rather than as part of a way of life. If we are serious about making real changes, we will have to take radical actions. We will look for ways to build communities we care about and to make the world we believe in work. Housing is inseparable from community. We are not going to have affordable housing until we have successful communities.

By most sensible measures, there is not a shortage of residential buildings in this country. New construction is important for many reasons, but it is not the key to our housing problem. The volume of building now in place with some "infill" in urbanized areas can provide more than enough healthy, comfortable homes for all. There *are* problems of quality, of services and, most of all, of "distribution"—the way the space available is actually used. For most Americans these problems come down to issues of neighborhood and affordability. While the latter is most frequently the focus of our concern,

the two are interdependent. We will not solve one without the other.

Attempts to make housing more "affordable" fall into two categories: those that reduce the cost of new construction and those that seek to increase the user's ability to pay. I will review each of these approaches briefly and try to show why I am convinced the second is more promising.

Most current efforts aim at building one of a group of well-established forms of "housing" for a lower price. It is important to note, that the term "housing" used in this way, to define a product, is relatively new. While house, home, and dwelling have long been in common use, "housing" is the product of an industry that is little more than 100 years old. The "housing" of people, doing it for them, is quite different from the process of dwelling.

Over the years a number of new technologies have been brought to bear in this industry: mass production, systems building, prefabrication, and fast track construction are only a few. While each of these techniques has shown some success (in its way the much maligned construction industry *has* industrialized over the last decades) there is not much promise for a further reduction in construction costs. Considerably less than half of the cost of a home is in the building itself (compared to land, infrastructure, and financing) and a good part of that is made up of materials and equipment. Some costs can be reduced by speeding the construction process, thus cutting the cost

of interim financing. More substantial savings will result from more careful design, construction, and operation of buildings. In many cases higher first costs will reduce the continuing "life" costs of a building. Other efforts to reduce costs slightly involve building smaller units, and reducing the square footage and the volume of the dwelling. Reducing the size of the home reduces the least expensive parts of the structure while leaving a whole set of fixed expenses: refrigerators, sinks and toilets, heating equipment, etc. If we are to maintain living standards as density increases, we will have to increase the costs of sound proofing, fire protection, and other aspects of general construction. Reducing the size and the amount (and more often the quality) of equipment can reduce first costs; however, this strategy simply transfers these costs to the owner or to later users or owners. Certainly the mobile home industry has shown that there are first-cost savings in the combination of reduced space and reduced quality of materials and equipment. It has also shown that in the long run there are significant social and economic costs to this approach to affordability.

In recent years new types of very small units have been proposed and built as a way to provide "entry" into the housing market. This strategy assumes that an individual or family will "buy into" the market at an inexpensive price and then "trade up," moving from house to house as their equity and ability to pay increase. This strategy has some

advantages; in a time of continuing inflation, however, we cannot be sure it will work in the economy of the coming years. It also poses some very real problems. An increasingly mobile population in which people have no ties to the communities where they live can create a whole new set of social problems. What will happen to these units and neighborhoods as the more financially successful families leave them behind? Most likely they will join other "abandoned" or "bypassed" communities and become slums.

Reducing the costs of land is another approach to the reduction of housing costs. Less expensive (often more distant) land results in lower housing costs but, again, this reduction often involves hidden long-range costs. These include the increased costs of transportation (in time, money, land, and pollution), the cost of new infrastructure (or doing without some aspects of community life or institutions), and the loss of other uses for the land (agriculture, recreation, or just plain open space). Taking another approach, higher density can reduce the unit cost of land, and lower land cost combined with the reduced size of units, more careful design, and the sharing of community facilities, can result in significant reductions in the cost of construction and operation.

Clearly, reducing the cost of money will be a major contribution. Many determinants of this cost are outside the building community and most involve trade offs between large groups of people. For example, who

pays to "write down" the cost of a mortgage from "market rates" to affordable levels? Who pays the cost of unlimited interest deductions from income taxes? Nevertheless, each percentage point of interest is the equivalent of major cost reductions in construction and/or services.

A significant element of housing cost is to be found in the price of regulation. A recent study by Californians for Housing estimates that regulations requiring "low density zoning, lengthy regulatory procedures, new fees and unequal property taxes contribute as much as 30 percent to new home and apartment prices." The administration of these rules takes time and costs money. Often, requirements are arbitrary or unproductive, mandating unnecessarily expensive construction. But in most cases these regulations have a basis in real concerns for life, safety, health, and for the protection of the individual and the community. While processes can be streamlined and rules rationalized, while the community's necessary interests in how individuals choose to live can be sorted out from the arbitrary, this country's appalling record of loss of life and property in fires, floods, landslides, and storms, added to the history of shoddy building practices that led to much of present regulation, indicate that some need for regulation will continue.

From time to time, experiments in developing countries in "self-help" or mutual aid have been effective in reducing housing costs. They have

occasionally had success in urban areas in this country. Those costs that can be addressed directly by an owner/builder reduce future carrying charges. They can also significantly lower the "price of admission"—the cash required for the purchase of new construction. An important additional benefit of these self-help activities is the individual input, variety, and overall richness that they add to dwellings and communities. Certainly one lesson learned from the self-help experiments of recent years is that a redefinition of what is a "finished" house can allow the occupant to trade off the cost of such a home against space, quality of construction, and the opportunity to add certain amenities over time.

There are some promising alternatives to this focus on construction technologies, subsidies, and minimal units. The strategies I am talking about approach "affordability" as part of a larger, very real concern with the quality of urban life. They build on the richness and diversity of people and neighborhoods, recapturing the urbanity that we admire in so many older cities; they rebuild the mechanisms that make people part of the economic life of their community and use resources more intensively. They support the process of dwelling in a community rather than focus on the provision of "housing."

These strategies are built on two valuable but underused resources: space and people. The redistribution and more intensive use of

available space is an obvious priority. There is an enormous amount of unused space in and between existing buildings. Adding, “infilling,” and subdividing in ways that value continuity, respect diversity, and invite the growth of “patina,” make better use of what we have while building the density necessary for successful neighborhood businesses, efficient services, and a lively and urbane community.

Infilling vacant sites takes advantage of existing utilities, transportation, and services, and contributes to their more effective operation. This is also true of new units created within existing buildings: dividing larger apartments into smaller ones, developing rental units or rooms within larger houses or apartments, and legalizing in-law units are all good strategies. In this way residents who cannot afford new homes or the increasing price of remaining in the ones they own, can reduce their costs, produce some income, and add to the quality of their neighborhoods. More people sharing currently underused space will increase security, provide new sources of income, and make for a generally livelier neighborhood, while imposing little added cost to the services and infrastructure of the community as a whole.

This approach respects a community’s traditions and is far less expensive than the construction of new neighborhoods or the subsidies needed to make them affordable. As part of a larger strategy it promises even greater savings. For example, a network of rooms in private houses

can be organized as a kind of hotel, providing bed and breakfast at costs far lower than those of downtown hotels. This approach contributes more to the city than service jobs in a new downtown hotel do. It spreads the impact of tourism over the city, encouraging visitors to enjoy more than one more standard version of “downtown.” It adds to the income of local shops and restaurants, provides jobs close to home, reduces the time and cost of travel, and builds the richness of the neighborhood. Some of these spaces can be organized into a network of clinic or hospital rooms and serve the many patients who do not need the expensive specialized facilities of a large general hospital. Someone with a broken leg can be cared for near home by friends, relatives, and a visiting nurse, reducing the cost of hospitalization and the strain on families, and involving the community in training for and the offering of an important service. Variations on this idea are endless: a neighborhood nursing home for the elderly, day care and nursery schools that use available spaces and people, and programs of vocational and adult education.

Additional income-producing units in existing buildings can take many other forms: small stores, a cooperative that sells the baked goods of neighbors, spaces for shared tools and equipment. The new activities will create jobs, introduce people to their neighbors, and keep streets alive and secure, while subsidizing the cost of housing.

This set of strategies aims at making quality housing affordable by

reinforcing people’s ability to join in community life. The strategies add to individual income rather than increasing subsidies or cutting back on amenities. Many aspects of a community’s life can be improved and real savings can be made as local residents take over activities and services conventionally done by paid employees. Some of these people will find regular work or supplement their incomes in building maintenance and repair. Others will exchange services rather than pay for them. Groups of houses or families can pool resources to provide some of the services now available only in more expensive housing: the equivalent of a doorman, a concierge, or a watchman. Cleaning, gardening, guarding, and caring for the very young, the sick, or the old will provide an income for those bound close to the home while allowing others to take regular employment elsewhere.

Experiments of this sort are part of a larger commitment to community and neighborhood. They can balance the operation of building heating and hot water systems, the carrying out of trash, and minor repairs, against cooking, sewing, cleaning, baby sitting, bookkeeping, and a host of other services. They will redesign streets to improve their residential and pedestrian qualities. They will use schools more fully, treating their libraries, clinics, shops, food service, and playfields as part of the neighborhood rather than locking them away behind chain link fences. School cafeterias can be run as restaurants by neighbors, serving meals to school children by day and

the rest of the community at night; wood shops and their instructors can serve home craftsmen as well as school children; and the school's maintenance engineer can run a cogeneration plant for the whole neighborhood. The costs of street cleaning, police, mail delivery, and fire protection services will be lowered when neighbors organize themselves to take over some of these activities and release funds that would normally go to pay others.

The architecture of these communities will take on a new richness as it expresses their new activities. The life of the community and the actions of its population will provide a better basis for architecture's forms than arbitrary borrowed elements from the past. None of these changes will be easy or uncomplicated. They will involve a reevaluation of individual and professional roles and the taking on of a larger set of issues. But if we are really serious about making

dwelling affordable, we cannot be timid.

We have a rare opportunity. One way or another, our cities will be rebuilt in the coming generation. We have the opportunity to build a new world. Why do it mechanically, bureaucratically, insensitively, when we can build with a love of people, places, and the joys of urban life.

Architecture and Daily Life: The Revitalization of a French Neighborhood

Tony Schuman

The city of Roubaix, situated in northern France near Lille, is an unlikely candidate for notable accomplishments in architecture and urban design. An archetypal industrial city, it developed rapidly as a textile center during the latter half of the nineteenth century and declined just as precipitously after World War II as changes in technology and the international mobility of capital rendered the existing production apparatus obsolete and superfluous. Left behind in the wake of massive industrial flight was an extremely poor, largely immigrant population, and a deteriorating physical environment.¹ The Alma-Gare district, subject of the present case study, was a classical case of a neighborhood ripe for the sort of slum clearance/urban renewal programs that uproot the existing populace to make way for the better-paid workers of the growing white-collar service sector.

But the citizens of Alma-Gare refused to be shunted aside in the name of progress. United by their common predicament at home and in the workplace, they organized to stop the “bulldozer renovations.” Through a community workshop called the Atelier Populaire d’Urbanisme, they insisted on their right to remain in the community and to shape the revitalization efforts in support of the rich social relationships that had developed despite the grime

and the poverty. Assisted by a group of planners under contract to an experimental government program, they prepared a counterplan calling for rehabilitation and new construction, including much needed social service facilities. They won the right to be part of the municipal working group that made policy for the area. And, together with a Belgian architect of their own choosing, they elaborated a building program and set of design considerations for the first phase of new construction—380 units of housing as well as a school, child care and elderly centers, and various retail and community facilities.

The revitalization of the Alma-Gare district is the result of the collaboration between socially concerned professionals and an articulate and well-organized community. As such, it offers significant insights into the successful practice of community design, which may be seen as combining three principal elements: a programmatic concern with daily needs, a procedural concern with citizen participation, and a formal concern with promoting social interaction and community identity. With respect to program and process, Alma-Gare is noteworthy for pushing both elements to higher levels than generally obtain in instances of low-income communities fighting for public (or, as the French say,

“social”) housing. The project may prove to be most provocative, however, in terms of architectural form for the architects are explicitly concerned not only with the social usage of physical space but with its social meaning as well. In this regard, Alma-Gare presents an important contribution to the emerging discourse on an elusive question—the relationship between built form and social consciousness.

Background

The Physical Fabric. The historic urban fabric consists of traditional urban blocks of one and one-half to three acres defined by a continuous band of modest brick row houses of two to four stories. The distinctive feature of Roubaix and its neighboring cities of Lille and Tourcoing is that, to accommodate the influx of rural immigrants in the late nineteenth century, a second band of housing was built in the *interior* of the blocks in the form of one- to two-story buildings lining a narrow *courée*, or small courtyard, entered through an alleyway in the perimeter buildings. These buildings provided only a minimum level of shelter and no conveniences, sanitation took the form of an outhouse in the courtyard, and the sole source of water was an outdoor spigot.

The Social Fabric. If the *courées* were unsatisfactory in a physical sense, they did promote a strong and vital

social web. Physical proximity, the intimacy of shared facilities, and the monthly contributions toward the single-metered water bill conspired to create unity in adversity. While the local labor unions did not play a direct role in the community struggle, France’s long tradition of working class organizing was the fundamental underpinning of the process through which a parallel set of neighborhood-based “unions” addressed quality-of-life issues such as health and housing. The community solidarity nurtured by these organizations had an important effect on the physical fabric itself, as cafés and small shops replaced the ground-floor apartments in the street-front buildings at the entrances to the *courées*. These small businesses played an indispensable role as forums for discussion, sources of information, and bases for mobilization.

Urban Renewal. Although the French government projected the demolition of the *courées* as early as 1963, the funds to begin work in Alma-Gare were not allocated until ten years later. At this point, the residents of the district became alarmed about just what sort of renovation the government had in mind. They were aware that the dominant economic logic of urban renewal envisioned the transformation of the housing stock to reflect the shift in the economic base:



1

the disappearance of “proletarian” lodgings to make way for the salaried employees of the growing tertiary sector of white-collar workers. They had observed the renovation of a similar neighboring community, where low-income workers were isolated in large projects lacking the rich variety of social spaces that palliated life in Alma-Gare. They also noted that the former inhabitants of the neighborhood rarely wound up in the new housing, having been shunted off into projects or into other decaying districts not yet slated for renewal. The social implications of this mode of revitalization were clear: “The base of the social pyramid will be closed up in collective housing designed to stifle collective life; commercial concentration will cause the disappearance of all the bases of meeting and popular mobilization.”² Further, they were justly suspicious of a renewal process in which the budget for demolition was approved, but funds for reconstruction not yet secured.

Organizing. The organizing effort at Alma-Gare began in 1962 when the Association Populaire Familiale (APF) called a meeting attended by 60 families to press for building repairs from private landlords. The base of the APF (which subsequently affiliated with the national Confédération Syndicale du Cadre de Vie, cscv) did not rest in the traditional left political parties but in activists of the Catholic left, whose roots in the community can be traced to the opening of a Mission Ouvrière in 1958. This absence of ties either to the labor unions or political parties opened the door to a wider degree of popular participation in the community at large, and of women in particular. As Marie-Agnès Leman, an early leader of the APF, observed, “Alma-Gare is like a bus: people get on and off. People kept coming up with ideas, and different people participated at different moments.”³

In 1974, as community momentum accelerated, the

cscv established a “peoples’ planning workshop,” the Atelier Populaire d’Urbanisme (APU), as a focal point for neighborhood organizing. Under the slogan “on agit, on réfléchit, on construit” (“we act, we reflect, we build”), the APU-cscv mobilized around one central proposition: “For us, a successful renovation is first of all to protect the inhabitants . . . to preserve and develop the social life; that is to say, the ensemble of relationships which bind the inhabitants and which constitute the richness of the district.”⁴

The first phase of their activity, from 1974–1976, was a defensive campaign. Their immediate goals were to enlarge the base, create local credibility in the community and with the authorities, to protect the physical fabric, and to galvanize the population. Their tactics ranged from disruption and demonstrations to delegations and meetings. Their issues were building repairs, sealing of derelict

1 Existing “*courée*” (small court), Roubaix, France.

All photographs are by the author unless otherwise noted.

structures, rent strikes to protest inadequate services, and negotiations with the city to prevent water cutoffs in the *courée* fountains. Then, moving beyond defensive measures and street rallies to stop the “bulldozer renovation,” they began to formulate an alternative plan.

Planning

A visit to Paris in 1976 brought critical technical assistance through the agency of Plan Construction, an experimental program within the Ministry of “Équipement” (since reorganized as the Ministry of Housing and Planning). Plan Construction was created in 1971 to conduct research and experimentation in areas of cost effectiveness, new technology (principally for energy-efficient design), and “quality of life” issues, with an emphasis on public participation. In November of 1976, in support of the latter goal, Plan Construction signed a research contract with a collective of architects, planners, and sociologists known as ABAC to work with the APU in defining a program for the revitalization of the Alma-Gare district.⁵ The selection of ABAC was an appropriate one, as several of the collective’s members had participated in earlier socioeconomic studies of Alma-Gare, and they shared

a number of premises with the APU: an urban outlook supporting the use-value of space over its exchange value; a belief in applied social research; and a cooperative work practice that sees technical expertise as a resource to be modified through discussion with local residents, rather than as a weapon to dominate that discussion. ABAC defines the process as follows:

What we wish to underline in the elaboration of the Master Plan is this: the participation of the residents in the meetings of the technicians transformed the work process by imposing a certain manner of conceiving urban life. The technical power retreated before the vigor with which the inhabitants advanced their objectives: the dominant logic of the Master Plan is that of the APU.⁶

The APU understood clearly the significance of the collaboration with ABAC. A special issue of their newspaper, *L’Atelier*, noted with enthusiasm:

It is the first time in France that such a contract was signed by the Minister. It favors a new urbanistic proposition. No more secrets or projects established behind closed doors, or unilateral decisions affecting the destiny of the citizenry. Each citizen has,

henceforth, the possibility to express an opinion, to participate in the creation of the neighborhood. This should permit us to return housing to its true position, which is not to individualize people but to support communal life at the family level as well as the larger social level. Housing is no longer an end in itself but a means to better living.⁷

A Strategy. The fruit of this collaboration was the publication in March 1977 of an annotated neighborhood map (*carte-affiche*) that combined a phased strategy for physical restructuring with social goals. The poster-map proclaimed a three-point program:

WE WANT:

1. To remain in the neighborhood.
2. To keep our streets and a portion of the existing buildings which will be *rehabilitated*. We will only keep the street-front buildings, not the *courées* (except one or two).
3. In the space cleared through demolition, we want housing, services (post office, child care, medical clinic, etc.), collective facilities (schools, sports, etc.), retail shops and work spaces (studios, artisan workshops. . . .)⁸

The strategy espoused by ABAC-APU was to revitalize the community incrementally,

starting with rehabilitation and improvements to the public spaces and facilities around the two existing social housing projects that defined the northern and southern poles of the neighborhood. This emphasis on immediate action represented a reversal of traditional urban planning practice. ABAC explains the importance of this approach: “The short-term has priority—it cannot be side-stepped by invoking hypothetical long-term plans. It is this reversal in the way of approaching urban planning which invites collective work with the inhabitants.”⁹

For example, in supporting the idea of rehabilitation and on-site relocation, the Master Plan opposed construction of a major transverse road. The vision of the future neighborhood was based on a series of microimprovements based, in turn, on the use value of urban space, rather than the sort of large-scale redevelopment engendered by demolitions and major road construction. The latter approach, which gives priority to the exchange value of the land, might have increased land values, but it would have done so at the expense of the viability of neighborhood life.

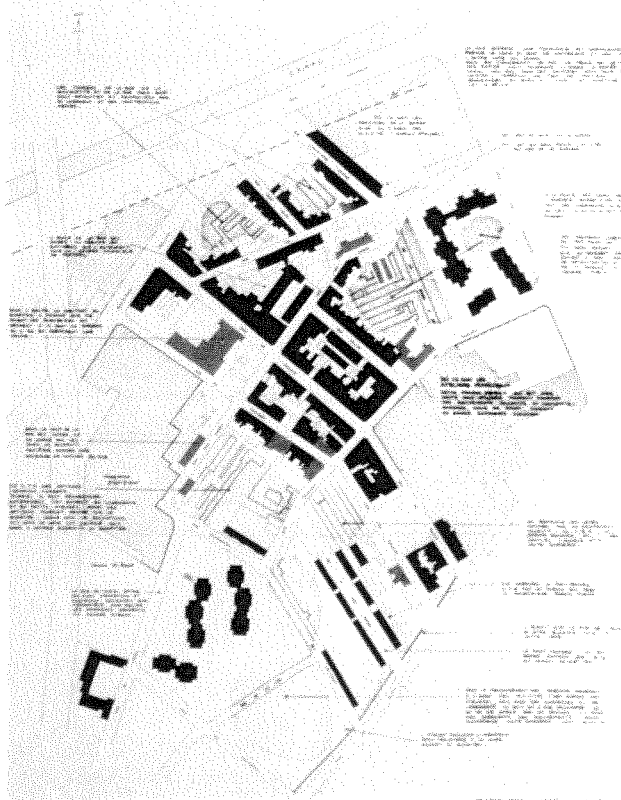
Politics. With solidarity between the inhabitants through the APU, and the planner-technicians of ABAC

A ALMA-GARE CA FAIT PLUS DE DIX ANS QU'ON NOUS PARLE DE RENOVATION-BULLDOZER, QUI RASE TOUT LE QUARTIER ET EN CHASSE LES HABITANTS.

NOUS, HABITANTS DU QUARTIER ORGANISÉS AVEC LA CSCV ET L'APU, NOUS VOULONS QUE LE NOUVEAU QUARTIER SOIT FAIT SELON LES IDÉES QUE NOUS AVONS DÉFINIES SUR CETTE CARTE AVEC LES TECHNICIENS.

NOUS VOULONS :

- ① RESTER SUR LE QUARTIER
- ② GARDER NOS RUES ET UNE PARTIE DES BATIMENTS EXISTANTS
- ③ DANS LES ESPACES LIBRES, FAIRE DES APPARTEMENTS DE PETIT LOGEMENT, DES COLLECTIFS, DES HABITAT COOPÉRATIFS, DES HABITAT INDIVIDUELS, DES ÉQUIPEMENTS COLLECTIFS (ÉCOLES, CLUBS, SALLES DE JEU, etc.)



2

2 *Carte-affiche*, Schematic Master Plan for Alma-Gare.

firmly established, the question remained of securing cooperation from the municipal authorities and departmental agencies. Despite a consensus that Alma-Gare was in desperate need of renovation, and the existence of a budget for demolition, little had been accomplished by 1977. Even the presence of a socialist government in Roubaix had not accelerated the process, as the elected officials favored the original plan to rebuild Alma-Gare for the growing tertiary sector of the local economy, which was represented principally by the giant mail-order house La Redoute, headquartered in a converted textile factory. Following the election of a new socialist government (Union de la Gauche) in March 1977, a Working Group (Groupe de Travail) was established for Alma-Gare, including the APU. Even here, the APU zealously guarded its political autonomy, rejecting the politics of the veto in favor of relying on the power of its organized constituency.¹⁰ Freed from formal political allegiances, the decisive voice of the APU in the Working Group meant that citizen participation had become a political reality. As the former Mayor of Roubaix observed, "This operation is now cited as an example, not only in France but also in Europe, for the way in which elected officials, technicians, and inhabitants establish in

common development and infrastructural plans."¹¹

While the establishment of the Working Group meant that the redevelopment project could at last get untracked, the level of imagination required at the various agencies to assure the quality of the project remained problematic. Despite the presence of devoted professionals, notably Pierre Lemonier, chief planner of the SAEN (Société d'Aménagement et d'Équipement du Nord), the agencies were burdened with years of bureaucratic routine. As Xavier Benoist, an economic planner with SAEN, explains, the constant pressure from the APU broke through the lethargy:

The social technicians—teachers, organizers, day-care and senior-care personnel, the social housing office—have both their own logic and that of their respective institutions. The technicians often have a much more positive position than their institutions. This is why the conflictual stage of development in Alma-Gare was so important: conflict makes innovation.¹²

Program. With the commitment of housing subsidies from the central government, the APU was ready to move beyond the schematic master plan of the *carte-affiche* to a building program for Opération Fort Frasez—the first phase of the

reconstruction: 378 units of housing plus community services and facilities on a cleared site of 3.8 hectares (8.3 acres) at the southern end of the district. In addition to the mixed-use program, the APU was careful to specify a variety of housing-unit sizes that reflected not only the remaining population of Alma-Gare but also the general demographic profile of the region, so that incoming families could be integrated into the community from the outset. The design program emphasized a range of public and semi-public spaces that would acknowledge and support the cultural heritage of the neighborhood in both its physical and social dimensions. For the housing design itself, the APU demanded a break with the traditional slab/tower projects with their long corridors and dark stairwells. They sought an architecture that would be compatible with the local patrimony of street-accessed row housing.

Design

Process. Armed with design criteria as well as a building program, the APU was ready to select an architect. To aid in this decision, bus trips were organized to visit housing projects in France, Amsterdam, Brussels, and Bologna. Different people went on each trip, including immigrants of North African origin as well as those of French and Belgian

ancestry—with an emphasis on participation by elderly inhabitants. Because the APU published photographs and annotated commentary on each visit in *L'Atelier*, the community at large had access to a wide repertoire of architectural solutions.

The housing that most impressed the Alma-Gare inhabitants was Les Venelles, a courtyard scheme with gallery access in the Woluwé-St. Pierre neighborhood of nearby Brussels. Designed by the AUST partnership in Brussels, this project was appreciated for its emphasis on space-facilitating social interaction. At the request of the APU, the Planning Director of Roubaix and the head of the local social housing office (the Office Publique d'Habitation à Loyer Modéré, OPHLM) met with the Belgian architects and engaged them officially for the first phase development in the spring of 1977. During the following year, the architects traveled to weekly meetings in Roubaix with the Equipe Permanente Opérationelle for Alma-Gare, headed by Lemonier and including the APU, the Mayor's office, and the OPHLM. As both the inhabitants and the public agencies were anxious to move the project along, the community participated through its representation on the Equipe Permanente, where most of the discussion focused on overall site massing and the disposition of exterior space.

The culmination of this process was an intense work period between the architects and the inhabitants in late spring 1978. The APU organized a dozen evening meetings where the architects presented axonometric sketches, unit plans, and designs for the exterior courts and gardens. In June a 50-page dossier was published defining the design ideas elaborated by the architects in consultation with the APU. A preliminary construction permit was issued, working drawings prepared, and, in February 1979, construction began.

Form. In approaching the formal aspects of building design, the architects were principally concerned that the design have relevance for the users, as they stated in the preamble to the dossier:

The notes that follow do not concern, for us, esthetics but *meaning*. The integration in an old urban site and the plan for reciprocal strengthening of the old by the new presuppose that there be a common vocabulary between the two. What is important is not esthetics but the fact that the new construction have meaning in relationship to the environment. The whole restructuring plan for Alma-Gare stresses continuity as the fundamental line of conduct (maintaining the population in place and their participation in

development in one of the modes of this continuity); the architecture must express and strengthen this continuity at its own level, leading to the search for an urban vocabulary which refers to common understanding, which permits a continual frame of reference.¹³

According to Michel Benoit, a partner in AUST, the focus of the architectural work was at the scale of "micro urbanism." The architects quickly established rules for the unit types, based on their long experience with social-housing design-parameters, and spent most of their time trying to analyze and understand the existing urban environment. They sought to create an "urban alphabet" that would establish the *maximum* number of design constraints in order to prevent formalist control of the design process.¹⁴ To this end, the architects undertook a systematic study of the existing urban fabric: the blocks, streets, squares, and *courées*; and of the morphology of the housing stock: roofs and façades, bay structure, brick detailing, etc. The result of their efforts is an architecture that is recognizably "Roubaisian" and incorporates distinctive new elements in a harmonious fashion.

The Generator. The architectural *parti* is a four-story perimeter-block housing-scheme that follows



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3 Les Venelles, Brussels,
Belgium, AUSI partnership.

the existing street grid and introduces new modes of access and a welter of transitional spaces. The larger of two superblocks is subdivided by a pedestrian street that leads to a public square in which are situated the major public facilities: an “open” primary school, a child-care center, and services for the elderly. The square is sited close to the existing Magasins Généraux housing project in order to link it to the new construction. Pedestrian walkways lead from the square to the old neighborhood to the south and to a continuation of the new construction to the north. The ground floor of the complex fronting the Rue d’Alma, the district’s main thoroughfare, is lined with commercial spaces. The entry to the pedestrian walkway is off this street and is marked by a large glass-roofed court that is announced by a glass gable with bright red metal mullions.

The pedestrian street itself is the major social path within the complex, lined on both sides by community facilities and workshops such as the Atelier Cuisine. The Atelier Cuisine, or “kitchen workshop,” is literally the heart of the community. It emerged during the early days of popular mobilization, when food was served after long meetings, and developed into a small enterprise with two chefs and one apprentice. In

addition to the Atelier, the pedestrian street is home to community meeting rooms and a series of organizations developed by the APU to provide both employment and a role in project management for the inhabitants. The employment-generating nature of these organizations—the Atelier, a printing shop called Alma-G’Art (pun intended), the project management office known as the Régie Technique—is of critical importance, representing as it does a direct effort by the inhabitants to contribute to the solution of the labor question. Their location along the pedestrian street that forms the social spine of the complex is equally important because of the visibility it gives to the workplace as part of the daily environment: it serves to dignify and demystify the production process.

Access. Open stairs off the pedestrian street lead up one flight on the south side to a raised, hard-surface court situated above a partially-below-grade two-story parking garage. This raised court reproduces the social collector function of the *courées*, but in more generous dimensions. The court is accessible also through a series of bridges crossing the pedestrian street and issuing from a continuous gallery (*coursive*) linking all the upper-level units. Weaving throughout the complex, sometimes on the street side and sometimes

facing the interior courtyards, the gallery serves two functions: it breaks down the inside/outside barriers between the new construction and the old neighborhood, and it provides direct entry to the individual units in the manner of the traditional street-front row housing. The units themselves, arranged mostly in a four-story, duplex-over-duplex form, reinforce the double inside/outside orientation: the ground-floor units have entries on the public streets as well as small outdoor patios which form a transitional zone between the apartment and the public open space.

Unit Plans. Although the design emphasized the exterior spaces, considerable attention was given to producing a wide choice in unit plans within four basic apartment types. Consistent throughout the unit designs is the provision of through ventilation (via the open gallery access system) and the inclusion of one important room (“la belle pièce”) in each unit. The latter concern reflects both the emphasis in northern France on interior life (for climatic reasons), and the North African cultural practice of having a ceremonial room within which to receive the father. Beyond these common elements, the basic type undergoes over 70 different modifications through manipulation of three

elements: the taking over of a small bedroom to enlarge the “belle pièce,” the choice of an eating corner in the kitchen or a small, separate dining room, and the enlargement of the main room by eliminating a large closet. In addition, the size of the second-floor landing in the duplex units can be enlarged by borrowing space from an adjacent bedroom. The variation in unit plans is multiplied by the choice of location within the complex: on the upper court, along the open galleries, or ground-floor units with private gardens. In the last instance, the architects provided several garden units with greenhouse extensions to suggest to future inhabitants possibilities of expansion.

Of the 380 units, 100 are small studio or one-bedroom units. Eighty of these are reserved for the elderly, interspersed throughout the complex; and 20 are intended for use by single men, principally members of the North African immigrant labor force. Additionally, 20 of the larger family units were designed to facilitate possible subdivision into smaller units.

Building. The construction system combines economies of industrialized production with traditional hand-set masonry. The concrete bearing walls and floor slabs are prefabricated, while the street façades employ brick arches and decorative motifs. In deference to the historic

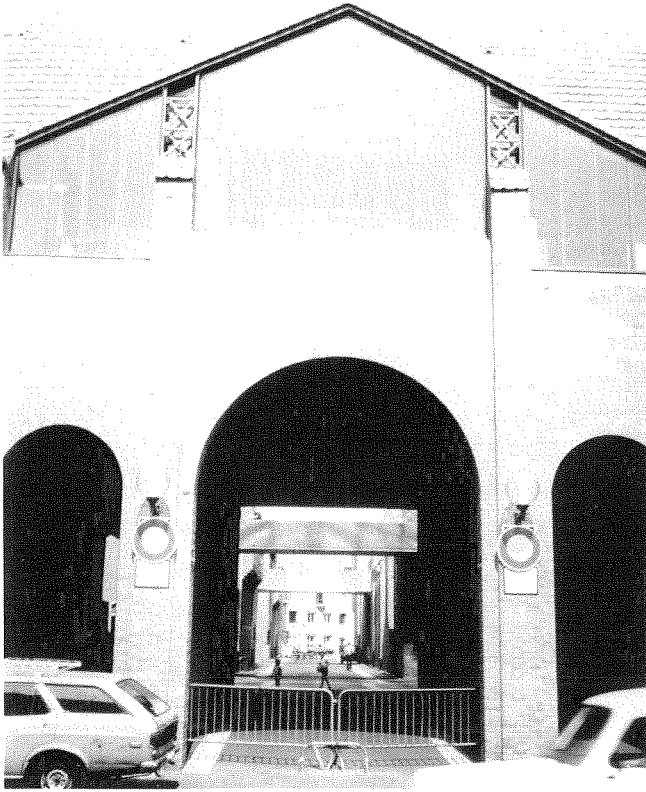
fabric, the buildings are cut at 45° angles at the corners. Within the vocabulary of Roubaisian masonry work, the window bay system is respected on the street façades while the important public spaces on the street and square are differentiated by means of large-scale arches and masonry openings. The units themselves are differentiated front and back, with more traditional treatment on the street and larger, more modern windows opening onto the interior courts and gardens. Similarly, the mansard roofs are made of traditional tile, but are punctuated with generous windows to brighten the upper-floor units. Along the street façades projecting balconies break the flat building line, providing both a sheltered entry area and collecting spaces at the access points along the upper-level gallery. These balconies are semienclosed with glass in a red-metal frame. Along with the extensive use of glass at the entry to the pedestrian street and in the public buildings surrounding the square, they constitute a major new design element in the neighborhood, heralding the important points of arrival and the procession of public spaces.

Architect Benoit places special emphasis on the use of traditional construction technology, speaking with great passion of the *savoir faire* of the northern construction workers,

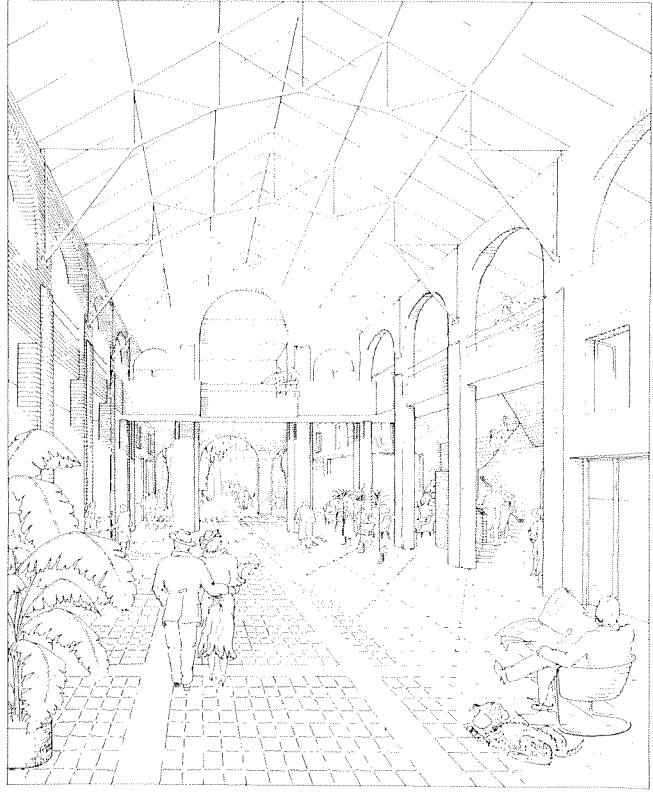
especially the masons. He defends the decision to make the façades out of hand-set masonry on three levels: economic, social, and construction quality. The required skill and evident craft embodied in the work increased its value to the masons and their families; children came to watch the work in progress. The workers were well-motivated as a result, and worked harder and faster—even putting in overtime without bonus pay to finish particular sections. Their attitude helped allay fears about the cost of such labor-intensive construction. With arches integral with the walls, there was no need for steel or concrete lintels; nor was there need for separate finishing trades as in the case of prefabricated wall sections. The resulting economies were so significant, according to Benoit, that the builder is now using only brick construction of this sort.¹⁵

Form and Consciousness

The key to understanding the impact of the new construction in assisting the process of social change lies in the architects' emphasis on the urban character of the new district, their concern with integrating the housing into the existing neighborhood. The significance of this gesture may be appreciated by comparison with two earlier projects that bear certain similarities to Alrēa-Gare—Michiel Brinkman's



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6 Rue d'Alma Elevation, entry to pedestrian street.

7 Glass Covered Court, architect's rendering (Courtesy of AUSI A&P, architects).

8 Glass Covered Court.



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perimeter housing block in Spangen (Rotterdam), and Charles Fourier's utopian phalanstery proposal.

Precedents. Brinkman's housing at Spangen introduced the open gallery access system into the perimeter block/interior court format, with the gallery serving as a delivery route for merchants' carts as well as providing access to the upper-level duplex units. While Alma-Gare shares with Spangen the social intensity of the interior court life, it opens up the housing to the surrounding community in two significant ways: the ground-floor units at Alma-Gare have direct outside entries on the public streets, and the galleries alternate between street and court orientations, whereas at Spangen all unit access is from within the courtyard, and the galleries are virtually all contained on the interior as well. The project as a whole, moreover, is penetrated by streets and walkways that link the complex to the surrounding community, while Spangen stands as a monolithic superblock with periodic arched entryways.

The reference to Fourier's theories is suggested by the glass-covered entry to the pedestrian street, which recalls the sky-lit courtyards of the *familistère* housing block at Guise, the principal built exemplar of Fourier's theories. While the glass courtyard at Guise represents

a modification of Fourier's original proposal for linear "galleries of association," the intention remains the same—to promote social interaction and harmony through a merging of public and private realms (the dwelling unit and the collective social space), an intention clearly shared at Alma-Gare, albeit in more casual form.

Symbols. In symbolic terms, however, the most critical point of comparison with Fourier's proposal is what is *not* shared; namely, Fourier's desire to elevate and ennoble his working-class occupants by placing them in a palatial structure modeled after Versailles. Although none of Fourier's followers undertook such a construction at a grand scale, two recent projects in French New Towns by Ricardo Bofill offer an astonishingly literal interpretation of Fourier's formal vision—Versailles for the People at Saint Quentin-en-Yvelines and the Spaces of Abraxas at Marne-la-Vallée. "Daily life should not be banalized," Bofill explains, "but exalted to become rich and meaningful."¹⁶ In the Abraxas project, Bofill argues further that this self-contained housing complex can be construed in paradigmatic urban terms:

The urban design of our era will take the structure, if not the dimension, of the historical city into account. It will, however, invert the symbolic values.



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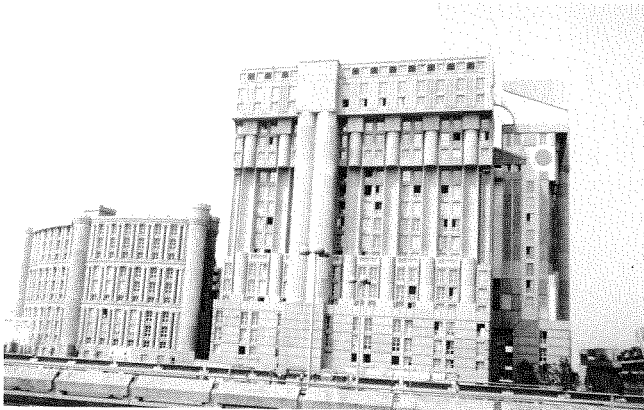


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10 Street Elevation, Rue Archimède, Alma-Gare.

11 Spangen Housing, Rotterdam; Michiel Brinkman, architect, 1921.

12 Familistère at Guise; J. B. Godin, 1869.



13

13 Spaces of Abraxas, Marne-la-Vallée; Ricardo Bofill, architect, 1983.

Everyday life will take the center of the stage, while the public edifice and facility will recede into the background.¹⁷

This monumental public housing project, comprising nearly 600 units arranged in a semicircular 9-story “Roman Theater” separated from a 19-story “Palace” by a 7-story “Triumphal Arch,” shares a fundamental goal with Alma-Gare—the empowerment of the French working class. But it pursues this goal through a radically different approach. Bofill’s work presents a powerful visual icon as an abstraction of power, intended to transform the consciousness of the residents and spur them to greater cultural and political activity. His work relies on the perceptual clarity of the formal associations with monumentality to confer status and self-esteem on the occupants of his housing. The civic scale of the complex, which looms as an urban fragment on the horizon, suggests that the present form of the city is not an appropriate arena for political action. Instead, the housing complex itself is offered as a model of the city as it used to be and might be again under future worker control.

Where visual form is the point of reference for Bofill, Alma-Gare relies on the experience of daily life to convey its meaning. The symbolism of this micro-

urban architecture cannot be captured in a photograph but can only be grasped incrementally, over time, through tactile, immediate activity. The architecture of Alma-Gare invites involvement, and suggests that the city can only be appropriated directly by living in it. The successful struggle of the tenants to remain in place is a first step toward this empowerment, and the architecture acknowledges this victory. This is why its departure from the closed superblock Spangen scheme (or the closed monumental complex by Bofill) is of paramount importance: it suggests that the realm of the working class cannot be contained within the block interior but extends into the municipal realm.

Intentions. The architects of Alma-Gare and Abraxas are playing for high stakes, and their relative success in the long run will be difficult to measure; their political intentions require an evaluation that goes beyond traditional indices such as levels of maintenance and the appropriation of the project space itself to broader questions of cultural and political enfranchisement and deeper psychological issues of self-esteem. It is not too soon, however, to signal certain problematic aspects of Bofill’s approach. Primary among these is his reliance on an accurate reading of the intended symbolism on which the whole scheme is

pegged; if the tenants miss the point, the scheme falls apart. Because the design of the units is subordinated to the precision of the formal image, there is no exploitation of design elements to contribute toward the process of empowerment by encouraging spontaneous neighboring and social organization among the residents.

Alma-Gare, on the other hand, is already halfway there. By any conventional criteria, the architects have been successful in their attempt to produce a built environment that encourages social interaction. The public and semipublic spaces—the galleries, courts, pedestrian street, and public square—are well-used. Sociologist Albert Mollet of Plan Construction, who has followed the project closely since its inception, speaks of the “spirit of place” that has developed there. He is particularly impressed by the increasing involvement in neighborhood affairs of people who have changed from onlookers to participants.¹⁸ This progressive incorporation of the inhabitants into the continuing process of community revitalization is an important goal of socially motivated design, and a first step toward empowerment.

By concentrating on familiar imagery and the existing urban tissue, the architects of Alma-Gare have assured

the legibility of their formal intentions—the neighborhood is the icon. This concentration, of course, is in direct response to the expressed wishes of the inhabitants to preserve the social qualities of an environment that had nurtured their organizing efforts despite the physical deterioration.

In program, process, and form, Alma-Gare offers a model for socially responsible design. While the ultimate impact of the new quarter on the neighborhood (and city) as a whole remains to be seen, it is not too soon to salute the very real accomplishments of Alma-Gare. Not the least of these is the reintegration of architecture into the totality of daily life. The dialectic between designers and users provided a mutual education in both the dynamics of urban revitalization and the role of design therein. The community itself offers a succinct summary:

If the APU discovers architecture and the importance of the quality of space in daily life, it must also inscribe this discovery within a global understanding of urban problems.¹⁹

NOTES

- 1 Of the 5,000 people in the Alma-Gare district in 1965, virtually all were extremely poor. Forty-three percent of the population was retired or unemployed, and 70 percent of the employed were low-wage manual workers, mostly in the few remaining textile mills. Nearly half the people were foreign-born: 25 percent were North African (predominantly single males) and 45 percent were of Latin origin (mostly households with children, principally Portuguese). Data from “La Participation Conflictuelle des Habitants du quartier Alma-Gare, à Roubaix,” by Georges Gontcharoff, *Correspondance Municipale* nos. 182–183, Paris, November/December 1977. An additional useful reference is Pierre Lemonier, “La Concertation Produit le Nouveau Quartier,” in *Quand les habitants prennent la parole*, a collective work directed by Albert Mollet (Paris: Ministère de l’Urbanisme et du Logement, 1981). All translations from the French are by the author.
- 2 Gontcharoff, “La Participation Conflictuelle,” p. 47.
- 3 Interview with Marie-Agnès Leman, director of CSCV for Roubaix, July 12, 1983.
- 4 Gontcharoff, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
- 5 It is not unusual in France for an office to go by an anonymous set of initials rather than the names of the principals. The Belgian office that designed the housing at Alma-Gare follows a similar practice.
- 6 Daniel Bourdon, Dominique Girard, Raul Pastrana, of the group ABAC, “L’Assistance Technique à l’Atelier Populaire d’Urbanisme: Nouvelles Pratiques Urbaines,” unpublished manuscript.
- 7 Cited in Gontcharoff, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
- 8 ABAC, *carte-affiche*, March 1977. Print from the architects.
- 9 Bourdon, Girard, Pastrana, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
- 10 This autonomy and the failure of the socialists to court the Alma-Gare constituency more enthusiastically, came home to roost in the midterm elections of 1983, when the government of Roubaix went to the center-right parties. Although only 10 percent of the Alma-Gare vote went to the right, its refusal to support the socialist slate reflected its political independence.
- 11 Gontcharoff, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
- 12 Interview with Xavier Benoist, economic planner with SAEN, Roubaix, July 12, 1983. The SAEN (Société d’Aménagement et d’Équipement du Nord) is the agency responsible for overall redevelopment projects. Through an eminent-domain process, they purchased the houses in Alma-Gare from their private owners. The purchase price in this case was based on the value of the land less the cost of demolition. Where 70 percent or more of the existing structures were deemed deteriorated, the entire block was purchased for demolition; if 30 percent or more were in good condition and rehabilitation feasible, a portion of the block was left standing. The

SAEN determines both the purchase price of the land and the number of new units to be built. The SAEN then resells the land to the developer, in this case the local social (public) housing agency, the Office Publique de l'Habitat à Loyer Modéré (OPHLM). The resale price to the OPHLM is based on the eventual cost of new construction in the context of available government subsidies. This same economic analysis is used to determine the necessary density, expressed as a "c.o.s." (coefficient d'occupation du sol), equivalent to a floor-area ratio. The government

subsidies to the local housing agency include both a brick-and-mortar construction subsidy, similar to the now defunct Section 236 low-interest federal mortgages in the United States, and a rent subsidy program called APL (aide personnalisée au logement) paid directly to the developer to reduce the tenant's rent to a maximum of 10 percent of gross family income. In the case of unemployed tenants, this subsidy can, in effect, produce a "negative rent" by covering the entire rent plus a stipend for utilities as well.

- 13 Quoted in *Roubaix Alma-Gare: Lutte Urbaine et Architecture* (Brussels:

Editions de l'Atelier d'Art Urbain, 1982), p. 55. This book was published in conjunction with an exhibit at the Institut Français d'Architecture in Paris.

- 14 Interview with Michel Benoit, partner at AUSI A&P, Brussels, Belgium, July 14, 1983. AUSI, the firm name, stands for "architecture, urbanisme, sciences humaines, et ingénierie," reflecting the interdisciplinary practice of the office.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Quoted by Barry Bergdoll, "Subsidized Doric," *Progressive Architecture*, October 1982, p. 74.

- 17 *Ibid.*

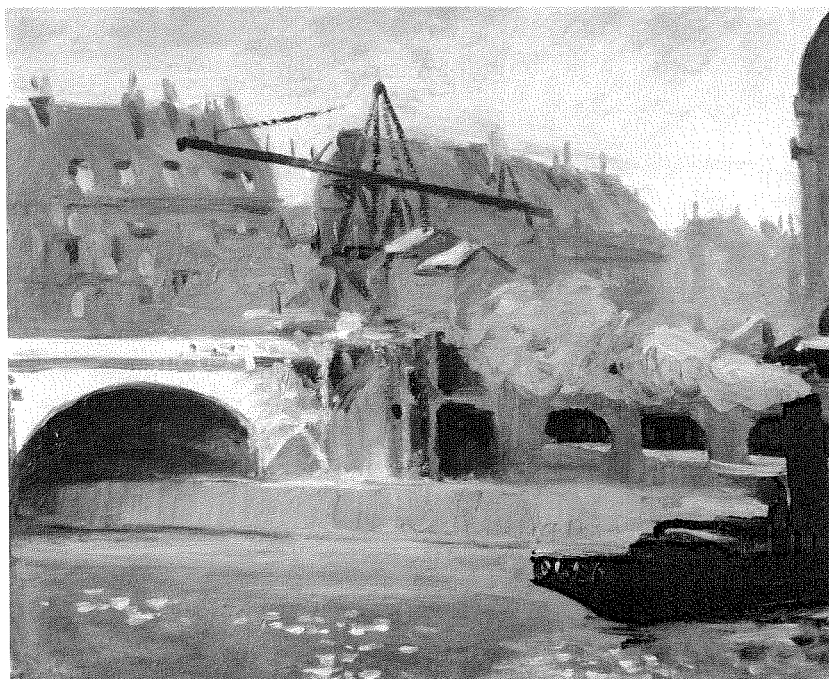
- 18 Interview with Albert Mollet, chief sociologist at Plan Construction, Paris, July 5, 1983. Plan Construction is an experimental program established in 1971 at the Ministère de l'Équipement. Mollet's office paid for the initial planning work by ABAC and has documented this and other participatory projects. See end note #1 above.
- 19 CSCV-APU, quoted in *Roubaix Alma-Gare: Lutte Urbaine et Architecture*, p. 14.

When Places Include People: Edward Hopper and George Segal

Glenn Robert Lym

The location of the body depicted in space, the location of the viewer in space, and the evocative quality of the body's posture are powerful techniques used by the painter Edward Hopper and the sculptor George Segal to give structure to space. Contrast this to an architect confined to creating building spaces by manipulating surfaces and openings without being able to control the position and action of people. Architectural space becomes dependent on the placement of physical elements only. It makes sense, then, that architectural space so conceived is photographed without people. People distract from the enduring physical character of architectural space. It becomes all too easy for people to be considered as a disturbing blur in front of space otherwise conceived.

My paper is not meant as art criticism, but is offered as an architectural appreciation of how two artists create space. I begin with Edward Hopper (1882–1967).



I Tugboat at Boulevard Saint Michel
Edward Hopper
1907
Oil on canvas. 23¾ × 28⅞ inches.
Collection of Whitney Museum of
American Art, New York
Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper
Acq#70.1250



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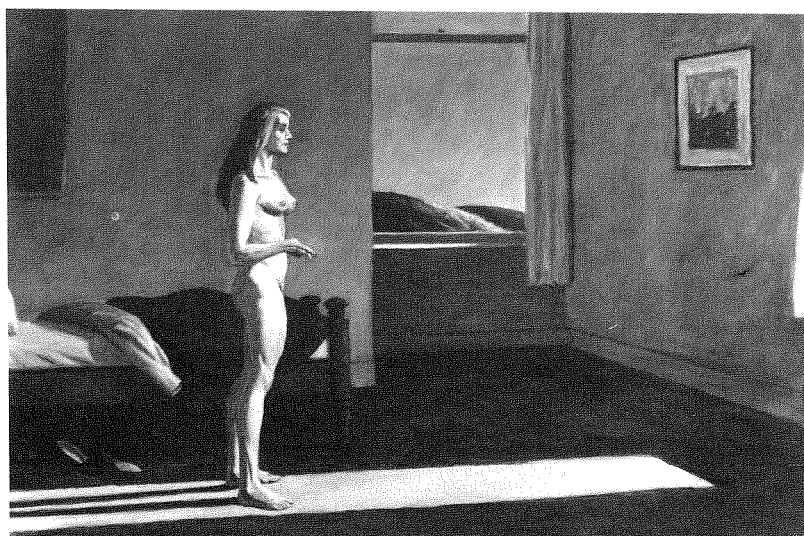
Edward Hopper: The Place In Between

As a painter, Edward Hopper has the pleasure of positioning the frame of his canvas wherever he wishes. He can include or exclude whatever he wants from his paintings of interior and exterior scenes. Many of his early paintings are technique and composition studies. Yet, occasionally, these paintings include a transitional element that moves the eye from the main scene to another place beyond the canvas. That element could be a dark window seen on a sunny Parisian apartment façade, a cave beneath Maine coastal rockscapes, or a shadowed vault beneath a Paris bridge, as in *Tugboat at Boulevard Saint Michel*.

After age 40, Hopper begins to depict a central place and its transition to another. Transitional elements such as windows, doors, and tunnellike forms become important. The human body now has a crucial role as a moderator between this central place and its adjacent area. In some paintings, the human form is intent on activity within the main area and ignores a suggested exterior area. In other paintings, the human form is oriented to activity outside the main area. In both instances this modulation of attention at the point between inside and outside has great consequences for the content of the scenes.

From Within A Private Place

Girl at Sewing Machine frames an interior room at its juncture with



3

3 A Woman in the Sun

Edward Hopper

1961

Oil on canvas. 40 × 60 inches.

Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

50th Anniversary Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Hackett in honor of Edith and Lloyd Goodrich. Acq#84.31.

2 Girl at Sewing Machine

Edward Hopper

1921

Oil on canvas. 19 × 18 inches.

Thyssen Bornemisza Collection
Lugano, Switzerland

an exterior window. Soft sunlight penetrates from an exterior light-yellow brick window-jamb and washes across a maroon plaster wall. At the window, a young woman in white, with soft, red-brown hair, is sewing. Her activity is supple and private. Our eyes are drawn to the completeness of this warm interior scene, set at the juncture of inside and outside. How different this is from *A Woman in the Sun*.

In *A Woman in the Sun*, the focus is outside an interior room. The naked woman is as much bathed in sunlight as called from bed by that light. You sense the origin of the light from without the room but do not see the sun. Paintings hang on the wall, but are mere decorations. Through another window, we see dark ridges in the distance that are also sunlit. Her attention is not on these ridges but on the sunlight itself. There is warmth emanating from without. Within there is melancholy.

Both these paintings concern two adjacent areas, a seen interior place set in reference to an unseen exterior place. The human form is placed and its posture configured to indicate whether the outside is to be ignored or embraced.

From The Outside Looking In

Some of my favorite Hopper paintings are based on the transition from inside to outside as viewed from the outside. Here, interior places are put within larger, balancing contexts. Human form is again used in conjunction with windows and doors to modulate



4



5

4 Apartment Houses

Edward Hopper

1924

Oil on canvas. 25½ × 31½ inches.

Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

5 Cape Cod Morning

Edward Hopper

1950

Oil on canvas. 34¼ × 40⅞ inches.

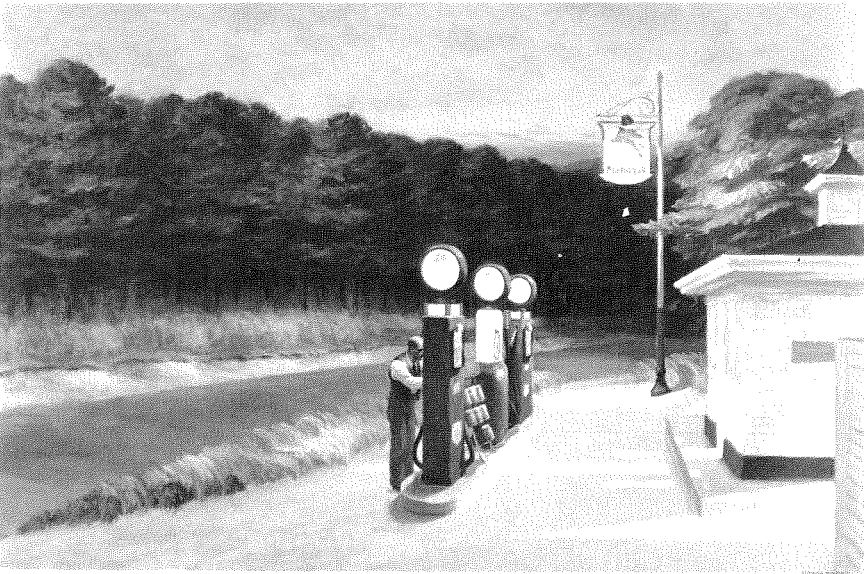
National Museum of American Art; gift of the Sara Roby Foundation



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attention to the interior or the exterior. Because the viewpoint of these paintings is now from the outside, this modulation can have particularly haunting qualities.

In *Apartment Houses* we see a sitting space separated by sun and air from neighboring windows. Our focus is on the interior room where a maid is arranging and fluffing up furniture, with her back to the scene outside. The occupant of the room is not at home. Perhaps he or she is working. Ironically, we see this leisure sleeping room during its working “off hours” with an employee in it. The sun backlights part of a curtain and lights a windowsill, a connection to the darkened, autonomous silhouettes out across the alley. As in *Girl at Sewing Machine*, inward activity is present here. But the exterior vantage point places the scene within a context. The observer wonders what lies behind the other windows. It is as if we see private lives strung out like clothes across a building façade—lives that are hidden during daily working hours.



7

6 August in the City

Edward Hopper, 1882–1967

1945

Oil on canvas. 23 × 30 inches.

Norton Gallery and School of Art,
West Palm Beach, Florida

7 Gas

Edward Hopper

1940

Oil on canvas. 26¼ × 40¼ inches.

Collection, The Museum of Modern Art,
New York. Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund.

In *Cape Cod Morning* we see into a bay window and an interior room set against a forest. The interior is warm and lit by the morning rays of the sun. Perhaps a meal is cooking in the kitchen. The dark forest is a cold and brooding presence in the early morning. A woman leans forward, orienting herself toward something beyond her room and the forest. She is interested in the sunrise, which we are not allowed to see. Instead, Hopper presents us with a meadow and a dark forest

beyond, which take up the right half of the canvas.

August in the City is one of my favorite Hopper images. Heavy architectural elements delineate an especially urbane relationship between interior and natural landscape. A sunlit, human interior—this time a luxurious sitting room—is portrayed adjacent to a dark forest. The sunlit fireplace, tables, and sculpture of a woman looking outwards, suspended in time, are wrapped by the heavy walls of the house. Outside, a path wraps by the forest and the room, to descend past the doorway portal, further isolating the interior from its context. The building is the keeper of a sunlit and timeless interior domain set in contrast to the unknown forest beyond. The thick windowed turret surrounds the interior as if it were a jewel, separating yet opening it to nature. The eye focuses evenly on both the interior and exterior as no live person is depicted.

Public Places Outside

In some of his paintings of exteriors, Hopper leaves his concern with the private sphere and examines public space. Yet he continues his interest in the transition between spaces, now transformed into a contrast between areas of routine versus ambiguous human activity.

In *Gas*, we see a gas station and forest set alongside a dark road. The road is barren and suggests movement out of the painting. The



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8 The Bridal Path

Edward Hopper

1939

Oil on canvas. 28 3/8 × 42 1/8 inches.

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

Anonymous Gift

9 Hotel Lobby

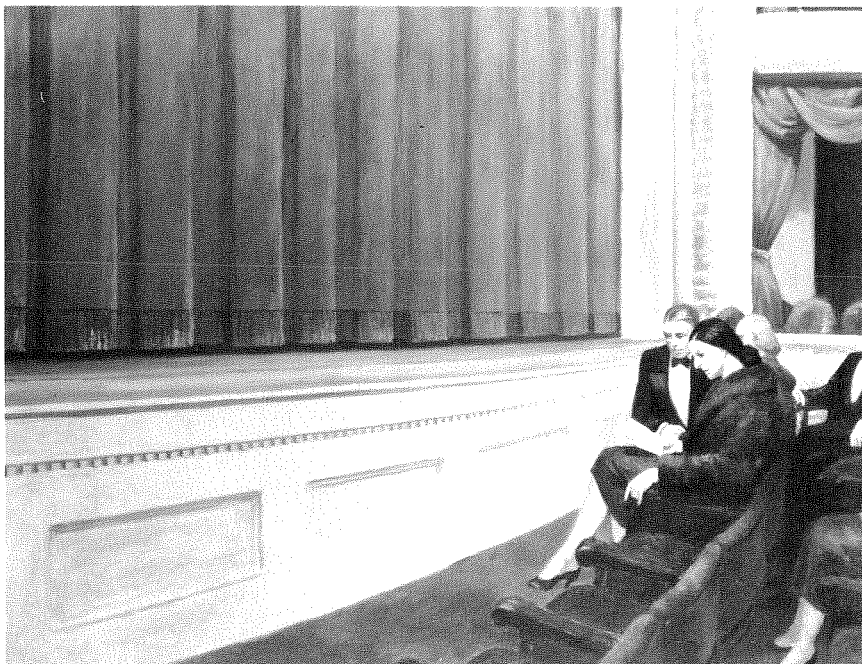
Edward Hopper, American, 1882–1967

1943

Oil on canvas. Acc. #47.4

Indianapolis Museum of Art,

William Ray Adams Memorial Collection



10



11

10 First Row Orchestra

Edward Hopper

1951

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden
Smithsonian Institution

11 New York Movie

Edward Hopper

1939

Oil on canvas. 32¼ × 40½ inches.

Collection, The Museum of Modern Art,
New York. Given anonymously.

road has no focus, only destinations and departures. The sun has set, yet Hopper's trees seem radiant. The attendant tinkers in the territory that he knows near his pumps, his back to the road and the forest. The elements of the station are held together by artificial light. Hopper's canvas sets the road and forest in taut contrast to the station.

The Bridal Path depicts two exterior places—the first, an energetic, rock-lined horse-path with three riders who are about to enter the second, a darkened tunnel. The rough rock-lined path faces the cut-stone tunnel. The buildings above grade contrast with the path below grade. The sunlit place is set against the dark tunnel. The rocks push up against, and then seem to fall into, the tunnel. Here Hopper places great movement and flurry in the form of three galloping horses with riders. The horses are ambiguous in their emotions. They are either spirited or hesitant to enter the tunnel. The female riders orient their bodies and their horses towards the tunnel. The male rider (or is it his horse?) expresses hesitation. This image uses human and animal forms to call out and to intensify the transition between what is known and what is not known.

Public Interiors

Hopper's paintings of public interiors are taken as pictures of lonely crowds, of individuals lost in their own thoughts, which are unrelated to the people with whom they rub elbows. To my eyes, his public interiors are remarkable for

their structural similarity to the spatial arrangements found in his other paintings. He depicts a single, public interior that hints of spaces beyond.

Though peopled, *Hotel Lobby* speaks of an empty interior space caught between an outside space and deeper interior spaces. The lobby is a transitional space that lacks its own focus. Its main element is an unoccupied aedicula-like reception desk. Like the highway in *Gas*, *Hotel Lobby* has a carpet stripe that proceeds past a forest, this time one painted on the wall. The stripe makes its way inward from the lobby's front door, past the dark reception portals and a darkened and empty dining area to terminate in a warmly lit, back-wall niche containing guest mail—the guests' connection to home. The placement and activity of the people emphasize the lobby's unfocused and transitory nature. The couple to the left are about to depart down the stripe to the exterior. The woman to the right is at home in the hotel yet her presence is not enough to bring life to this lobby. There is no connection between these two groups. Hopper's lobby is a waiting station, an interior roadway.

The left two-thirds of *First Row Orchestra* is a bare stage curtain about to go up at the beginning of a performance. Here is the interior equivalent of *The Bridle Path*. Instead of a rocky horse path, we have a theater with seats oriented forward. Instead of the dark tunnel, we have a lit proscenium arch with a blue-velvet curtain about to open.

Hopper has depopulated the audience to concentrate on their expressions and activity. The vacant seats underscore the tension surrounding the performance before it begins. As in *Bridle Path*, there is a mixed reaction to this uncertainty. Some study their programs while others stare patiently.

In *New York Movie*, the curtain has already lifted, and the performance has begun. To the left we see darkened individuals in the audience viewing a fantasy—the lit image of people on film. To the right, a female form is lit, caught in her own thoughts, her own images. Yet her reveries are simply pastimes within the labyrinth of the movie house, as stairs to her right wander up to the balconies. Selecting a remarkable vantage point, Hopper frames two interior areas, softly juxtaposed—to the left, outer-directed, and to the right, inner-directed reverie. This is a painting of our everyday lives.

Hopper's canvas examines the qualities of transition between distinct areas. Whether at a window, a door, a highway, a carpet stripe, a tunnel entrance, or a stage curtain, he uses the posture, gaze, and activity of the human form to develop qualities among these areas of lasting psychological power.

George Segal: No Space without People

In a Hopper work, there is the sense of physical space being modified by the presence of human occupants. In contrast, a sculpture by George Segal (born in 1924) seems to originate from people, to be modified by elements such as walls and signs. Remove people, and the physical elements cannot in themselves define space. Space, in a Segal sculpture, stems from the human body—its posture, the axis of its gaze, its front versus back, and the direction of its walk. Segal is a master at locating and positioning people in a way that generates space out of thin air with little need for physical elements.

The Unaccompanied Body

In *The Costume Party*, fantasy and life intertwine. The piece creates a body-derived space that explores gazing and its objects. Body height, body axes, and pecking order create a composition with mystical overtones. Are the couple in the same party as the fantastic beings or is one group set in the imagination of the other? If so, which group imagines the other? The couple in white lie on the ground. The man looks into the distance, perhaps daydreaming, while the woman looks past him out of concern or caught in her own reverie. Standing above them are four surreal individuals whose gaze is not casual. A man in red, to the right, looks straight ahead. Around his neck hangs a man's photograph. Another individual, dressed in black and wearing a cycle helmet,



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12 The Costume Party

George Segal

begun 1965

Acrylic on plaster, metal, wood, and mixed media. 6 × 12 × 9 feet.

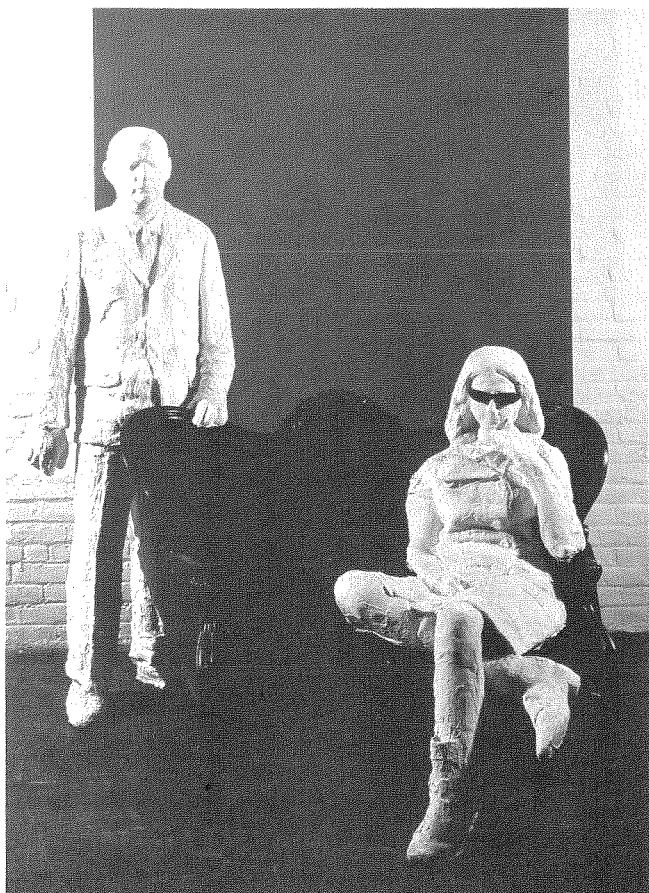
Courtesy Sidney Janis Gallery, New York City

also stares ahead. A yellow woman sits in a chair softly looking past the others in the same direction, just as the woman on the floor looks past the man in front of her. Meeting the surreal stares is an entity, to the left, dressed in a blue cape and an animal's head—the pagan god or fantasy figure that is the object of the yellow, black, and red stares.

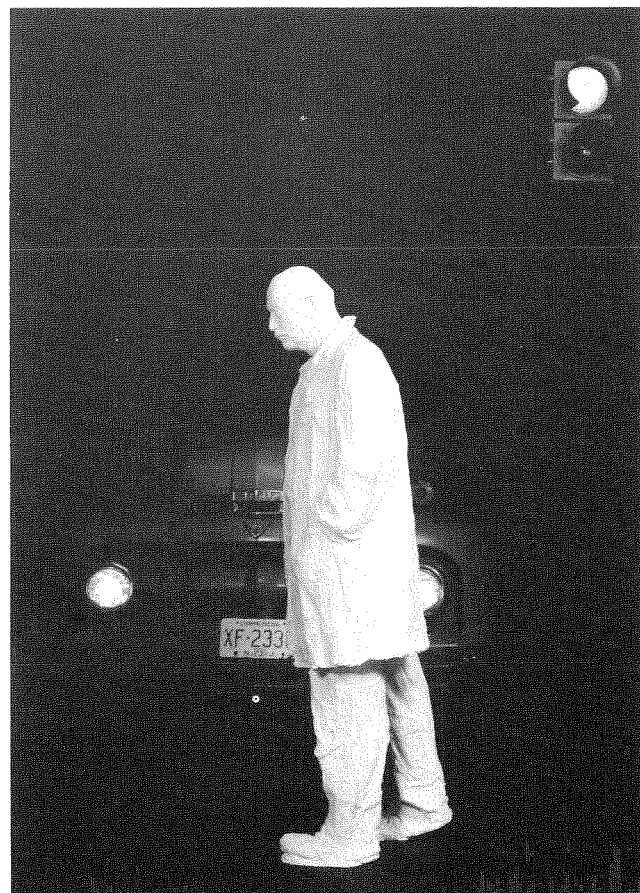
In *Robert and Ethel Scull*, the themes of separation and togetherness are developed spatially through the use of a wall and a sofa in conjunction with two figures. The man and the woman are remote, yet they stare at us. The woman, wearing dark glasses, is seated in a semirelaxed, semiglaring, possibly bored posture. The man is standing above and behind her, his hand on her sofa;

his position suggests social reserve as well as protection of the woman. The red wall adds a challenging tone to this scene. The couple is brought together by their mutual distance and aloofness from us and not by their physical closeness to each other. There is an implied boundary between them and us that pulls them together.

The Red Light is a simple yet powerful scene. The white figure of a man walks perpendicularly across the path of a dark truck-grill. The truck is actually hung, cableless and driverless, from a dark museum wall. A red stoplight shines above, identifying this as a nighttime street corner scene. The truck's headlights glare into our eyes, light the man, and underscore the tension. The truck is a large



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driverless, mechanical beast about to rip the man out of its way. Yet there is no animal snarl, no loud noise. In reality there is only the silence, the lights, and the sound of a museum's air-conditioning system.

Bodies and Buildings

When Segal places architectural elements near the human figure, a special symbiosis occurs. The architectural setting provides a painterly background that comments on that figure's state of mind. Likewise, the figure gives the architectural setting a focus, a human form upon which to elaborate. The figure and the background fuse to create space.

In *The Parking Garage* the attendant is slumped over his seat in

front of a fragment of a larger wall, waiting. He, too, is parked here. Though he helps others drive up and be on their way, he is bored and stalled; he melts into the wall. The fragment of the building behind him performs double duty. It calls out and comments on his job. The wall itself is a wonderful composition of wood, metal, paint, and light-bulb textures that frame the figure. On the wall is a sign, "park," commenting on the scene. Yet, it is a painting—a deep and dreamy blue surface to the right, framed in black, adjacent to the jarring yellow and black diagonal stripe, with the parking sign rectangle juxtaposed to the top left. A metal bumper protects the wall from the absent automobiles.

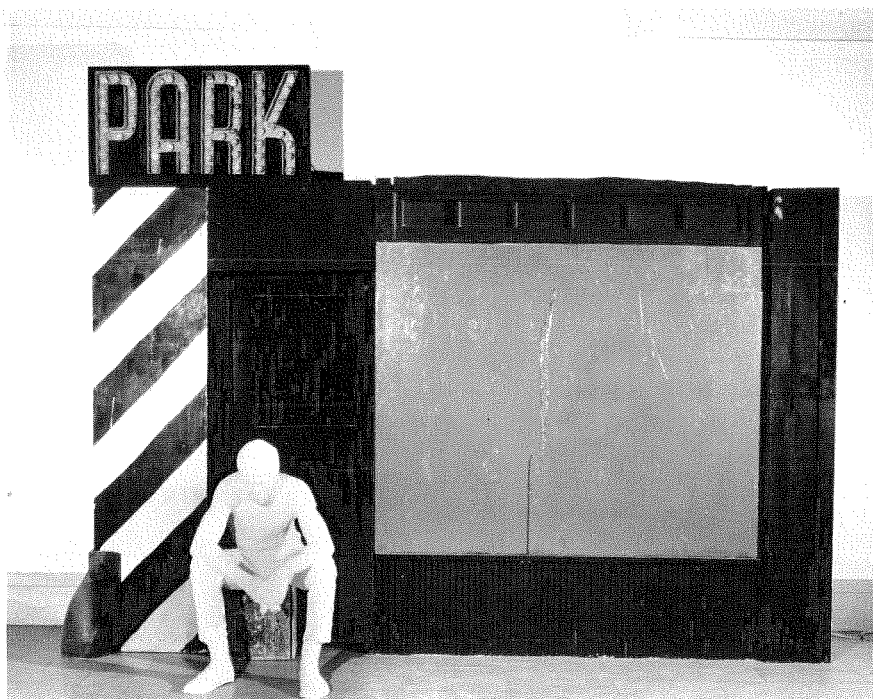
To All Gates uses architectural elements to create a classic spatial

13 Robert and Ethel Scull

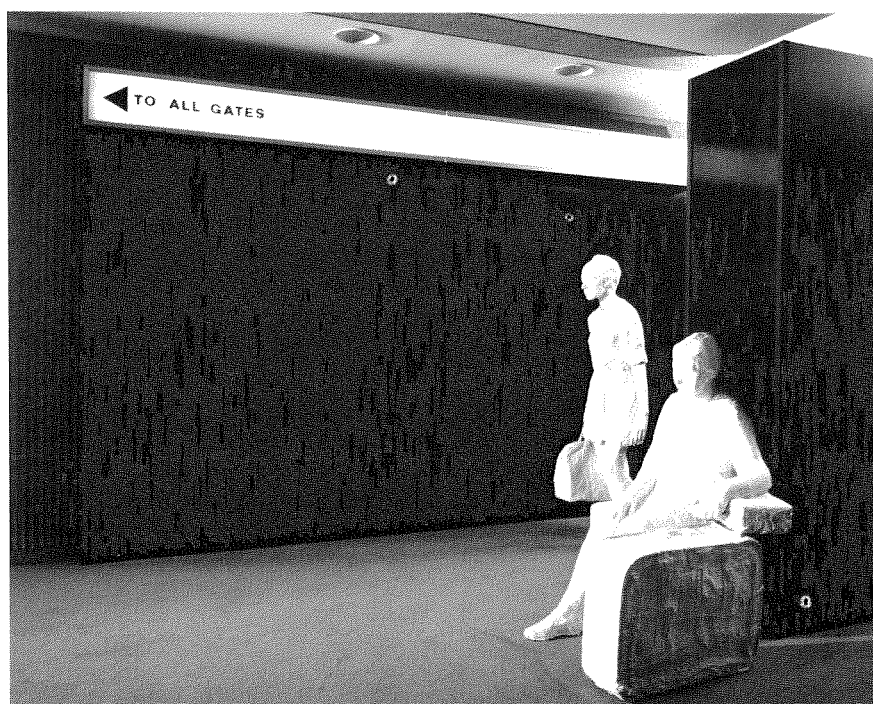
George Segal
1965
Private Collection

14 The Red Light

George Segal, American (b. 1924)
1972
Plaster and Mixed Media.
H. 114 × W. 96 × D. 36 inches.
The Cleveland Museum of Art,
Purchase, Andrew R. and Martha Holden
Jennings Fund



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contrast that reinforces the figures' posture. Segal has placed a stationary black column in front of a running black wall having a long, narrow, red-lit, arrowed sign. The column stakes out a point on the ground in contrast to the wall that moves to the left down the corridor "to all gates." Human figures develop this contrast. A heavyset woman rests by the stationary column. She sits on her baggage and leans against the column. Behind her, a thinner woman holds her own luggage while she walks along the wall to be whisked to some far-off destination. The scene is about rest and movement, as told by body postures and a building.

Space can be generated by human form alone in Segal's work. Great demand is placed upon the human body to create space through body axiality, gait, and stance. Yet when architectural elements are used, they supply spatial, social, and textural elaboration on these human forms. The human forms, through their posture and activity, provide a point of discussion for these architectural elements.

15 The Parking Garage

George Segal

1965

Plaster, wood, metal, and electrical parts.

117¼ × 155 inches.

The Newark Museum

16 To All Gates

George Segal

1971

Plaster, wood, plastic, and lights.

243.8 × 365.8 × 228.6 cm.

Coffin Fine Arts Trust Fund

Des Moines Art Center

Place in the Eyes of the Artist

In the work of Hopper and Segal, space develops in relation to human occupancy. In Hopper's paintings, the human figure is arranged and framed in relation to transitional elements—windows, doors, or a stage curtain—to create a subtle depiction of inside versus outside or known versus unknown. In Segal's sculpture, the human body is carefully placed in relation to other figures to create spaces of great poignancy. When architectural elements are used, they frame and comment on human lives. By including people in their work, Hopper and Segal open space to a wealth of emotional, bodily nuances.

How different this is from architectural expression, an expression that does not often depend on human form to shape space. Current architecture often makes reference to past spaces in creating a new place. Hopper and Segal make no effort to refer to other times and places. Their images celebrate everyday places, yet capture moments that reveal fundamental human character. In an era of architectural one-liners, the work of Hopper and Segal is open to many levels of viewing. They depict physical elements yet understand their relation to the human soul. They understand the inseparability of physical artifacts from their human contexts. Architecture becomes alive when human drama is entwined in its physical features.

Acknowledgment

The author wishes to thank Don Lyndon, Ruth Lym, Gary Parsons, Rachel Rush, and Reid Condit for their comments on an earlier draft.

Drawing on Mount Athos: The Thousand-Year Lesson

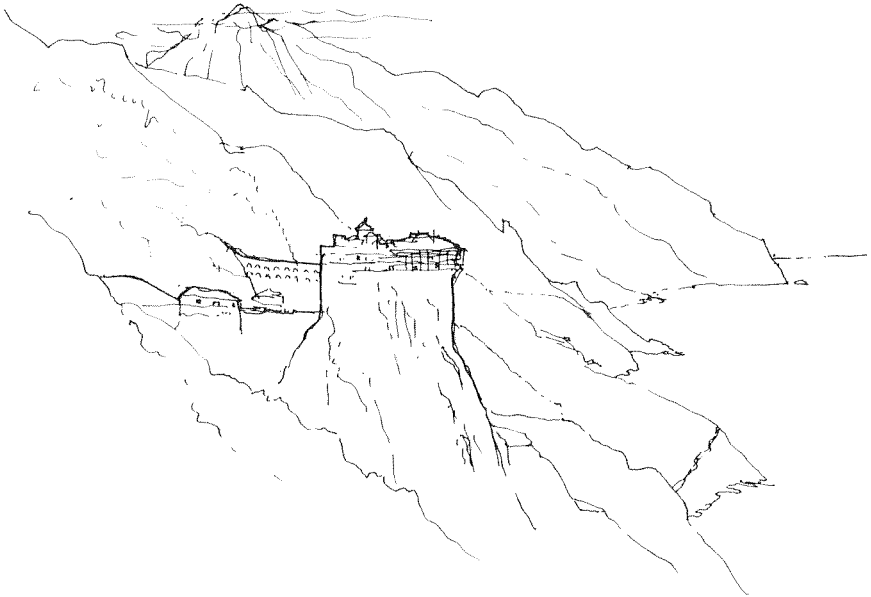
Patrick J. Quinn
Drawings by the author

Preface

The monastic settlement of Mount Athos is a curious anomaly, being neither truly Western nor truly Eastern in its spirituality. It is isolated, ascetic, contemplative, and includes both coenobitic (communal) and idiorrhythmic (individual, hermitlike) life-styles.

Its architectural complexes evoke images of both Tibetan (Lhasa) and European medieval settlements. Yet its details range from Byzantine to Moldo-Wallachian to Moorish to neoclassical. While it sits on a peninsula in northern Greece its origins and attitudes are the antithesis of classical Greek thought. Faith takes precedence over rationality as the keystone of its life structure. Its mystics seem much closer to Buddhists than to Benedictines. Its communal prayer is closer to the Copts of ancient Egypt than to the Gregorians of the West. In fact, its way of life is more faithful to the ideas of Pachomius, the fourth-century founder of Western monasticism in the deserts of Egypt, than to later ideals.

Abbot Suger who, in building the church of Saint-Denis covered the altar with gold and precious stones, would probably have loved the interiors of Athonite churches. Bernard, who took Suger so much to task for his materialism, might have been delighted with the dwellings and other buildings of Athos, in their bare-boned, ascetic strength. One of the purposes of this paper is to reveal the rich architectural potential of the Athos plan.



Historical Note

Contemplative monks had already begun to frequent Mount Athos by the seventh century A.D. Athos became a refuge from the hostility of both Byzantine emperors and the people of Constantinople toward monasticism in general. The Holy Mountain was not referred to as a monastic “center” until the ninth century when monks from Mount Athos took part in the Council of 843 convened by the Empress. Two key personalities emerged about this time: one devoted to the eremitical (individual, ascetic) life, Peter the Athonite, and the other, Euthymios, of Salonica who favored a semi-eremitical life that included some communal structure.

The breakup of village communities and the Arab conquest also acted as factors in inducing holy men to seek the slopes of Mount Athos. Pirate raids and repetitive pillage forced them steadily toward the least accessible areas at the peninsula’s southern end, where by the ninth century many hermits were grouped into loosely organized communities, Lavras, modeled after those of Palestine. Their elders formed an assembly, the Synaxis, on the heights of Zygos.

The coenobitic, or communal life was introduced by Athanasios, who established what I call the Athos **plan** in the design of the first major monastery, Grand Lavra in 963 A.D. Despite resistance from those who favored the eremitical life, the “rules and disciplines” of Athanasios were embodied in the first **typikon** or Charter in 971;

these continue to govern life on Mount Athos today.

In 1453 Mount Athos fell under Turkish rule. Imposition of taxes and tariffs threatened the economic survival of the monastic communities. Part of their response was to adopt the idiorrhythmic way of life. In this mode individuals live virtually as hermits yet are affiliated with a monastery whose liturgical functions they attend as infrequently as three times a year. Although in the twentieth century almost all of the Athonite monks live under coenobitic rule in communally owned structures, two monasteries remain idiorrhythmic.

Despite its origins as a refuge for hermits and ascetics, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Mount Athos became the intellectual center of Greece. The Athonite Academy was founded to prepare the rebirth of Hellenism. The Greek War of Independence in 1821 marked a rapid decline of such Athos-based scholarship, when many of the monks took up arms against the Turks. In the late nineteenth century, however, the population of the Holy Mountain reached a peak of some 7,000 monks, with members from Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, etc., and great material support from royal patronage in those countries, a patronage which, for obvious reasons, has almost disappeared in the twentieth century. Mount Athos once again is an isolated retreat from the world; its population is just over 1,500.

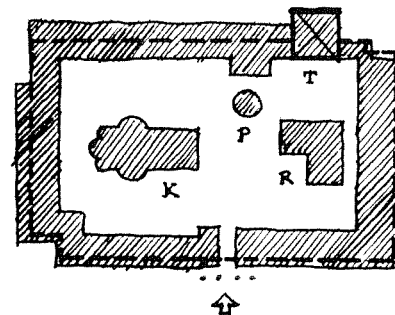
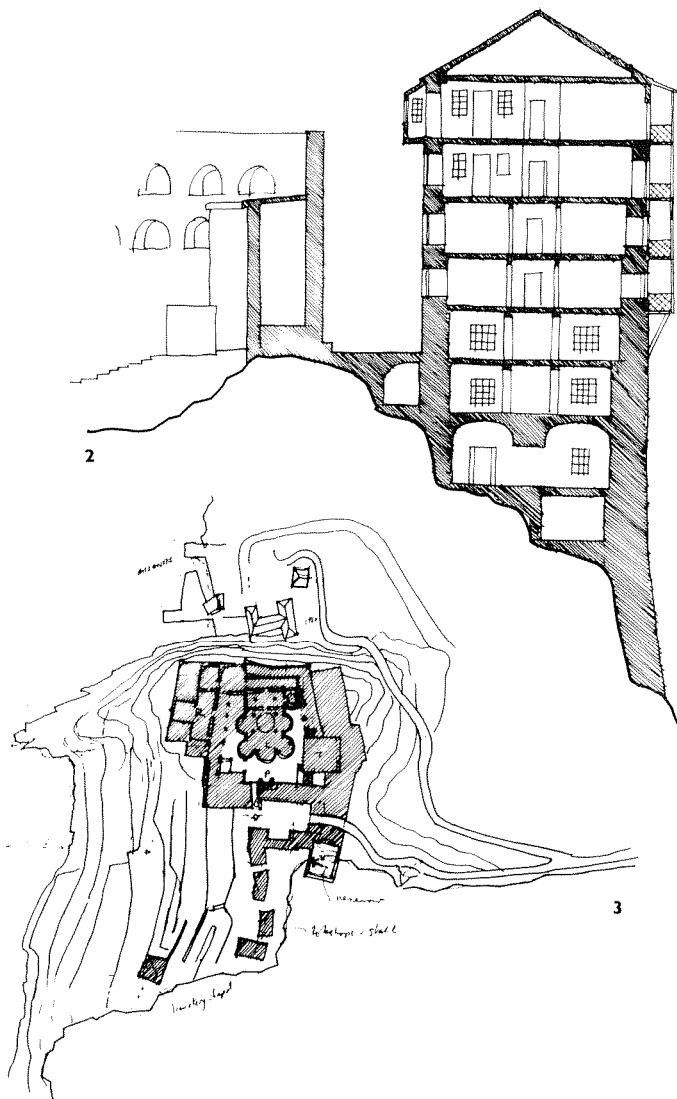
Introduction

Few American architects have ventured to visit this extraordinary repository of architecture. Paul Mylonas of Athens is the only European architect in the field who has studied it with any degree of seriousness. Perhaps the cause is difficulty of access, the monastic diet, or the lack of modern conveniences. Architects like to eat and sleep well when they travel and hate to be far from a telephone or post office. Yet, in a time of studious concern with historic precedent, despite the fact that an historian such as Joseph Connors considers it “more relevant for architects than ever,” Athos is neglected.

Athos is the easternmost of the three promontories of the Chalkidiki, a Greek peninsula some 60 kilometers long that stretches into the Aegean Sea from a low, gentle landscape at the isthmus to a 2,000-meter-high peak of white marble rising sheer from the rocks at the stormy tip.

The peninsula is reached by boat, and from its tiny harbors narrow trails lead up through forests, meadows, along cliffs, and streambeds to the monasteries. Time is measured by sunrise and sunset. The monks fish, raise bees, grow vegetables, olives, vines, and harvest chestnut forests. They also make icons and other devotional objects. The Holy Mountain is dedicated to the Virgin.

There are 20 monasteries today, most coenobitic, a few idiorrhythmic, and many small sketae, kellia, and



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even inhabited caves. After two study trips to the Holy Mountain I am convinced that it offers enlightening examples of:

the adaptability of a formal model, the **plan** to a variety of site-types, settings and scales; the integration of architecture and the land; and the integration of formal and informal orders of architecture.

The Plan

In 963, despite protests from those who favored the traditional ascetic, eremitical life, Athanasios founded the first formal monastery as a communal model, Grand Lavra. The **plan** was clear and has been used as an architectural model ever since.

A rectangular area was enclosed by a protective stone wall, with a single, formal entrance and a defensive tower, usually at the highest point. Within the enclosure were placed the three major communal buildings in a clear relationship to one another: the Katholikon, or main church, the Tramezza, or refectory, and the Phiale, or holy well.

The monks' cells were arrayed along the inner face of the wall, often in random groupings. In many cases, as the monastery grew, the cells rose above, poked through, and even clung to the outer face of the wall. The contrast between these and the formal character of the communal structures often results in what Charles Moore calls the Doctrine of the Immaculate

2 **Simonopetra**, section through nineteenth-century building.

3 **Dionysion**, site plan.

4 **Philotheou**, from the south.

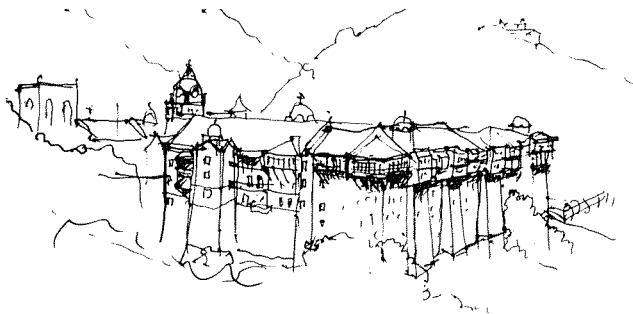
5 **The Plan**.

6 **Iveron**, from the southeast.

7 **Philotheou**, site plan.

8 **The Katholikon**, sketch plan (Dionysiou).

9 **The Tramezza** (Refectory), Xenophontos.



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Collision, a most lively and aesthetically exciting complexity.

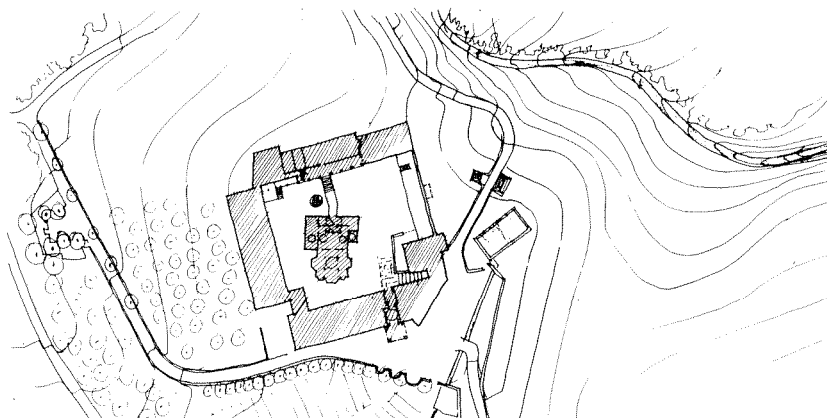
Other areas such as the library, workshops, small chapels, etc., are found in various places within the “thickened” wall. The laundry, bakery, infirmary, wine presses, icon painting studios, and storage vary in placement inside and outside the walled complex.

These monasteries, pillaged and often burned by pirates, crusaders, Saracens, and others, have been built and rebuilt, transformed in size and shape, and adapted to changing occupancy and changing technology over the past 1,000 years; yet the **plan** remains, sometimes clearly evident, sometimes hidden in complexity as the architectural genesis of Athonite monasteries today.

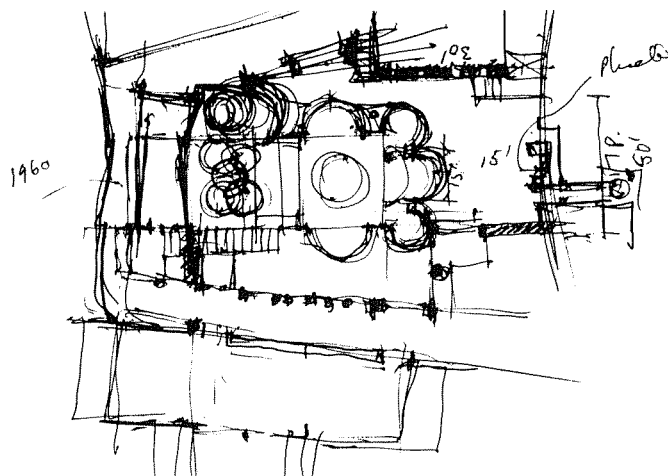
The formal **Katholikon** has a triple-apsidal plan, one apse for the Holy Table (usually with two subapses for the treasury and the Diakonium), and two lateral ones for singers and dignitaries. There is usually, in addition to the Naos, a sequence of spaces making a narthex and an exo-narthex, thus, ritualizing in the architecture both the structure of the liturgy and the degrees of entrance and inwardness.

The symmetrical multidomed structure is reminiscent of Armenian churches, and it is no surprise to find that Athanasios came from ancient Trebizond.

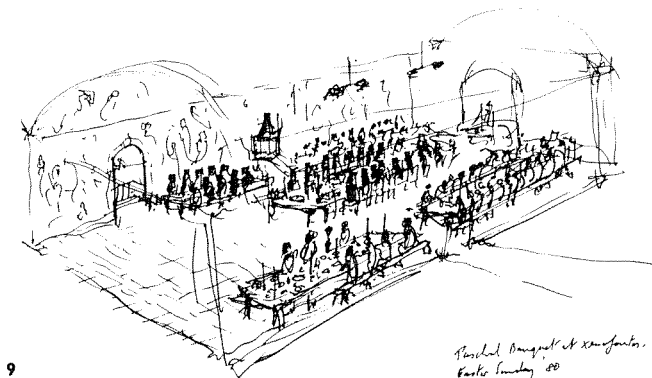
The **Refectory** is generally a rectangular space with an apse at



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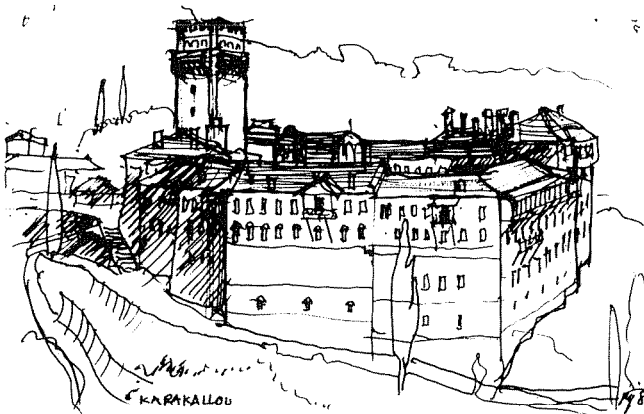


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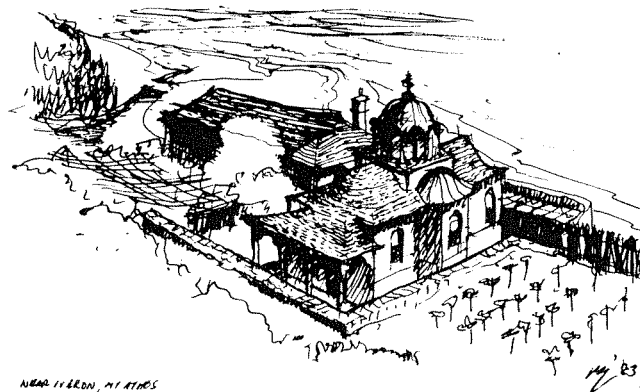


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Refectory, Monastery of St. Panteleimon, Kato Syros, 1960



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one end in front of which sits the abbot on a raised dais. Monks sit at two long rows of tables lining the walls; a raised lectern on one side provides for readings during meals. The space may be L-shaped, as at Koutlemoutsiou, or T-shaped as at Dionysiou. Sometimes a shortage of enclosed court space forces the Refectory to be built into the wall or up close to it, as at Chilandari or at Docheiariou.

Both the Katholikon and the Refectory are customarily decorated with rich frescoes covering interior walls and domes.

The **Phiale**, the third of the communal ritual structures, serves for the monthly Blessing of the Waters and on the feast of the Baptism of Christ. It may be circular or polygonal, ringed by eight columns within low parapet slabs and covered by a hemispherical dome, with a richly frescoed interior.

Architectural character is quite varied within this scheme, ranging from the thirteenth-century Byzantine Katholikon at Chilandari to that at Docheiariou, which is Moldo-Wallachian. Neoclassical

forms appear at the entrance to Iverson and in at least one of the chapel façades at the Russian monastery of Panteleimon. Vernacular elements surround and interweave with these, creating a very rich complexity.

Some windows and doors, for example, at Isphigmenou and Docheiareiou remind one of postmodern details from the current pages of *Progressive Architecture*.

The same might be said of the bedroom stoves at Vatopedia and the stove in the Governor's office at Karyes.

Adaptability of the Plan

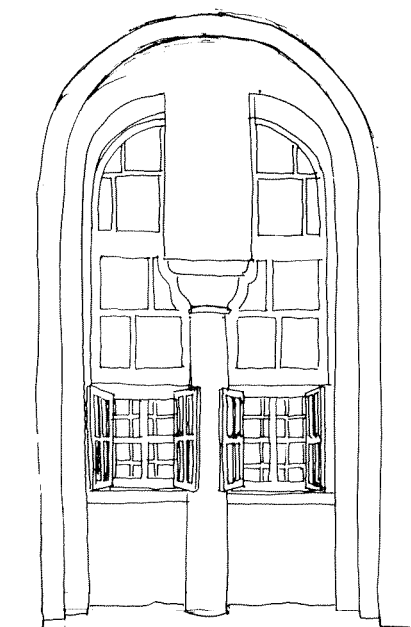
The monastic enclosure varies in size from about one-half an acre at Dionysiou to over three acres at Vatopedia. Adaptation of the **plan** varies ingeniously, from site to site, with topography, orientation, and size. Chilandari, for example, rests expansively in a sheltered valley. Simonopetra clings tightly to a rocky, often stormy, pinnacle.

The **plan's** shape shifts from the pure rectangle, as at Lavra,

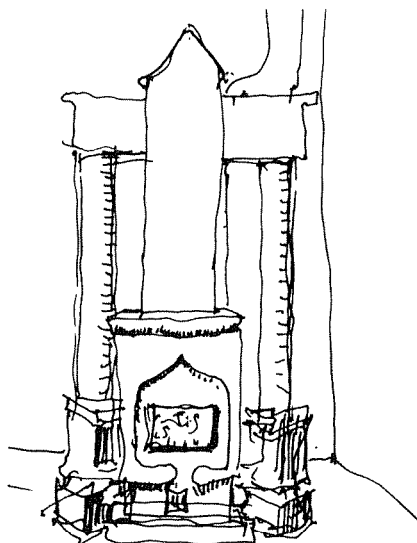
10 **Phiale**, Iveron.

11 **Karakallou**, from the southeast.

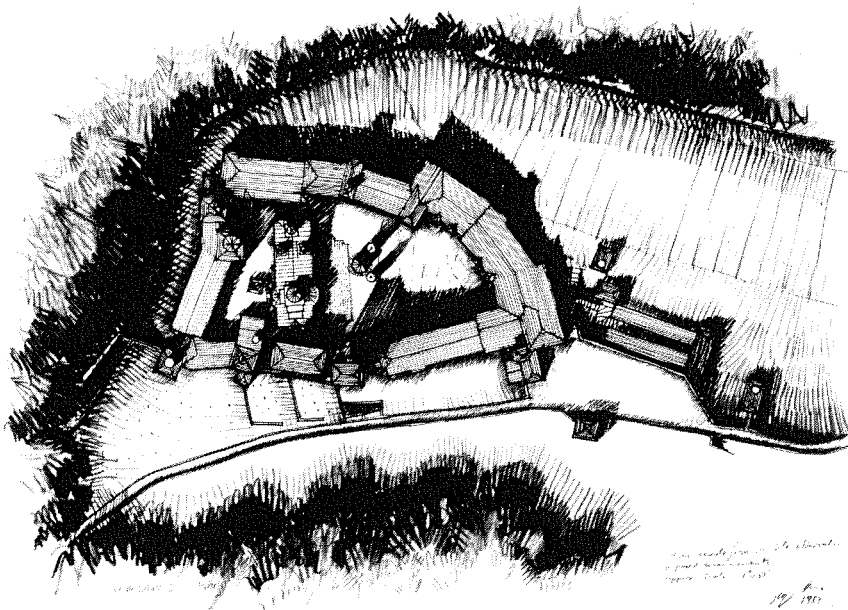
12 **Kellion**, near Iveron.



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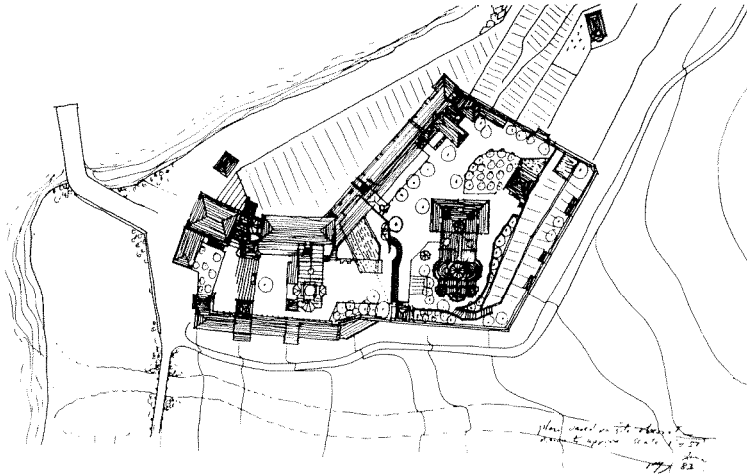


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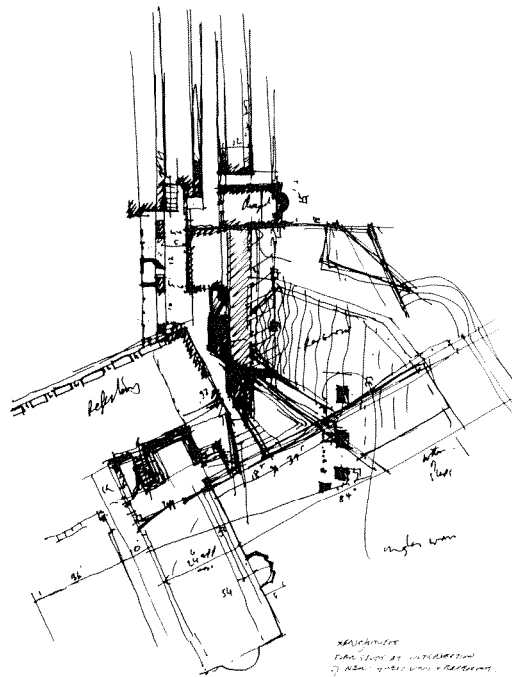
13 Katholikon window, Dockeiriou.

14 The Governor's stove, Karyes.

15 Chilandari, site plan.



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Koutlemoutsiou or Philotheiou, to bent, cramped or distorted versions at Iveron, Docheiariou, and Xenophontos. At Xenophontos a large nineteenth-century addition extends and embraces the old, creating a new whole where we find the **plan** within the **plan**. The meeting of these walls is so complex as to defy understanding without close study.

The monastery of Dionysiou is so cramped on its rocky site that it reduces the courtyard to a mere passage on three sides of the Katholikon. The most extreme example of adaptability is found at Simonopetra, which I will describe in more detail later.

Integration of Architecture and Land

No less important than the adaptation of the **plan** to various site types is the careful manner in which each building complex is related to topography, land-planning, and cultivation. It is hard to tell, in some cases, whether the building was shaped to the land or the landscape tailored to the architectural form. Each site utilizes a precious stream for water supply, water power, and irrigation. Reservoirs are placed within the walls and near the gardens. Aqueducts are sometimes needed to conduct the flow. Orientation to the sun and shelter from the wind help to determine the best location for vines, vegetables, etc., and for their closeness to the buildings. These are important factors in the layout of each complex.

16 Xenophontos, site plan.

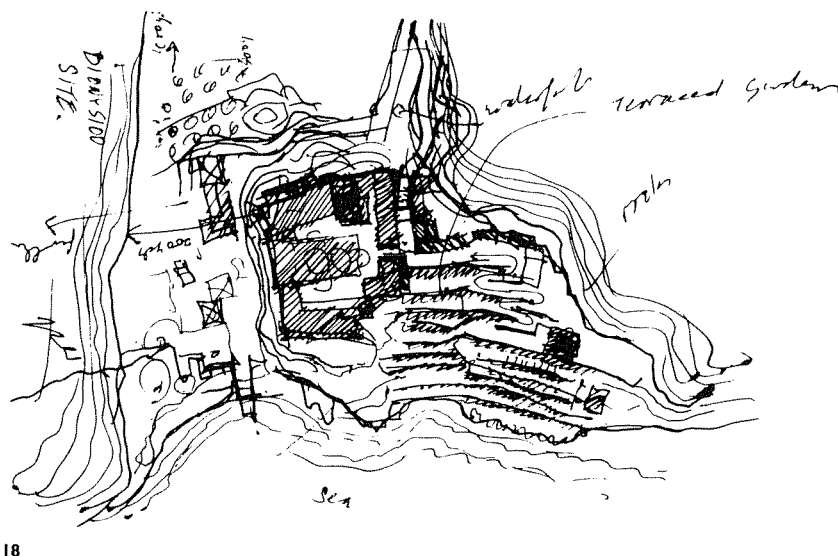
17 Detail of the plan, Xenophontos.

The flatter, more fertile land of the North allows for less confined buildings and gardens yet, even there, clear economy is evident in the planning. The larger fields, groves, tree rows, and waterways are no less carefully organized. Tree rows soften wind effects. Slopes both expose and protect planting as nature demands. Water is distributed without waste. Trails are laid out to minimize erosion.

The rocky southern garden slopes are carefully terraced with stone walls, often up to 30 feet high. Every enclosed meter is closely planted with life-supporting supplies. These make beautiful, mosaic-like patterns on the land. Olive groves, needing less precise ordering, serve as soft buffers between the small-scale gardens and the wilderness.

The retaining walls sometimes appear as a continuation of the monastery architecture as at Simonopetra or Dionysiou. The building acts in counterpoint to the landscape, thus making a fine integration, both ecological and visual, therefore aesthetic, of architecture and site.

At Dionysiou, even the elements protruding from the upper building walls seem to be of the same order as the stepped garden walls of the slope below. At Xenophontos, when the monastery was expanded in the last century, the extension embraced some of the terraces which now appear within the enclosure, giving ease of access to produce and utilizing the new court area to the maximum.



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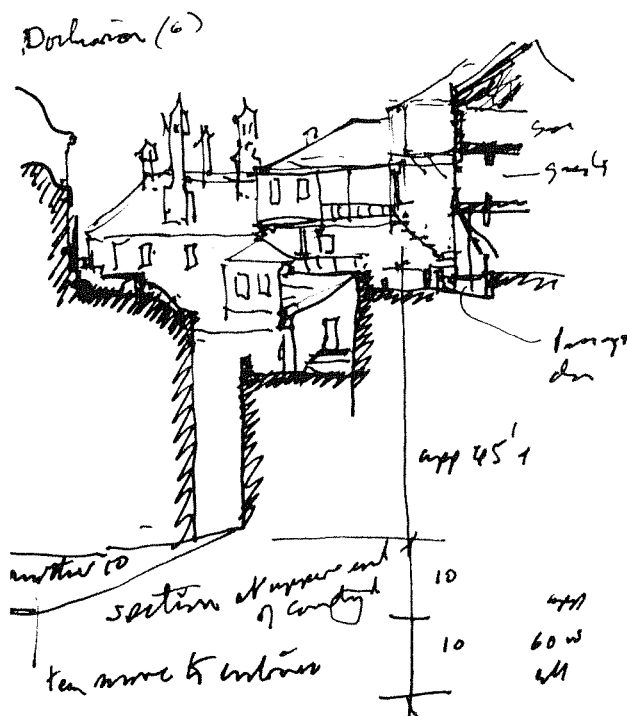


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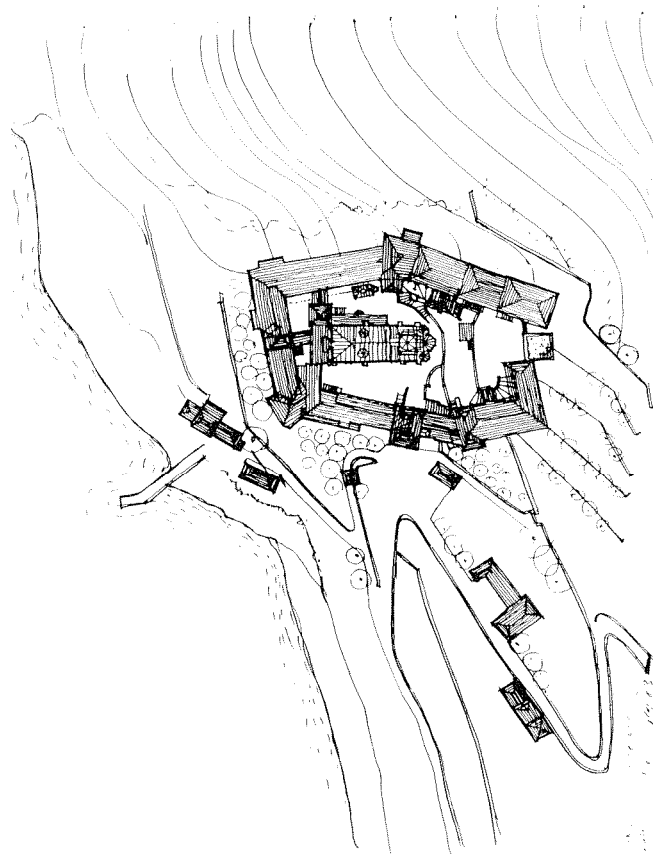
18 Dionysiou, site plan.

19 Dionysiou, from the south.

20 Dionysiou, view of the entrance from within.



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Docheiariou's tightly packed structure on a steep slope reduces the courtyard almost to a narrow, stepped street.

Integration of Formal and Informal Architecture

This phenomenon of Athos can be illustrated by two general examples; *first*, the cells, their distribution, design, and relationship to the **wall** and other nonritual spaces; *second*, the entrance and its ritualistic sequence of spatial experience in penetrating the complex.

The monks' cells illustrate the possibility of personalization of one's own space/world within the larger world of an impersonal, communal life-style. Its many Athonite variations show the range and degrees of asceticism reflected

in the architecture. Each monk's cell is his own world and the diversity of these is difficult to anticipate. Some are merely boxes protruding from the face of the **wall** or crowning it like crenelations. Others are anonymous units in three-story ranges. Some occur within the form of the **wall**, identified only by windows. Some are sparsely furnished. At the opposite extreme a monk in the idiorrhythmic monastery of Vatopedia has an apartment complete with a stereo set and comfortable furnishings. His habit hangs, infrequently used, on a hook in the corner. His dress while "at home" is casual, worldly.

As a result of all this, the cells and their balconies, shared and singular, vary the **wall**, inside and out like the interweavings of a rich tapestry.

21 Docheiariou, section.

22 Docheiariou, site plan.



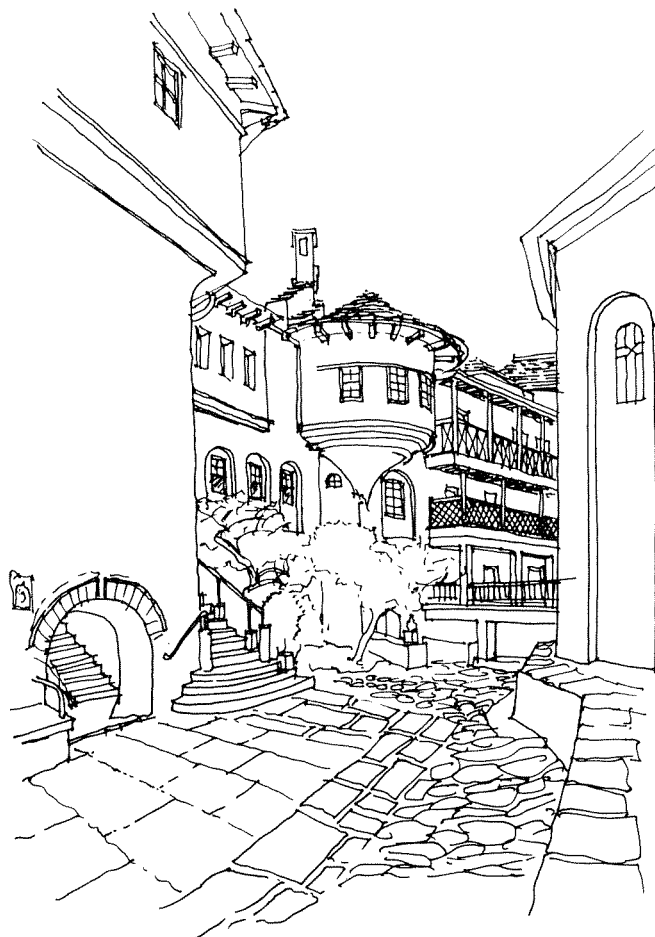
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The many shifts in detail, form, and scale are seen in the unity of this larger tapestry despite their almost anarchistic diversity.

The small chapels, the guest rooms, stores, etc., serve only to further enrich this diversity within the overall, formal order.

Two entrance sequences can serve as our second set of examples.

At Isphigmenou the trail emerges from the mountainside, crosses a bridge, and passes under two sentinel trees into a forecourt, which welcomes the coastal trail and is flanked by the reservoir. The formal opening in the wall is arched, symmetrical, and flanked by two strong, blue columns. The color scheme of the entrance, terracotta red, cerulean blue, and white



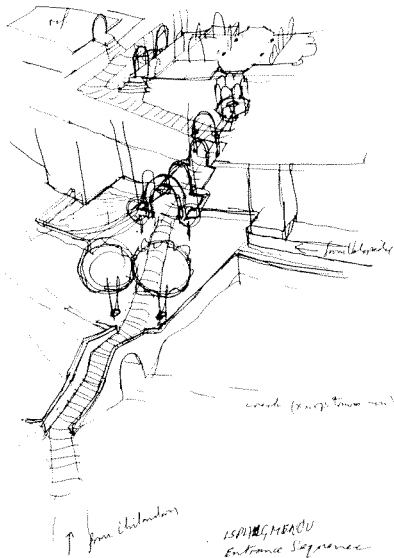
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is common among the monasteries and serves to emphasize the opening in the grey mass of the structure.

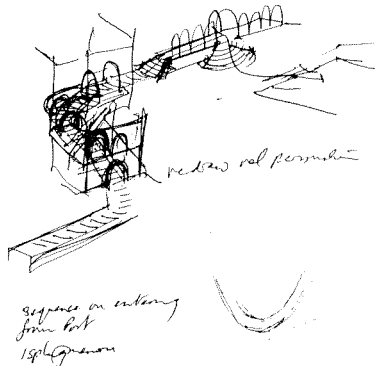
The great, iron-studded oak doors, which open at sunrise and close at sunset, give way to a series of four vaulted and frescoed spaces within the thickness of the wall. A second pair of doors on the inner face opens into the court where the imposing Phiale confronts the pilgrim. Its richness of detail and strength of form increases the anticipation of the Holy Place, presaged by the frescoes of the passage. The dramatic light changes from the glare of the forecourt to the darkness of the passage to the brilliance of the Phiale's light marble set against the dark red of the Katholikon wall is clearly intended.

23 Docheiariou, courtyard.

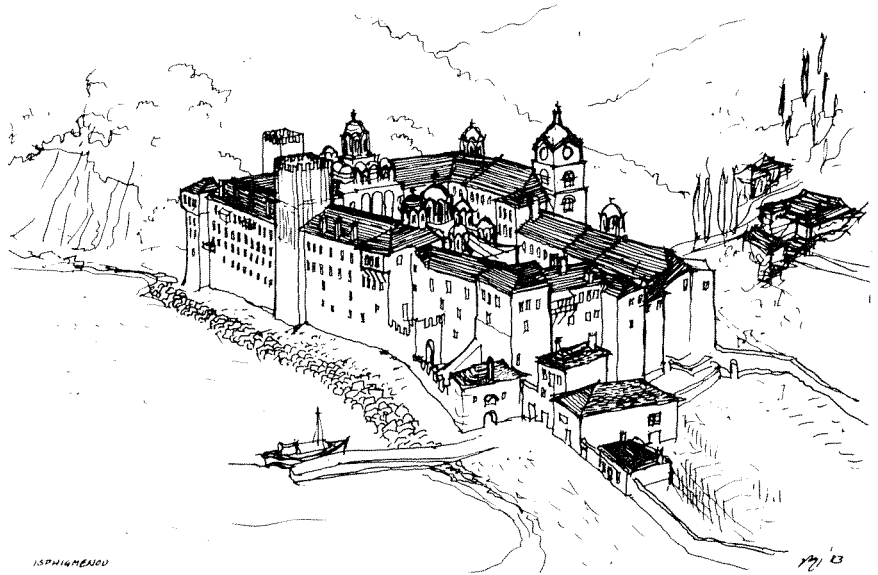
24 Karakallou, courtyard.



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The Phiale serves also to turn one's route gently and firmly towards the colonnaded entrance of the Katholikon and the space between it and the Refectory. The sequence becomes utterly formal as one proceeds from the esonarthex to the ikonostasis where the great dome and the image of the Pantokrator on its inner surface terminate this journey into the Holy.

The monastery has a second entrance from the sea (now used more frequently) that penetrates the complex in the same winding, articulated, increasingly formal order.

Chilandari has a shorter but even more dramatic sequence. Here the vaults of the passage through the wall are interrupted by a great light well in the middle. Thus, one goes from light-vast to dark-small, to light-high, to dark-small, finally turning at right angles to the breathtaking beauty of the court. The Katholikon is away on the far side, yet seems close and intimate, fronted by its most elegant Phiale, which in turn is flanked by two regal, ancient cypresses.

These entrance sequences, bending and adapting to the site's peculiarities, provide both informal and formal order in easy coexistence. They are like spatial rosaries whose beads vary in beauty, shape, and importance yet whose stringing gives order and clarity to their disparity.

Simonopetra: The Ultimate Example

More than any other monastery Simonopetra illustrates the ideas outlined in the preceding sections. So well does it succeed in subsuming both the plan and its modes of variation that they are virtually unrecognizable as separate considerations. Perhaps that is why the first sight of its singular form moves one so deeply.

I have therefore made a more precise set of drawings of Simonopetra's plans and sections, for it is worth careful study and its complexity defies easy analysis. The drawings show how wonderfully clever the builders were in encircling the pinnacle, distributing space according to both hierarchy of function and symbolic importance.

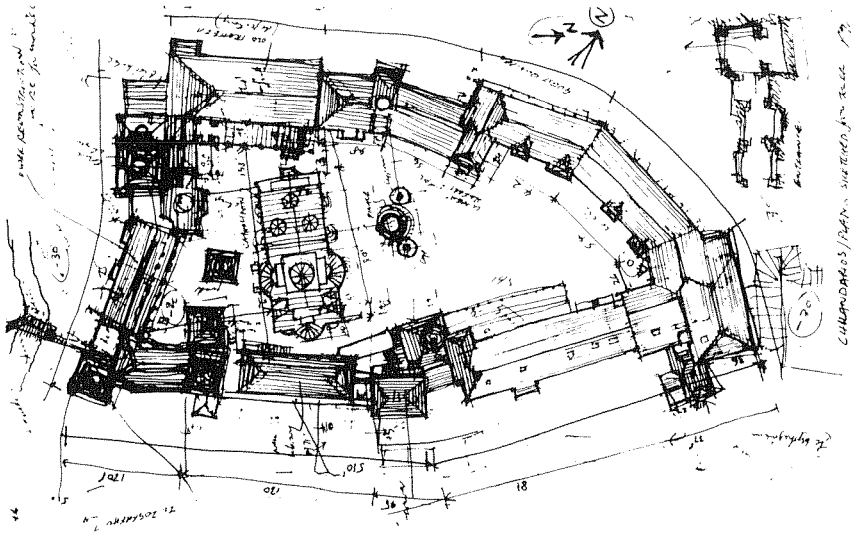
25 Isphigmenou, entrance sequence from the west.

26 Isphigmenou, entrance sequence from the east.

27 Isphigmenou, from the northeast.



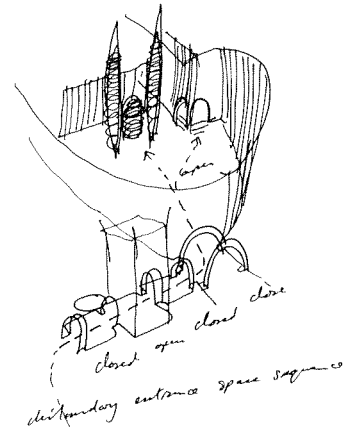
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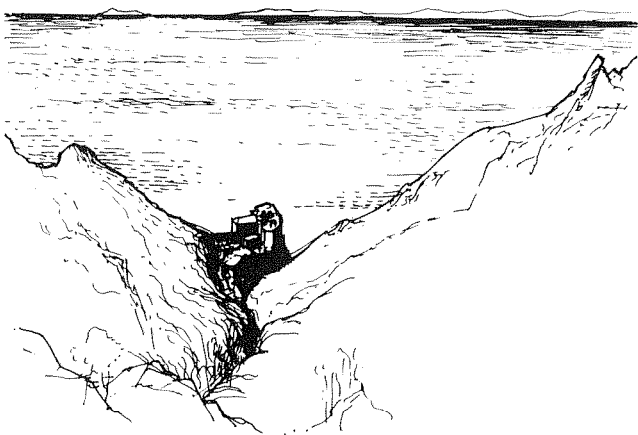
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28 Chilandari, from the east.

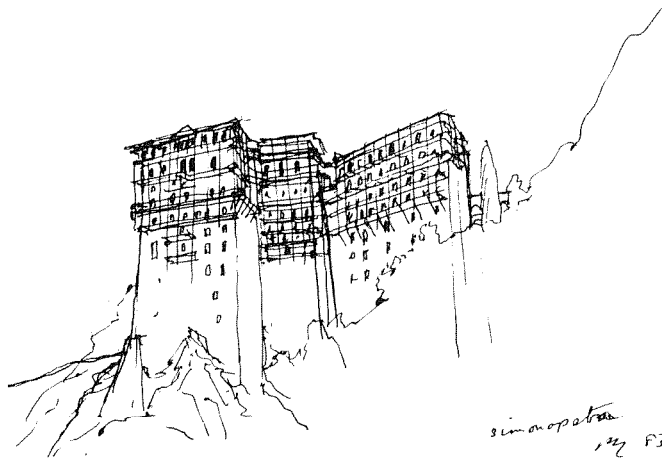
29 Chilandari, plan.

30 Chilandari, entrance sequence.

31 Chilandara, courtyard.

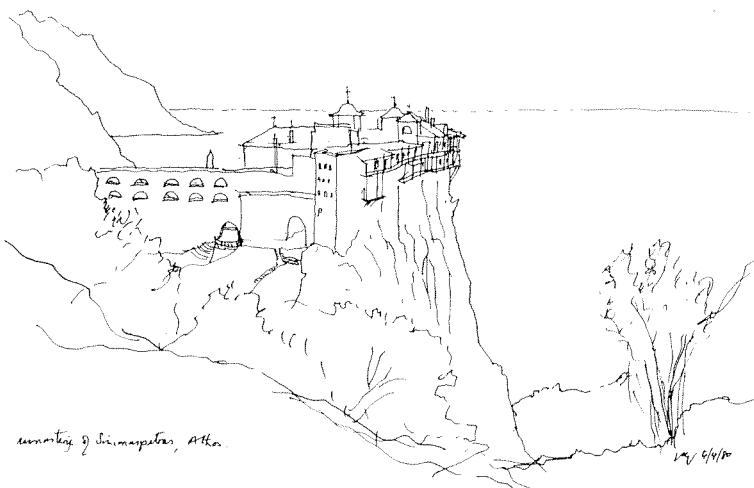


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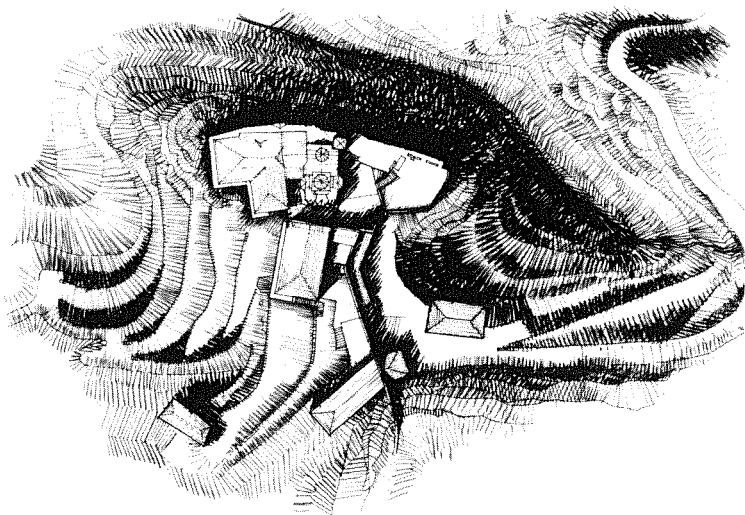
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The building seems to grow out of the rock. It becomes the Rock. It becomes Simon Peter ("Thou art Petrus and upon this Rock I will build my church . . ."). It transcends even its own elegant efficiency and becomes built poetics. It thus becomes architecture.



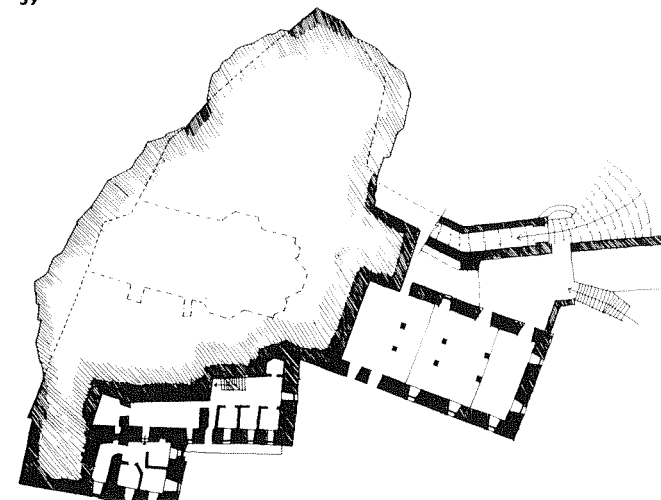
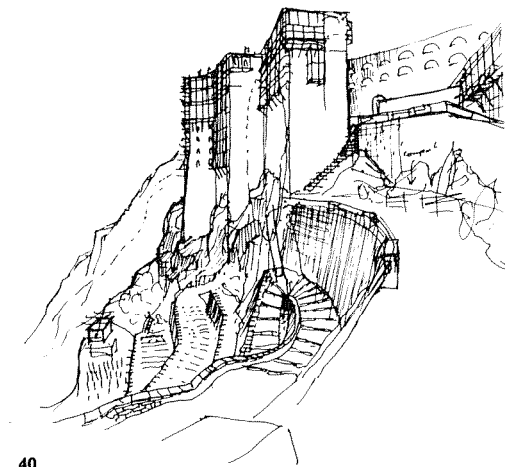
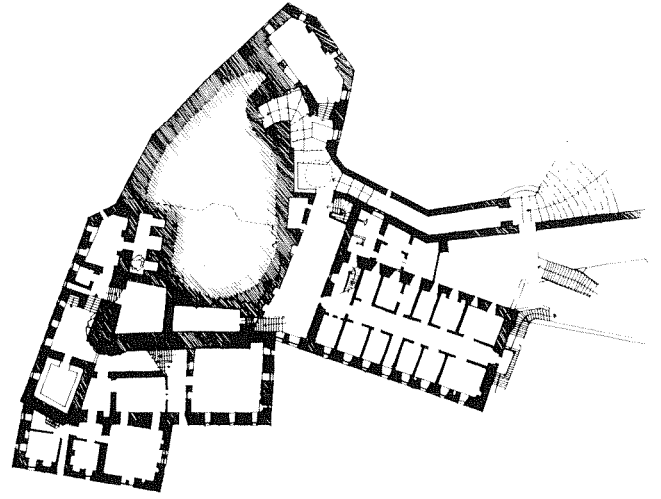
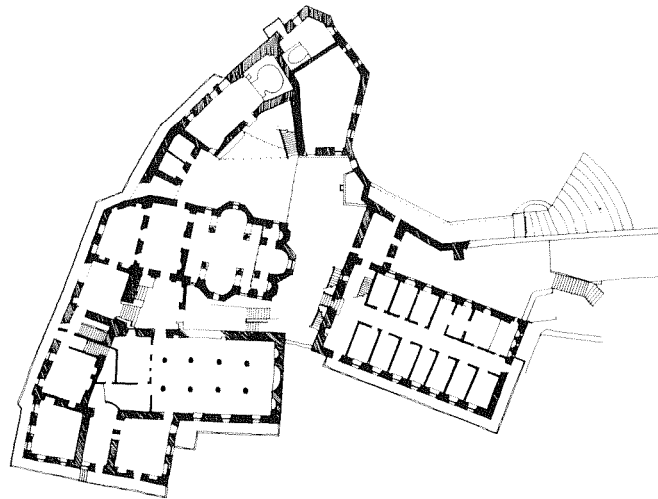
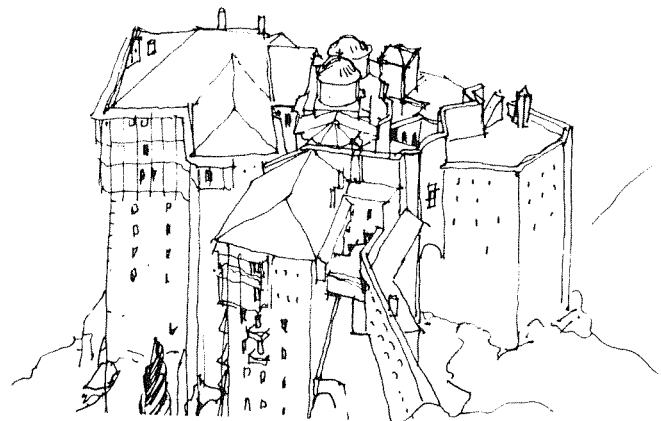
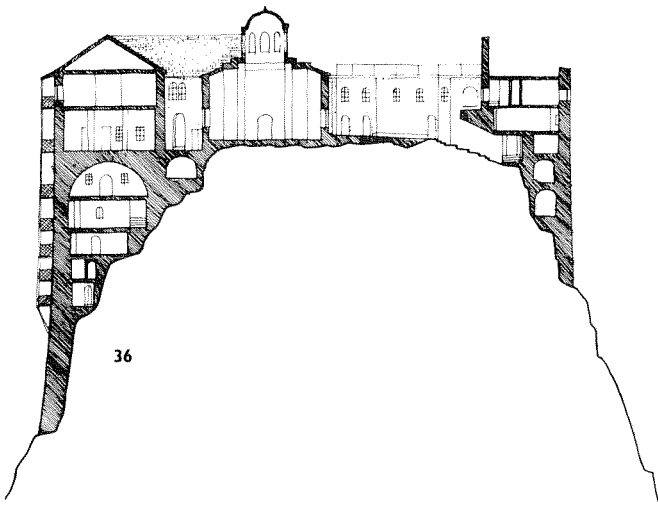
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It has no tower because it is a tower. The aqueduct is no mere conduit. It is integrated with building and land. The stepped terraces are an extension of the building, an outcropping of the rock. The outbuildings articulate both the trail and the terraces, sometimes even bridging the path which winds on the seaward side along the successive steps of the gardens.



35

The ritual entrance, whose steps flow like the baroque stairs of Noto, is a tunnel winding mysteriously through dark complexities of formal and informal space, up and up until it slowly climbs into the bright light of the tiny court. Flanking the cool wall of the built-in Katholikon, the path again penetrates the wall onto the flimsy necklace of balconies, and stops the pilgrim with the shock of the enormous vista of sea and



32 Simonopetra, from the north.

33 Simonopetra, from the south.

34 Simonopetra, from the northwest.

35 Simonopetra, site plan.

36 Simonopetra, N-S section through Katholikon.

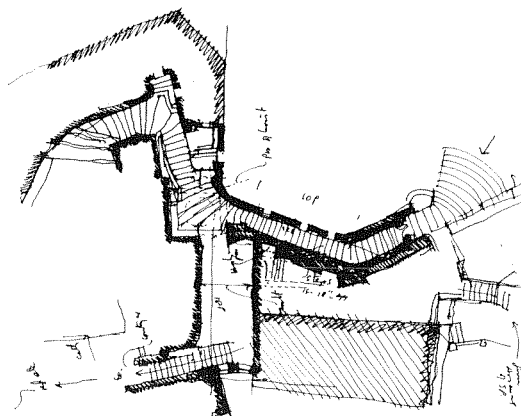
37 Simonopetra, from the east.

38 Simonopetra, plan at courtyard level.

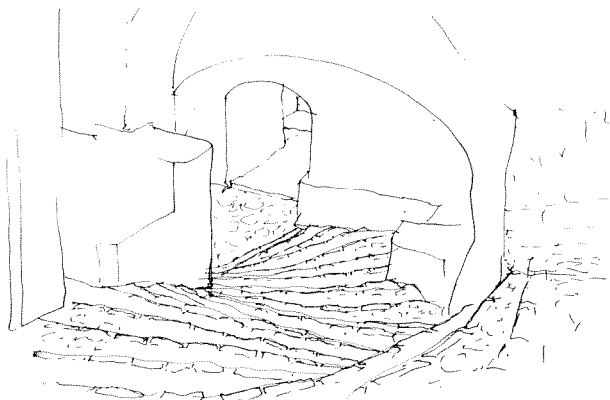
39 Simonopetra, plan at level of entrance.

40 Simonopetra, from the southeast.

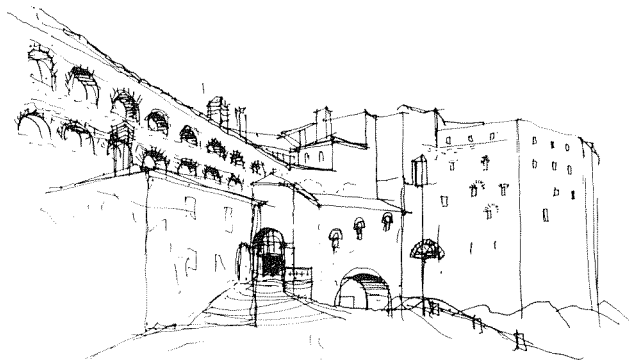
41 Simonopetra, plan at second lowest level.



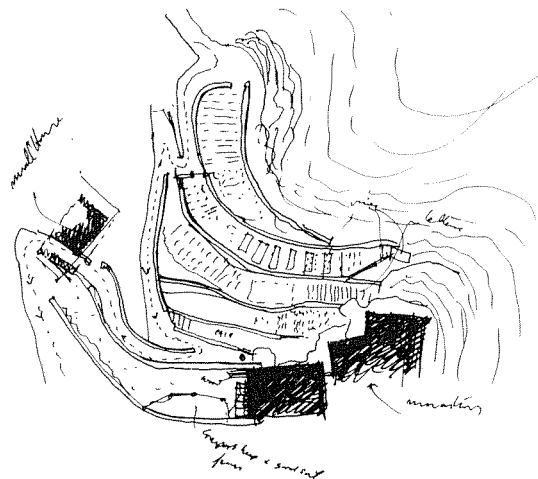
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mountain and the dizzying drop to the water below. Again one penetrates the wall into the tiny vaulted atrium between the Katholikon and the Refectory.

As they descend, seemingly through the rock, the inner corridors of the complex form a whole inner world of mystery and delight. They seem never to end and give a sense of infinite dimension to this tiny enclosure. Only in the nineteenth-century wing which flanks the aqueduct does the order become clearly rectilinear. Fire has several times destroyed Simonopetra, consuming its manuscripts, its treasures, and, sometimes, the monks who tried to lower themselves down the cliff-like face. In the rebuilding, the form of the plan and of the building remains as a timeless bulwark against change.

Yet it accepts change and modernization.

Modernization of Mount Athos

The critics of Athanasios, when he gave order to the inhabitants of the Holy Mountain, were no less vocal than the monks who today criticize new changes.

42 Simonopetra, the tunnel.

43 Simonopetra, tunnel exit.

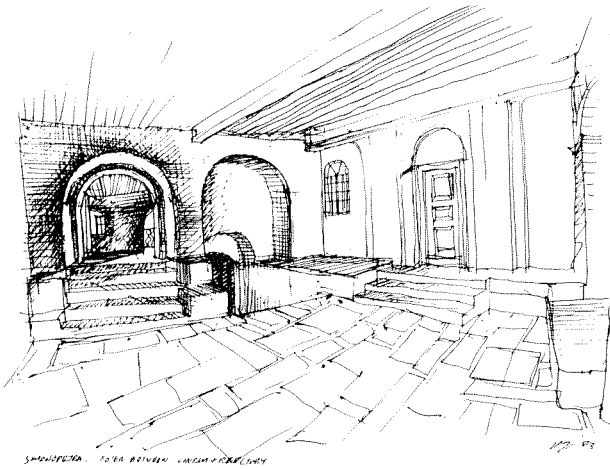
44 Simonopetra, entrance.

45 Simonopetra, garden plan.

46 Simonopetra, former reception area halfway up tunnel.

47 Simonopetra, interior atrium.

48 Vatopedi, the harbor.



47

The new abbot of Simonopetra, Remilianos, provides the new vision and the example. Coming from Meteora a decade ago, he found Simonopetra a neglected, decaying complex occupied by a few elderly monks, who had invited him to come and rescue the monastery from decline by new leadership.

Today the monastery is filled with young, healthy, and vigorous monks whose vitality and holiness is impressive. The old watercourse now drives a hydroelectric plant. Silent, modern switches and electric fixtures have replaced gas lamps and candles (except in the Katholikon's corona). Fire extinguishers are everywhere. The once-decayed gardens are bright and full with a variety of nutritious plants. The diet, while still ascetic, is excellent and the abbot's policy recognizes the greater needs of those assigned to heavy physical work.

A similar resurgence is evident in other monasteries such as Karakallou, Chilandari, and Philotheou, where three young American novices live and where remodeling, reconstruction, and repainting goes steadily ahead.



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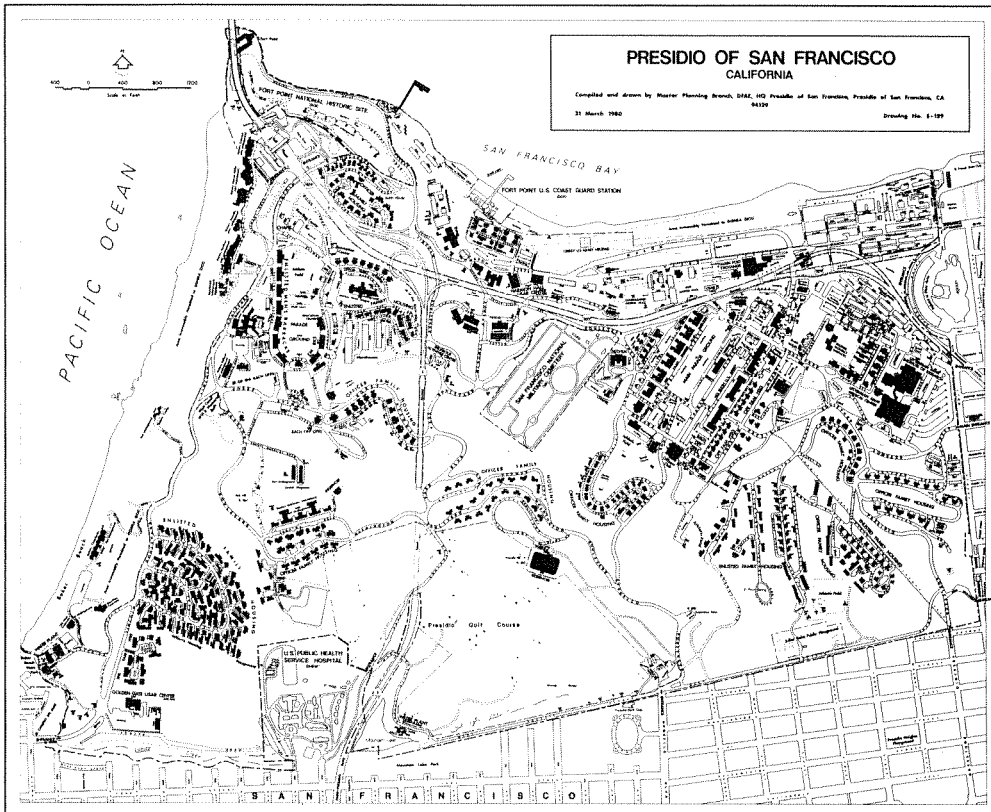
The monks' life is no less rigorous than before; yet novices appear from as far away as Alaska and Australia. Participation in the communal prayer gives one a sense that the whole spirit of Mount Athos has been reborn, auguring perhaps another 1,000 years of unbroken continuity.

Athos survives, not only as a physical example of superb design, but as a living community dedicated to the most spiritual of life-styles.

Athanasius' great **plan** continues to act as a framework within which change is not only possible but real, without diminishing the holy commitment of its community.

Military Architecture: The Presidio of San Francisco

Britton Schlinke



In a city ruled by the neutral grid of its streets, which tames its hills and orders its life from the Embarcadero to the Pacific Ocean, the Presidio of San Francisco stands as an important difference. For the people of San Francisco the Presidio, with its dramatic landscape overlooking both the ocean and the bay, has become a kind of picturesque public estate. Though still operating as a military reservation, its value today as a U.S. Army base is more symbolic than real. But the Presidio is also valuable as an architectural museum. The buildings of the reservation offer themselves as traces of specific historical events and as embodiments of the values that have structured military life.

If San Francisco is primarily the result of thousands of individual actions, played out within the geometric framework of small-scale property holdings, the Presidio reveals a different mode of development. Less a single architectural composition than a collection of different, typologically ideal formations scattered across the parklike reservation, the Presidio is the result of various programs of building, created by specific military missions and indicative of a scale and mode of development that characterize the military as an institution. By implication, the Presidio offers broader lessons in the

I President-day Presidio of San Francisco. (Courtesy of the Presidio of San Francisco.)

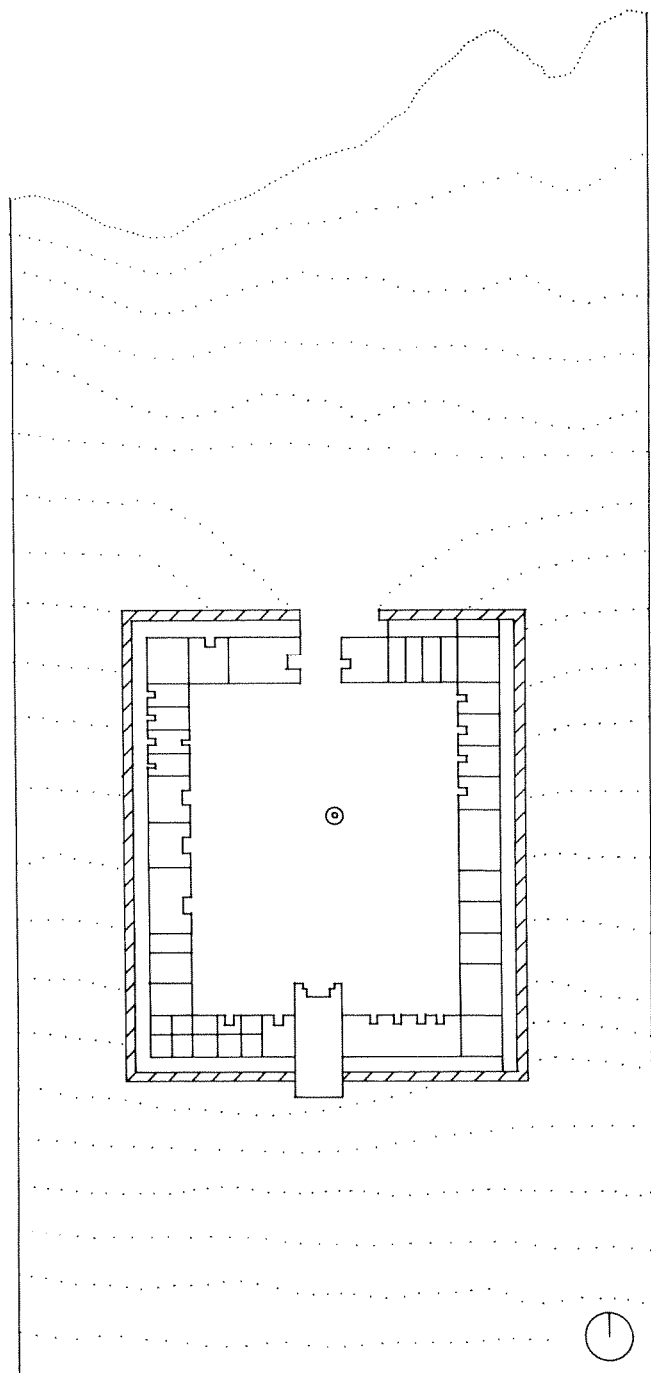
difficult relationship between architecture and the institution.

Architecture's role in the institution has at least two aspects. Its primary function is to physically constitute and to order a space according to the needs of the institution. This link between operational structure and built configuration is so tight that the word "institution" includes both. And because that word covers everything from schools and hospitals to factories, military bases, and prisons, it is clear that Louis Kahn's fond use of the term comprehends less than its total meaning. Michel Foucault has analyzed the darker side of the institution, most notably in *Discipline and Punish*, which traces the history of the prison through the 19th and 20th centuries. According to Foucault, institutions—regardless of their specific goals—share certain common strategies that are centered around the use of discipline as a mechanism to achieve desired ends. The first move in this disciplinary mechanism is to enclose and to separate clearly a definite space from the ambivalence of the larger world. That territory is, then, precisely partitioned according to a system of hierarchy and repetition that is determined by the needs of the institution.

If institutional architecture is, thus, primarily the physical correlative of a

purposeful order, it can also attempt to affect the mind as well as the body. With strategies ranging from inspiration to intimidation to camouflage (to list a few), architecture assumes its second major role as the symbolic representation of the institution.

With those roles in mind, the history of the Presidio reveals a series of mutations within the institution itself. These mutations are immediately apparent when searching for evidence of the oldest fort on the reservation. All that remains of the original Presidio, which was founded in 1776 as the northernmost Spanish garrison on the Pacific Coast, are a few adobe walls imbedded within the much larger and more recent mission revival style Officers' Club. As a functional entity, that fort has ceased to exist, but its architecture has become a stylistic touchstone for the reservation. From rough plans and sketches drawn by early travellers we know that the original Presidio was true to the Spanish courtyard type. A walled rectangle, it was set in a desolate landscape of grassy dunes and barren hills, lined inside by barracks, prison cells, the commandant's and sergeants' quarters, various storerooms, and in the place of honor, the church. One is tempted to read in the plan of this "primal fort" an innocence born of absolute necessity, and to attribute the plan type to a basic need for



2

2 Plan of the Spanish Presidio, circa 1820, showing the church opposite the main entrance. The Bay is at the top of the plan. (Author's drawing from original plan. Courtesy of the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service.)

PRESIDIO, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA.



3

3 Plan of the first U.S. fort at the Presidio, circa 1865.
(Courtesy of the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service.)

protection and a platonic will to geometry. Yet, obviously, the fort was a culturally determined product of a long societal evolution. What seems primal about this original Presidio is the fact that the needs of the military and the technology of building were both so relatively simple that the congruence was nearly perfect.

By 1847 when the first U.S. forces arrived, all they found of the original Presidio, which had been abandoned for over 20 years, were a few half-eroded adobe buildings. Though work commenced on rebuilding the Presidio, it was seriously hampered by the discovery of gold in the state, which lured deserters away in such epidemic numbers that by 1849 only a few stalwarts remained on the base. Nevertheless, it had been recognized that the Presidio occupied a strategic position on the Golden Gate, and in 1851 a presidential order set the present boundaries of the reservation. At that point the boundaries were mostly academic. San Francisco clustered along the Embarcadero and the nearby hills; it would be decades before its development closed in upon the base.

The Civil War and the Union's desire to ensure California's loyalty precipitated the first large wave of U.S. construction at the Presidio. The Spanish had brought their architectural culture with

them; the Americans now brought theirs. Starting from the few remaining adobe buildings, the new fort was organized around a sloping parade ground, lined on one side by barracks and administrative buildings and on the other by officers' quarters and the hospital. All the buildings were made from wood frame and clapboard and built from standard quartermaster plans. A simple perimeter fence with a gate and a guard sufficed to provide security. Though it may have resembled a New England village, the fort was highly ordered to serve the needs of institutional discipline. To this end several elements were crucial. Each barrack was a simple rectangular room with a porch in front, home to a company of 100 men who ate and slept as a unit. One company equaled one barrack, an architectural equivalence of exact and economical precision. On the other side of the rectangle stood the officers' houses, lined up in perfect repetition. Here the individual family was the unit of organization, recognition of the "gentlemanly" status of the officer. Though the officers were more individuated than the enlisted men, the pure repetition of their housing and the unequivocal hierarchy of rank locked them into the disciplined life of the base. At the center of the fort between the officers and the soldiers lay the parade ground. On that clear

space of discipline itself, in the guise of marching drills and parades, individuals were trained, made docile, and shaped into military instruments. For all the clarity of that space and the order of its surrounding buildings, the operational reality of the military was already becoming too complicated to be structured within a single controlling architectural form. Thus, support services such as the laundry and the stables were housed in buildings that served, but stood away from, the official life of the rectangle.

After the Civil War the Presidio found a new role to play as a support base for the Army campaigns against the Indians in the West. The final subjugation of the Indians around 1890 signalled the end of the small frontier posts and the consolidation of military forces into larger, more urban forts located near transportation routes for easy mobilization. This consolidation precipitated several major changes in the military as an institution. Mobilization meant both large-scale, long-range planning and the permanent and complicated organization to support it. The institution moved from a dependence upon the immediate mission to a prepared and permanent anticipation of future conflicts, which were not long in coming. Having settled its own internal



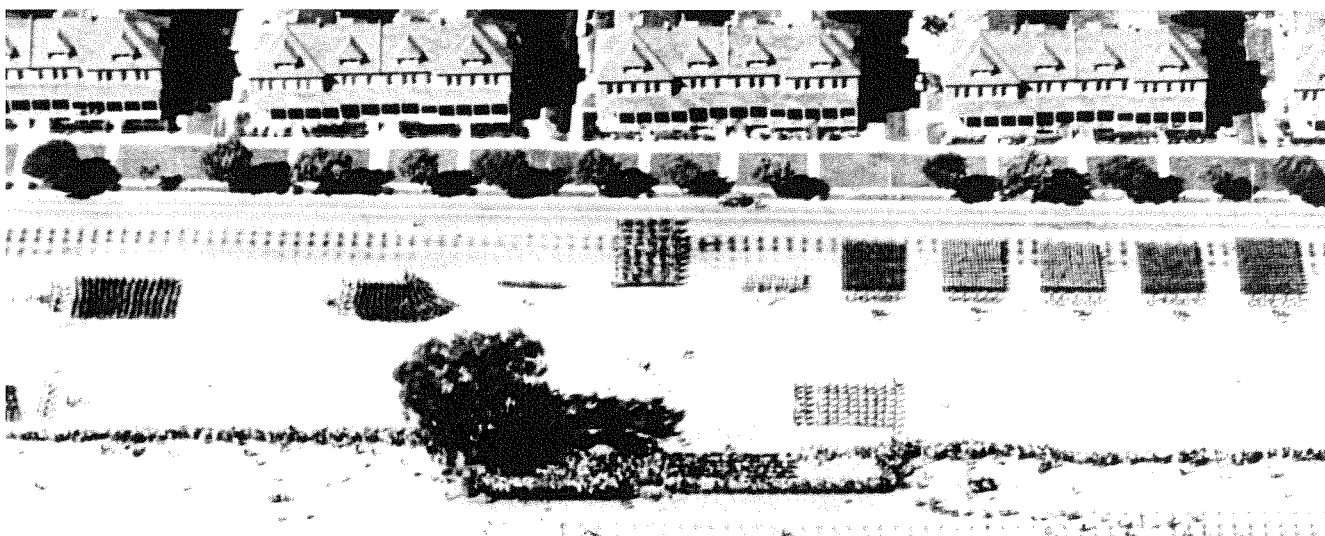
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4 Gateway into the original U.S. fort at the Presidio. Officers' quarters flank the gate in the foreground. Behind them on the other side of the parade ground stand the barracks and administrative buildings. (Courtesy of the Presidio Army Museum Library.)

5 Parade ground and barracks from the original U.S. fort at the Presidio. (Courtesy of the Presidio Army Museum Library.)



6

disputes, the United States soon engaged in imperialist adventures abroad. The military action in the Philippines associated with the Spanish-American War caused a new round of building activity on the base, including a new guardhouse, several ordnance and commissary buildings, and a string of new barracks enfronting a new, larger parade ground to the northwest of the original.

These new barracks, imposing brick edifices in a severe version of the federal style, reveal the expanding role of symbolism in military architecture. This is not to say that the earlier fort, in its chaste wooden severity, lacked symbolic power, but rather that the architecture of the new barracks was consciously symbolic. The root of that symbolism lay in a growing self-consciousness within the military, encouraged on a national level by patriotic imperialism and on the local level by the development of San Francisco as a prominent city. As an Army engineer

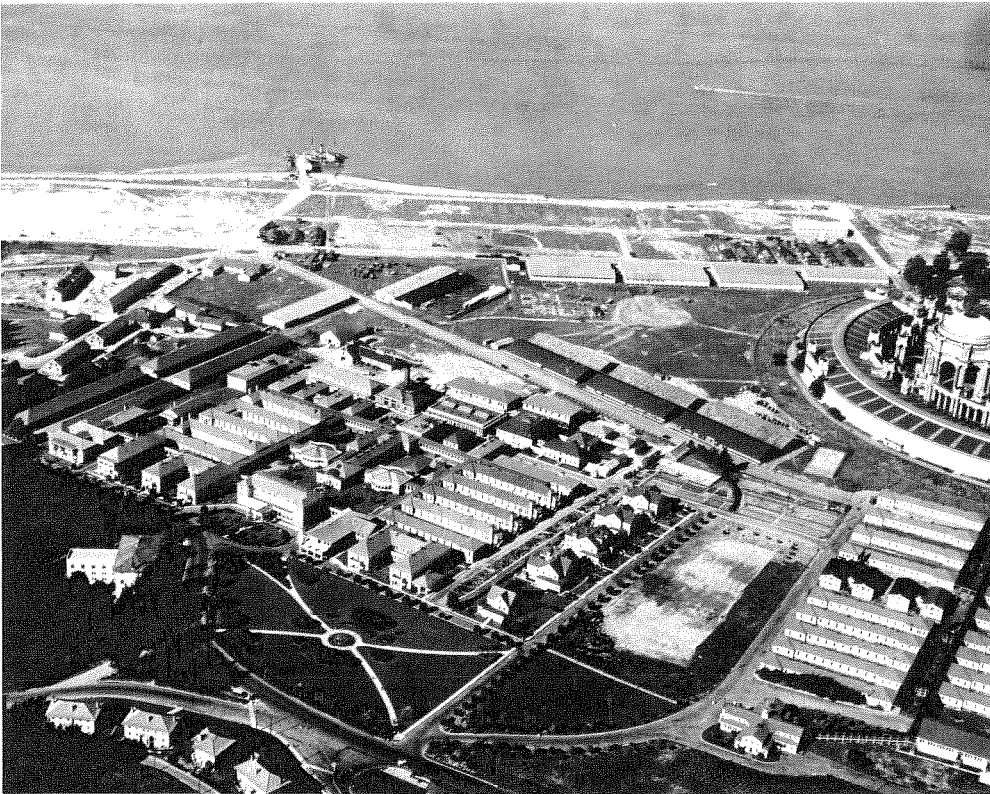
noted at the time in his proposal for a program of forestation on the base: "We are in the midst of a great and growing city. . . . The eyes of the people of calibre are upon us. . . ." He went on to note that a forested Presidio would "make the contrast from the city seem as great as possible and indirectly accentuate the idea of the power of the government."¹ That same idea is expressed in the permanence and dignity of the brick barracks.

One of the consequences of the military adventures overseas was the large number of sick and wounded soldiers returning from the Pacific. The original hospital was soon inadequate. In 1899 construction began on a new, much larger facility, Letterman Army General Hospital. Designed by a local architect, W. H. Wilcox, the hospital consisted of a series of long, narrow wards attached to two sides of a quadrangular circulation system organized around a central court. Administration buildings at the front and a powerhouse at the rear

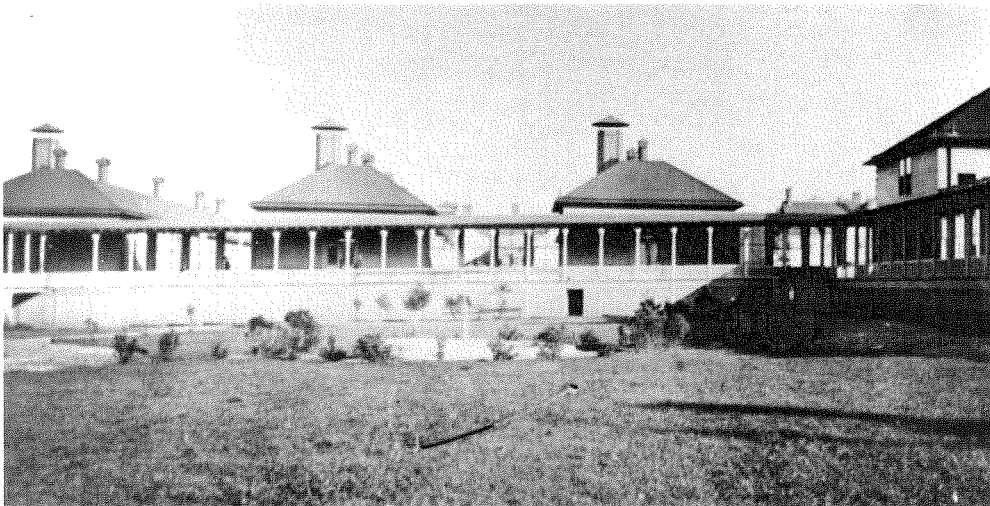
completed the hospital. In comparison with the old hospital, which was a simple element in the larger plan of the original fort, the new hospital was a complicated, completely self-contained entity in which the architecture served an enlarged medical institution. The building was both a clear diagram of the organization of the hospital and a machine for the supply of fresh air and light to the patients. Like the Spanish Presidio, this hospital marked a historical moment when the science and organization of the medical institution were perfectly matched by the architecture that served it.

Elsewhere on the post, however, new growth indicated only the increasing complication of the military institution itself and architecture's relationship to it. In 1908 an entire new base, Fort Winfield Scott, was constructed to serve the artillery troops manning the coastal defense batteries that had long been an important aspect of the military presence around the Golden

6 Parade in front of brick barracks, circa 1900.
(Courtesy of the Presidio Army Museum Library.)



7



8

7 Aerial view of Letterman Army General Hospital showing offices and clinics in the front, with two rows of wards flanking a central court containing two therapeutic sunrooms. A line of doctors' houses stands to the right of the hospital. The Palace of Fine Arts is on the right edge of the picture. (Courtesy of the Presidio Army Museum Library.)

8 Photo taken from the courtyard of the hospital shows continuous ramped gallery connecting wards. (Courtesy of the Presidio Army Museum Library.)



9



10

9 Parade ground and barracks at Fort Scott with Golden Gate Bridge in background. (Photograph by Britton Schlinke.)

10 General's house at Fort Scott. (Photograph by Britton Schlinke.)



11

Gate. The plan of this fort reveals another stage in the progressive fragmentation of the military institution as a cohesive typological entity. While the barracks still enfront a clear parade ground, the associated housing has broken free and now curves along the hillside in several isolated, fragmentary strands. This separation is emphasized by the fact that while the barracks were designed in the newly popular mission revival style, some of the housing was built in the Georgian revival style. The latter can be seen as a patriotic attempt to assert the connection between the military and the early history of the United States, while the mission revival style seems to be connected with the earliest Spanish history of the Presidio while actually appropriating it within an American dominion.

Like the earlier brick barracks, these new buildings reflect the self-consciousness of the military. But while the stolid physiognomy of the earlier barracks conveyed the crude

message of "the power of the government," Fort Winfield Scott reflects a romantic mystification of the military institution through the use of historical symbolism. This genteel posture became the accepted architectural strategy for the post, particularly during the building programs of the 1930s, when a very restrained version of mission revival came to be the definitive style. The Presidio began to assume the character of an extended country club.

World War II awakened the sleeping fort. The Army suddenly had an immediate mission requiring large-scale mobilization. The "temporary" two-story barracks still standing on Crissy Field are the unpretentious result of that war. With their simple plan and cheap materials, the barracks were ideally designed for endless reproduction across the country.

The architecture of the Presidio today reveals a complex situation. Though

11 **Officers' housing**, circa 1930s. (Photograph by Britton Schlinke.)

still operating as a military base, it seems to be without a clear military mission. In some respects the fort is like a ghost town. The remaining typological formations are now either museum pieces or offices. Of the original U.S. fort, the barracks are gone and the officers' quarters have been converted to duplexes. The original hospital is a museum, and the parade ground, a parking lot. The other barracks are largely empty. The marching regiments are gone.

If, in the larger scheme of the defense establishment, the Presidio is superfluous, it still retains a powerful role to play in the military. Though they may have been rendered functionally obsolete by the changing needs of a now vast and complicated institution, the historic buildings of the Presidio, standing peacefully against the green hills, are still symbolically potent as the conscious representation of the military to the larger world.

NOTE

- 1 James Delgado and Mark Brack, "Presidio of San Francisco": *Historic American Building Survey* no. CA 1114, p. 7. (Available from the National Park Service, Western Regional Office, 450 Golden Gate Avenue, Box 36063, San Francisco, CA 94102.)

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Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

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Levi's Place: A Building Biography

W. Russell Ellis
Tonia Chao
Janet Parrish

Introduction

Where do new buildings come from? What social and historic forces lie behind their final appearances, siting, layout, and uses? Can case studies based on such questions teach practitioners of place-making useful lessons? The creation of Levi Strauss' new headquarters complex—"Levi's Plaza"—has provided the occasion to examine these questions.

Describing the creation of Levi's Plaza is tantamount to recapitulating the history and culture of the corporation itself, an environmental biography of sorts. This is, no doubt, true of all organizations expressed in built form, but the case of Levi Strauss—the world's largest apparel maker—merits special attention because of the distinctive way the new Plaza was conceived and shaped. As we will show, the complex is singularly expressive of Levi's evolution and relationship to the city of San Francisco. It has enjoyed extensive media attention celebrating the distinctive plan and array of the buildings, plaza, and park, and has been described as "sensitive to its surroundings," "a gift to the city," and an unusually pleasant work environment inside and out.¹ The numerous articles that applaud the buildings and work atmosphere overlook the extraordinary process by which the place came into existence.

This article describes how a series of headquarters relocations uncovered and clarified the company's environmental needs and crystallized a corporate image. The analysis began in 1976 when a research team was asked to help interpret a vague, persistent, and general dissatisfaction among employees with the then new headquarters location in San Francisco's Embarcadero Center, a flourishing office and retail development in the heart of the city's financial district.²

In 1978, after the decision had been made to leave Embarcadero Center and to construct Levi's Plaza, another team of faculty and architecture graduate students in architecture from the University of California, Berkeley, conducted observations, interviews, and surveys, and helped manage a participation process through which employees explored their images of the new headquarters complex.³ Finally, in 1982 a third research team was permitted to conduct an impressionistic postoccupancy evaluation.⁴ As members of this most recent team, the authors are in a unique position to discuss the origin, conception, and use of the Plaza.

Levi Strauss: Origins and Growth

Levi Strauss, a Jewish immigrant from Bavaria, came to this country as a

follower of the gold rush and purveyor of dry goods. He transformed his unsold tent and covered-wagon canvas into durable "waist-high overalls" that responded to expressed needs of the 49ers. Eventually he stopped using the indigo-dyed canvas and began importing a strong French fabric, *serge de Nîmes*, a name that was later shortened to the colloquialism that we know today as "denim." Copper rivets reinforced the strain points, a feature that still punctuates the popular "501" denim jeans. The Levi Strauss work pants were so successful that Levi Strauss & Company became not only an important San Francisco establishment but a part of Americana; in fact, several old pairs are now included in the Smithsonian Collection.

Levi Strauss' prosperous, albeit modest, business was located in a brick warehouse on the San Francisco waterfront. Later, four nephews inherited the company from the distinguished San Franciscan. The company managed well as a family-owned enterprise in which promotion was largely internal and personal contact was relaxed and extensive. Stable and private through the years, the company grew slowly, functioning exclusively as wholesaler of one product in 35 sizes until the end of World War II, when it moved into retail trade and diversified its line.

Farmers, cowboys, and blue-collar workers made up its expanding market until successive events exploded on the American cultural scene. Popular films, especially those of Marlon Brando and James Dean, crystallized the popularity of Levis among young people. The antifashion "beats" and, later, the youth of "Aquarian Age" counterculture elevated denim, in general, and "Levis," in particular, to the level of social statement. Denim was no longer merely the garb of workers; it had become the uniform of international youth culture, transcending even social class and political differences.

Levi's sales rocketed from \$8 million in 1946 to \$1.2 billion in 1976. Consciously catching the wave of the baby boom, the company enjoyed a 24 percent annual growth in sales every year between 1968 and 1978. In 1981, 10 years after going public, Levi's recorded \$2.85 billion in sales. Developing a new product line with "a skosh more room" allowed them to continue riding the crest of the maturing, postwar baby wave.

Levi's Moves into Fashion: Embarcadero Center

Success produced growth, differentiation, and competitors. Levi's original building at 98 Battery Street was small and informal: in the early days its entire



1 98 Battery Street.
(Photograph by Tom King,
courtesy of Howard
Friedman, FAIA.)

inventory was comfortably warehoused on the fifth floor. In 1974 Levi's moved its cozy and cluttered 98 Battery Street offices to a 34-story tower in John Portman's and David Rockefeller's new downtown development: Embarcadero Center. The second of four buildings in the complex was named the "Levi Strauss Building," although Levi's occupied less than half its space.

Levi Strauss was no longer the manufacturer of a single product. As its products were diversified to find new niches in an increasingly competitive market, Levi's found it necessary to reorganize along divisional lines, each division functioning as a relatively autonomous unit. A critical event in 1973 exemplified the company's need for efficient and streamlined organization. European sales had grown so rapidly that the officers of the international division lost control of production schedules and inventory management. That year the company experienced only the second profit loss in its history, a 53 percent decline, which was attributable almost entirely to European losses in a recession environment.

In 1976 the international division had fully recovered under new management. It accounted for one-third of all Levi's sales and was second only to the jeanswear

division in size and productivity. Because of the division's importance, its fourteenth-floor offices, designed by Howard Friedman, were dramatically different from all floors save the twenty-eighth-floor executive suite. For the benefit of Levi's executives visiting from countries around the world, the elevator lobby announced "international" with a forest of flags, bright colors, and other adornments. Friedman, a member of the family and consulting architect on every Levi's building project for 35 years, had developed a clever circulation plan with scattered and enclosed offices, open, small-scale receptionist areas, and distinctive waiting areas.

The international division is important to our discussion because its special treatment was noticed with resentment by those on other floors and became one of several lightning rods of employee dissatisfaction. The issues were complex in nature and interactive in their origins. The policy of top management on the disposition of space was enlightened: only the very top managers within divisions or other units were given enclosed corner offices with the obligatory "view." A large percentage of all window surface and natural light was given to lower-level employees; middle management was housed in glass-walled offices without doors that ringed the inner

core of the building. These faced interconnected cubicles of high-quality wood that was lined with so-called “Levi’s Grey” cloth. Throughout the white-walled Levi’s floors, everything sat on a thick “Levi’s Grey” carpet.

To top management the appointments represented continuity with the modest, frugal yet quality materials symbolic of the company’s origins. The openness and relative spatial equality of the floors was meant to recapture some of the life at 98 Battery Street where employees had had easy access across hierarchical lines. There everyone had had the opportunity routinely to meet and to say a friendly “good morning” to Chief Executives Walter and Peter Haas. Here, at Embarcadero Center II, Walter and Peter took the elevators that served the tower’s upper floors, while the bulk of their employees rode the elevators for the lower floors. Both banks of elevators were filled with strangers. Few Levi’s employees ever saw—in the otherwise elegant executive suite—the astonishingly small and simple adjacent offices to which Walter and Peter retreated.

“Old-timers”—long-term employees from 98 Battery Street—understood, without instruction, the subtle meaning of “Levi’s Grey.” They disliked, however, the division by elevator and by

corridor from their friends. Neither the “class” location in the financial district nor the quality work stations could compensate for their loss of interpersonal “perks” and a sense of belonging. They also bridled at the replacement of the customary “Christmas bonus”—a company-wide gesture of goodwill by the family—with incentive bonuses devoted to the most productive divisional managers.

Newcomers found “Levi’s Grey” and universal white simply drab. They could identify neither with the “unpretentiousness” of the physical environment nor with the corporate motto: “Levi’s is People,” muttering instead, “Levi’s is 40,000 people,” “Levi’s is Profit,” “Levi’s is a job.” Newcomers in management resented the frugality of their expense accounts. For them, the glass-walled offices and simple, serviceable showrooms were not appropriate settings for conducting business in the increasingly competitive world of fashion.

Environmental openness added to these problems in other ways. Everyone was “looking for a closeable door” away from the “fishbowl” offices through which competing button-and-thread salespeople could read the faces of their competitors. Adjacent occupants heard things they “shouldn’t hear” through the doorless glass-walled offices.

Passersby mistook visibility for availability, forcing office occupants to invent personal devices signalling “busy.” Sometimes tearful employee-evaluation sessions were on view for all. It was impossible to catch five minutes of contemplative rest in the midst of a tough problem or a hectic day.

Salvaging Corporate Culture

Walter Haas, Jr., Levi’s president from 1958–1970, now chairman of the executive committee, frequently lamented the loss of morale in the company and the lost “sense of family,” formerly an unstated Levi Strauss trademark. This sense of family had been lost before. In fact, the move from 98 Battery Street had largely been prompted by the corporate growth that had pushed the expanding employee population into several outlying buildings. Within a year of its move to Embarcadero Center, however, Levi’s again found itself forced to locate some functions outside the building. Their lease made provisions for expansion, but, ironically, did not guarantee expansion *within* Embarcadero II—the “Levi Strauss Building.” The “family” was dispersed again.

This time, however, the meaning of “family” was more equivocal. It could mean many things or few in the new Levi’s. There was, of

course, the historic extended family. There were the displaced denizens of 98 Battery Street, schooled in the Levi’s life nurtured in the old building. There was management’s overarching paternal desire, which most newcomers sensed, to maintain everyone together in a single, caring environment. But for an increasing number of new employees the push to bring the “family” together seemed irrelevant and hypocritical. Management was keenly aware of this; underneath the impetus to move again lay a relatively urgent need to salvage the old and to incorporate the new.

Home: A Fitting Form

Loathing his “ivory tower,” Walter Haas began as early as 1974 to envision the creation of a definitive headquarters facility. The recent move to Embarcadero Center II and a commitment to employee consultation inhibited any precipitate action on these fantasies. When corporate instincts and the studies commissioned by Friedman in 1976 confirmed a general unhappiness in the building, the decision was made to build the Plaza. Gerson Bakar, a developer and a friend of Haas, had proposed an attractive arrangement wherein he would buy out Levi’s long-term Embarcadero lease, give the corporation complete design control, and build Levi Strauss a “Shangri-La.”

Levi's took this unprecedented opportunity to carry out in Levi's Plaza the ultimate form of image-making and gift-giving, a practice central to Levi's corporate ideology. To project an image of a special and caring company, when it constructed a new facility. Levi's had consistently avoided attaching itself to industrial parks or to other factory concentrations. It also attached to each new facility some major, public-oriented amenity. For example, a factory in Mexico was surrounded by a community garden available to employees and to the nearby community. A facility in the southern United States was located near a stream that the company rerouted, cleaned, and turned into a fishing and recreation area. This history of corporate-building practice provided a guide for the competitive proposals Bakar solicited from architects Arthur Gensler & Associates and Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum.

The task of developing a new headquarters complex involved the company's top executives, members of the family, and all levels of employees. Robert Haas, Walter's son, managed the corporation's design interests when, after a 1977 presentation to top executives, Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum was chosen to design the buildings, Gensler the interiors and Lawrence Halprin the park and

plaza. Howard Friedman's responsibility was to mediate and to interpret corporate policy on facility development to the architects.

The prospect of creating a final "home" required the distillation of the company's 120-year-old self-definition. Levi's wanted a setting that would include the essential qualities of "Levi-ness." The resulting brick-and-glass metaphor was to be the physical manifestation of the same sense of quality that was stitched into their comfortable and well-worn "501" jeans.

Robert Haas prepared a set of principles with which Friedman was to guide the architects:

"We are an understated Company . . . as a consequence, monumental architecture is not our style. . . ."

"We are an exceptionally distinctive Company." The Plaza too should be distinctive. The concept of a low-rise urban office complex is unusual.

"Quality Never Goes Out of Style." The project's design and materials should reflect the company's high-quality standards. "This implies sensitivity to detailing and high standards of workmanship, not extravagance or gaudiness."

"Levi's is a San Francisco Company. While our growth has spread our

products and operations around the world our roots are deeply planted in the City. For Levi's, then, an 'International Style' design would not work. We want the project to be a 'good neighbor'—to fit comfortably in its environment and be a positive feature of the revitalized Northern Waterfront."

"Above all else Levi's is people-oriented. To be successful the project must provide a superior working environment. The work environment and public spaces must be relaxed, not formal, and should facilitate communication and a sense of community."

Haunting these principles was a set of unstated facts that confounded them. While the company had a natural loathing for bigness, it was, in fact, a massive and growing multinational corporation. (A Gensler architect was later to say, "Levi's does not know how to be big.") Levi's was also now a public company, with only six years of public experience after more than one hundred years of quiet, private, family ownership. "Understated," then, could not mean the hidden life of San Francisco's privately held Bechtel Corporation, whose low-key headquarters housed the nation's largest construction and engineering company; nor could it mean the brazen landmark quality of the publicly held Transamerica Corporation's headquarters in San

Francisco, often referred to by locals and tourists as "the Pyramid." How, then, was Levi's to represent itself anew, architecturally?

Design Sources and Outcomes

As we will show, the completed Plaza is a physical rendition of several countervailing forces in and outside the company. The complex reflects the encounter between the unique history of a corporate culture, a distinctive city, and certain practical realities. In what follows, we will describe the effects of these encounters on design intentions and outcomes at Levi's Plaza.

Patrician Mitzvah: The High Road of Lowrise

Jewish families appeared early among the late-forming elite of this late-forming city. Names like Strauss, Sutro, Zellerbach, and Fleishacker excited a deference similar to those of Huntington, Hopkins, Crocker and Stanford. Among these social and economic elites, *noblesse oblige* induced public gifts counterbalancing economic exploitation. Economically prominent, this family obligation was, in Levi's case, punctuated by the special requirement of their religion to include some blessing or social good to their work: a "mitzvah."

This obligation was consistent with their philanthropic and personnel policies and, as previously mentioned, their

siting practices for outlying facilities. The plans and guidelines for the Plaza were, then, a mixture of business and belief.

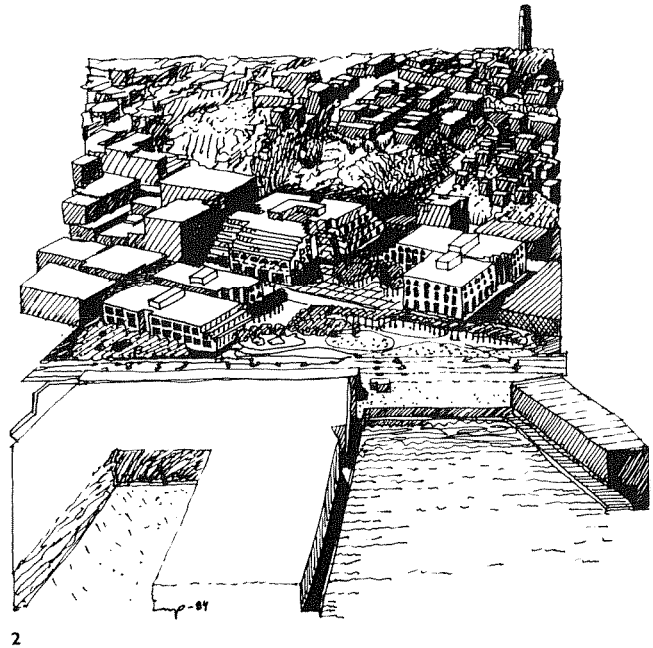
Thus, in following Gerson Bakar's cleverly negotiated lead to the northern waterfront, Levi's did not aim for the high profile of big capital, but for the low quiet of preservationist community. "Lowrise" was Levi's massive move away from the much criticized "Manhattanization" of San Francisco. The corporation was responsive to 20 years of active opposition on the part of certain history-conscious city elites to the rapid increase in tall office structures that had radically altered the skyline. This "San Francisco Company" called for buildings of historic brick, preservationist values, and a contribution to human-scale city growth. "People-oriented" meant not only sensitive employee practices, but also sensitivity to the people of the city at large. "Quality" meant the tourist city's struggle to avoid meritricious quaintness.

Levi's Plaza is situated just north of the financial district in a dockside community of old brick buildings and renovated warehouses. Fully occupying two square blocks beneath Telegraph Hill, the Plaza steps back from the hill and is sited to draw attention to Coit Tower, one of San Francisco's foremost landmarks. The tallest building is seven stories tall; the rest are three. Separated

by a fairly busy street, the Plaza seems more like two complexes: on the Telegraph Hill side are the seven-story Levi Strauss Building with its grand glass atrium, and the Stern Building, which is connected to a rehabilitated, old-brick, Italian Swiss Colony Building. These buildings are organized around a hard plaza and look across Battery Street to the Koshland and Haas buildings, which were located at the extreme south end of the site to allow for a large grassy park and stream. All five brick buildings include amenities such as outdoor balconies and generous window space. The design plays on historically significant features such as brass rivets, which appear as decorative elements on doors and windows.

The Plaza was an immediate success with the media and the public in San Francisco and nationwide. There could have been no better affirmation of the company's intentions (and public image) than the brief panegyric by Herb Caen. Caen, an immensely popular local columnist, routinely writes directly to the company's most important San Francisco audience:

"St. Patrick's Day sightem [sic]: Wally Haas, Jr., boss of Levi Strauss, in green jacket and green tie, pushing a tray of corned beef and cabbage in the company cafeteria, just like the help. By the way, if you



2 Levi Strauss Plaza.
Drawing by Lars Lerup.



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haven't strolled through the new Levi 'campus' below the East crest of Telegraph Hill, browse around. A showplace, another gift to the city from this splendid family. No wonder the people who work there fondly call it 'Levi U.'"⁵

Soon after, *Fortune* magazine ran an unusual feature story on the corporation highlighting its financial status with a story on the Plaza's design. Positive appearances in the major architecture magazines were capped off by *Time* magazine's identification of the Plaza as its "Building of the Year."⁶

The internal audience of employees was also graced by the Plaza's break upon the mediascape. Even during the first studies at Embarcadero Center II, employee identity with the social glow of the product "Levi's" elicited comments such as: "At a party, I say I work at Levi's and people smile." The postoccupancy evaluation showed increased employee pride in their association with Levi's at the new Plaza complex; the majority seemed especially pleased by the new attention paid by the media to their employer and to their workplace.

Park and Plaza: Invitation, Inversion, and Stratification

Like the floor plans and the decor, the Plaza buildings had been subject to great scrutiny. After critical

review by division managers (and later by employee representative groups), the powerful Telegraph Hill Dwellers Association, the San Francisco Planning Commission, and local architecture critics played major roles in progressively twisting, bending, and re-forming the design into its present shape and siting.

These buildings take up only 40 percent of the site; the park and plaza, conceived and executed single-handedly by Lawrence Halprin, fill the rest of the site. Halprin was an appropriate choice: he knew the extended family, had done major private work for its members, and understood the scope of their intentions. Also, like corporate architects Gensler and Helmuth, Obata & Kassabaum, his "signature" on the Plaza garment would be seen as a "quality" label, a sign that the family's intents were to be taken seriously.

The park proved to be a major symbol of Levi's goodwill toward the city of San Francisco. When the lowest bids on Halprin's design came in \$5 million over the original \$1 million budget paid for by Bakar, the Levi's family took the necessary money from personal, not company, funds. The family also maintains the park in perpetuity.

An interview with Halprin uncovered some concrete

social themes in his design intent. His translation of the family's desires produced two contrasting areas separated by Battery Street: a "hard plaza" and a "soft park." The "hard plaza" was designed to recall the best elements of old European plazas. Its purpose, in Halprin's words, was to "turn the organization inside out, the same way you would a coat, to see how it's made." Traffic to and from the various buildings would function to show all Levi's people from all levels who they were collectively. The organization would, thus, be inverted and revealed. This idea was Halprin's direct response to what Levi's wanted to escape at Embarcadero Center II: the utter lack of company identity. While the postoccupancy evaluation was too limited in scope to fully document the outcome of his intentions, observations clearly showed extensive use of the plaza by formally dressed executive types, catching brief snatches of conversation in the general flow of the varied traffic. Levi's liberal dress code, mandated by its products, provided a neat, unobtrusive measure, since managers still lean toward "financial district" attire. The counterpoint "soft park" across the street consists of a stream, winding paths trimmed by seasonal plantings, and a long grassy area with landscaped berms that shelters users from the sounds of traffic.

3 San Francisco's Telegraph Hill forms the backdrop for Levi's Plaza, the new headquarters of Levi Strauss & Company and an open-space alternative to metropolitan high-rises. With heights ranging from seven stories downward, the new buildings reflect the cascading of the hill and its residential structures. The Plaza's red-brick exteriors are compatible with neighboring turn-of-the-century warehouses, including a renovated pre-earthquake landmark that now houses Levi Strauss offices. The north waterfront development includes a 3.2-acre public park complete with fountains and a stream. (Photograph by Peter Aaron, Esto, courtesy of Howard Friedman, FAIA.)

4 Main (Levi Strauss) building, atrium, and plaza. (Photograph by Janet Parrish.)



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A second of Halprin's intentions and hypothesized outcomes—which he held with great conviction—was that the location would stratify outdoor use by employees: lower-level employees would be more likely to use the soft park's grassy knolls and seating than upper-level employees. We could find no strong evidence that Halprin's predictions were borne out, however.

Finally, the park, a “transplanted piece of the Sierras” where Levi Strauss first sold his canvas pants, was to invite the public in to share it with employees. This works better than Levi's people realize. At lunchtime fewer than one-half of the park's occupants are associated with Levi's. Most outsiders are not aware that the park is Levi's property—in part because of its public scale and the use of minimal, subdued signs by the company. Interestingly, Levi's people generally estimate that nearly all of the park's occupants are associated with the company. Also,

5 The Embarcadero Center

II looms (left) behind the campuslike grounds of Levi's Plaza.

(Photograph by Janet Parrish.)

6 Plaza and rehabilitated, pre-earthquake, Italian Swiss Colony building.

(Photograph by Janet Parrish.)



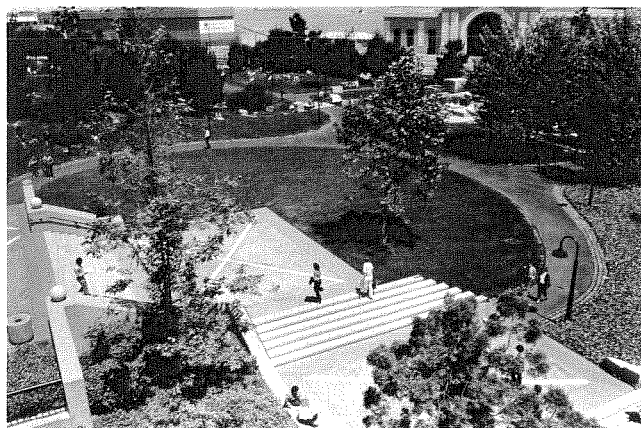
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the park quickly became a tourist attraction on the route to and from Fisherman's Wharf and Pier 39.

One group of visitors dislikes the park, though they use it extensively. They are the local design professionals who had colonized the low-rent buildings with offices and studios. “Gentrification” is the complaint, this referring both to increased rents and to various “hokey” treatments in the design. A major example was the rehabilitation of Mildred Pierce's, a cozy hamburger café that had long been a slumming favorite for the informal professional crowd, a place where they could mingle with sailors and dockworkers on a sawdust-covered floor. The simple box that housed Mildred Pierce's was as much a popular sign as any logo-shaped food franchise. Its new skin and plant-filled atrium (actually ordered by Bakar, not Halprin) outraged many of the old patrons and exacerbated the criticisms of gentrification. And, in fact,

their complaints may be justified: Mildred Pierce's has been replaced by a new restaurant, Battery Point. The old sawdust and chaos has given way to tables graced with linen napkins and freshly cut flowers.

An interesting sidelight relating the social and the physical in this design is that Halprin's large, accessible, unsupervised fountains clearly constitute an “attractive nuisance” in the legal sense. The year-round, 24-hour security force paid for by the developer is essentially a design supplement that freed Halprin's design hand even further and allows Levi's to maintain a public stance of openness. Robert Haas envisions a time when street vendors and musicians will mingle with the employees and the public will be interlarded among Levi's people at their celebratory plaza affairs. All of these possibilities rely on human supervision, which is, in fact, an intimate feature of the design, giving it the formal freedom it could not otherwise have.



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The Atrium

The atrium of the Levi Strauss Building is the hub of all intentions and outcomes in the Plaza's creation. What had been missing since 98 Battery Street was a visible corporate commons: a place through which the entire community flowed—where one could, with certainty, know one was “at Levi’s.” The Plaza and park are symbolic hubs; the atrium is the transparent tool that separates the Levi’s community from the outside world while retaining a visual connection. This separation acts to reinforce employee cohesion and, at the same time, the sense of general accessibility. The main building filters out those who do not work there; those who move beyond the lobby are associated with Levi’s. People accomplish the actual filtering, since it was important to the company not to convey a sense of public exclusion through the design itself. An information officer sits at a circular chrome desk in the center of the atrium to monitor comings and goings. Thus,

a sense of easy mobility and clear control are maintained simultaneously.

The atrium’s conspicuous chrome elevator, one which brings top management up from the garage, is a surprise; its chrome encasement seems inconsistent with the overall warmth of the complex. It is at this point that one remembers that Levi Strauss & Company, the world’s largest apparel-maker, is in fact, a multinational corporation. And, like any other corporation, hierarchy is a reality. Although Levi’s has a detailed personnel grading system, and top executives occupy the plush offices located on the top floor in the highest building, it *somehow* manages to obscure this hierarchy in an understated manner, one which can be demonstrated more clearly by looking at the interiors.

Interiors

“Levi’s Grey” is gone. Gensler’s negotiated interpretation of employee and corporate preferences comes very close to what was requested in sessions with

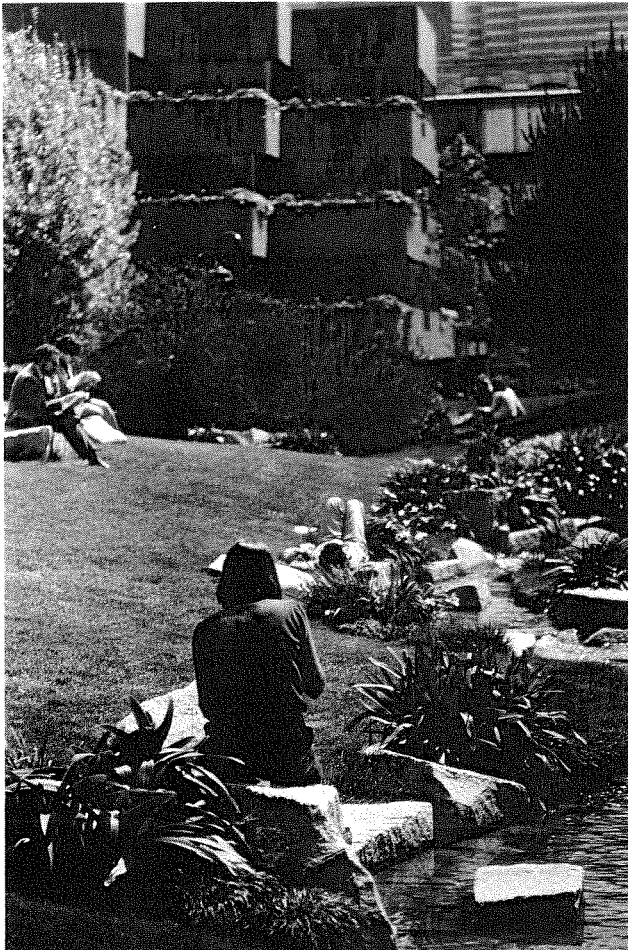
employee representative groups. During the 1978 preprogramming studies, a number of recommendations were made that stemmed from the international division’s issues: it was recommended that since each division was an independent unit of the organization, each should have different design personalities, linked by a common circulation system and swelling into the eating areas, garden spots, and strolling places. In addition, the divisions and major operating units should be located tangentially on this loop-style arrangement. Single-axis, double-loaded systems were discouraged. The resulting circulation scheme by Gensler accommodated these suggestions with open offices laid out almost like mazes, color coded in earthy pastels, and institutional in a soft way. The universality of the color scheme, however, blurred the divisional distinctions proposed for the circulation layout.

Interestingly, personality and distinctiveness are reflected in the response to a second

7 Park and waterfront.
(Photograph by Janet Parrish.)



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recommendation. The preprogramming studies revealed that for professional staff, job satisfaction and personal space were most closely connected to a feeling of job competence and getting somewhere within the company. Space was associated with its value as a symbolic badge and notarization of position, not just as a functional area for completing one's work. For lower-level staff, job satisfaction seemed less connected to work as a rewarding experience in itself than with the convivial aspects of the job: in particular, relationships with fellow workers and the boss. Therefore, the program's suggestion was to design a qualitatively different type of space for the second group: friendlier areas given to more social intercourse, more lounges, rest areas, and lunchrooms.

Miniplazas

In a major gesture, lobbied for heavily by Howard Friedman, "miniplazas" were created. These tastefully furnished lounges sit at corridor intersections. They

were intended to be places where employees of all levels could bump into each other while going about their everyday business—positive, informal settings where people could mix business with friendly conversation. Each miniplaza has a coffee machine, refrigerator, tables, and bulletin boards; a copier and conference room(s) are only steps away. Each division or work unit has its own distinctive, uniquely furnished miniplaza. Chairs and tables are provided for indoor lunches and coffee breaks, an option to the complex's restaurant, cafeterias, and parks.

The miniplazas do not work as they were intended: people know where they are on the floor but they will not always stop and relax.

One reason why the miniplazas do not work as they were intended is that they are an unfamiliar environmental tool in the work setting. Employees do not, in their experience as workers, know how to use them. Second, Levi's Plaza



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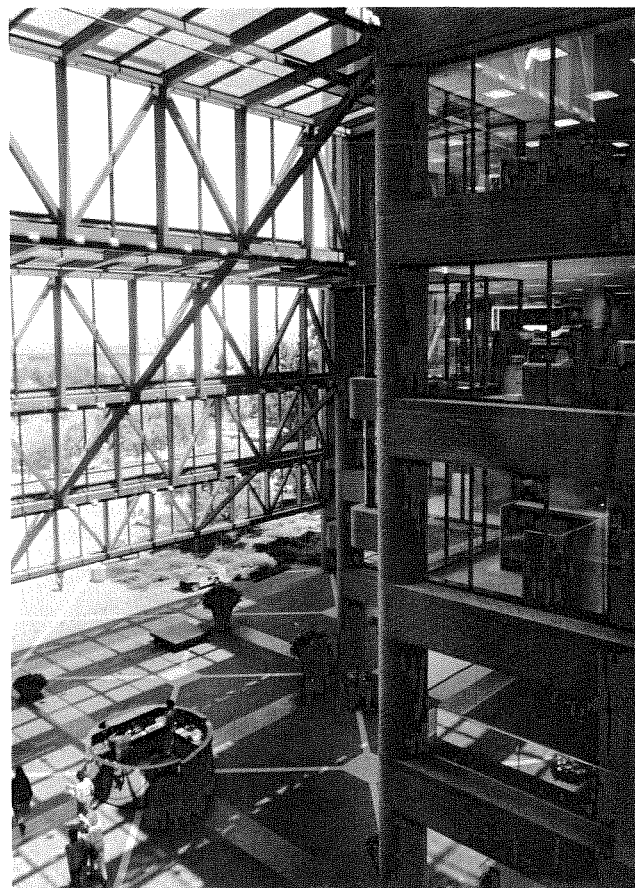
was completed and occupied at the start of a devastating economic recession. In its third major contraction, cuts in staff and pay produced anxiety among employees. So, despite top management's vigorous offering of this gift, lower-level employees realistically understood that their more immediate managers, tense about productivity, were watching. Many who do use the miniplazas often retreat to those on a different division or floor so as not to be seen "malingering."

Friedman, who even insured the miniplazas against the imperialism of office expansion by excluding wiring and power sources required to make that possible, was especially

disappointed by this outcome. Recent observations reveal a gradual increase in the number of employees using the miniplazas.

Offices and Work Stations

Aside from the chrome elevator in the atrium and the seventh-floor executive suite of the Levi Strauss Building, status signs are underplayed throughout the four major buildings. The design sticks to the corporate "50 percent rule": no more than 50 percent of the interior periphery is devoted to individual offices. One result of this has been a feeling of demotion for some executives who had more sumptuous offices at Embarcadero Center II.



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Because of this spatial "democracy," many in the new complex were moved into enclosed interior offices. Of course, those nonmanagerial employees who benefited from the rule are delighted.

Cafeteria

A great deal of "community" is created and sustained around the ritual of meals. Lunch at work is certainly a national pastime. Lunchtime at Embarcadero II had no pleasant or central location. The company cafeteria was unpopular and lost customers to the rich variety of shops and restaurants scattered throughout the financial district and within easy reach of Levi's employees. As part of Levi's

8 Two views of the park at noon.
(Photographs by Janet Parrish.)

10 Atrium of main building maintains a visual connection between Levi's employees at work and in transit while separating Levi's from casual outsiders.
(Photographs by Janet Parrish.)



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12 Scene portrays Levi's ideal use of "mini-plazas."
(Photograph by David K. Madison, courtesy of Howard Friedman, FAIA.)

13 The 36 distinctively
14 appointed "mini-plazas"—a
15 gift to the employees—are an unfamiliar environmental tool that employees are slowly learning to use. In current tight economic times, some employees retreat to "mini-plazas" away from their units to avoid the appearance of malingering.
(Photographs 13 and 14 by Tonia Chao, photograph 15 by Janet Parrish.)

16 The "50 percent rule"
17 produced many work stations and common areas with access to operable windows, sliding doors, and terraces. In fact, somewhat less than 50 percent of the plaza outer-window area is taken up by private offices.
(Photograph 16 by David K. Madison, courtesy of Howard Friedman, FAIA; photograph 17 by Janet Parrish.)

18 The Plaza complex includes two cafeterias. The "Plaza Café" (above) is limited to Levi's employees.
(Photograph by Janet Parrish.)



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efforts to retrieve a sense of community, two cafeterias were included in the complex: an elegant restaurant in the Levi Strauss Building and a more informal cafeteria in the Koshland Building with a panoramic view of the park and fountain. Both work well and are places the Haas can frequent, confident that they are with Levi's people.

Inwardly, this "culture" involved a tradition of familial caring for employees and—at least ostensibly—a diminishment of the everyday importance of hierarchy. Outwardly, there was the identification with the city of its origins and the desire to give back to the city some of the environmental qualities lost in the burst of high-rise development.

Conclusion

Levi's Plaza is a "place" in comprehensive terms. Its location, form, scale, and layout are summaries of what the company intended in crystallizing its corporate identity and supporting its architectural image. There were conflicts between the company and the architects, but, in fleshing out and physically manifesting corporate policy, Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum, Gensler, and Halprin clearly benefited from the strong and distinctive set of implied and explicit guidelines that emerged from a long corporate history and culture.

Despite the honest, positive tone of our discussion, Levi's is, of course, not a democracy. Hierarchy in the new-scale organization is more a fact than ever. Nor is Levi's a "family," despite efforts to retrieve some of that feeling. Certainly the "gift to the city" was not innocent of advantages that could be extracted from the city's review process. But the Plaza is a success as a workplace, as a city-place, and as an environmental symbol. At this writing, for example, San Francisco's mayor, Diane Feinstein, has forced a major developer to rethink its proposed design insisting that she wants "... a less ambitious project modeled



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on the college campuslike design of the new Levi Strauss offices.”⁷

The Plaza was intended as a definitive home and it works that way. It was intended as a contribution to the kind of place a significant and influential segment of the San Francisco community wants the city to be, and it is. It also manages to be summary of the company’s historic experiences—rooting the place in time. More significantly, the Plaza is a resolution of Levi’s experience with growth.⁸ As an environmental tool, it helps resolve the contradictions between bigness, on the one hand, and a sense of community and distinctive corporate culture, on the other.

This is a dramatic case of social origins in building. Those of us who have been critical of the abstract and/or formal descriptions of buildings that frequent the literature need to search more extensively for those

extraaesthetic and extramaterial forces that explain the shapes and uses of places in our built environment. It is inevitable that the familiarity of design professionals with building biographies such as this can function as a guide to their questions, and can offer advice, eyes, and hands when working on similar problems.

NOTES

- 1 *A.I.A. Journal*, May 1982, pp. 153–160. *San Francisco Business*, March 1983, pp. 13–15; and “The Odyssey of Levi Strauss,” *Fortune*, March 22, 1983.
- 2 Russ Ellis and Gary Lehner.
- 3 Russ Ellis, Dana Cuff, Sam Dyer, Marianna Adler, Toby Levy, and Fried Wittman.
- 4 This was conducted by a graduate methods seminar on postoccupancy evaluation. Levi’s management insisted that our approach be as unobtrusive as possible. No interview schedules or survey instruments were permitted. Thus, we relied on observation and unstructured interviews.
- 5 *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 19, 1982.
- 6 *Fortune*, op. cit.; *Time*, January 3, 1983, pp. 265–266. See also “Revolution in the Workplace,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 16, 1984.
- 7 “Southern Pacific Will Start Over on the Design for Mission Bay,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 23, 1984.
- 8 Ironically, it is very likely that Levi’s will again have strangers in its buildings. The fading popularity of the “501” jeans has recently necessitated the closure of 11 plants in the United States, Canada, and France. Headquarters employees will also be laid off. This major new contraction will almost certainly require the leasing of underused space to other companies. The closeness of Levi’s relationship to developer Gerson Bakar will most likely result in Levi’s exercising some influence over the choice of new lessees. See “Big New Levi Cutback to Close San Jose Plant,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 20, 1984; “Levi Closing 11 Plants, Idling 2,500,” *San Francisco Examiner*, June 19, 1984.

Civic Space: An Urban Collage

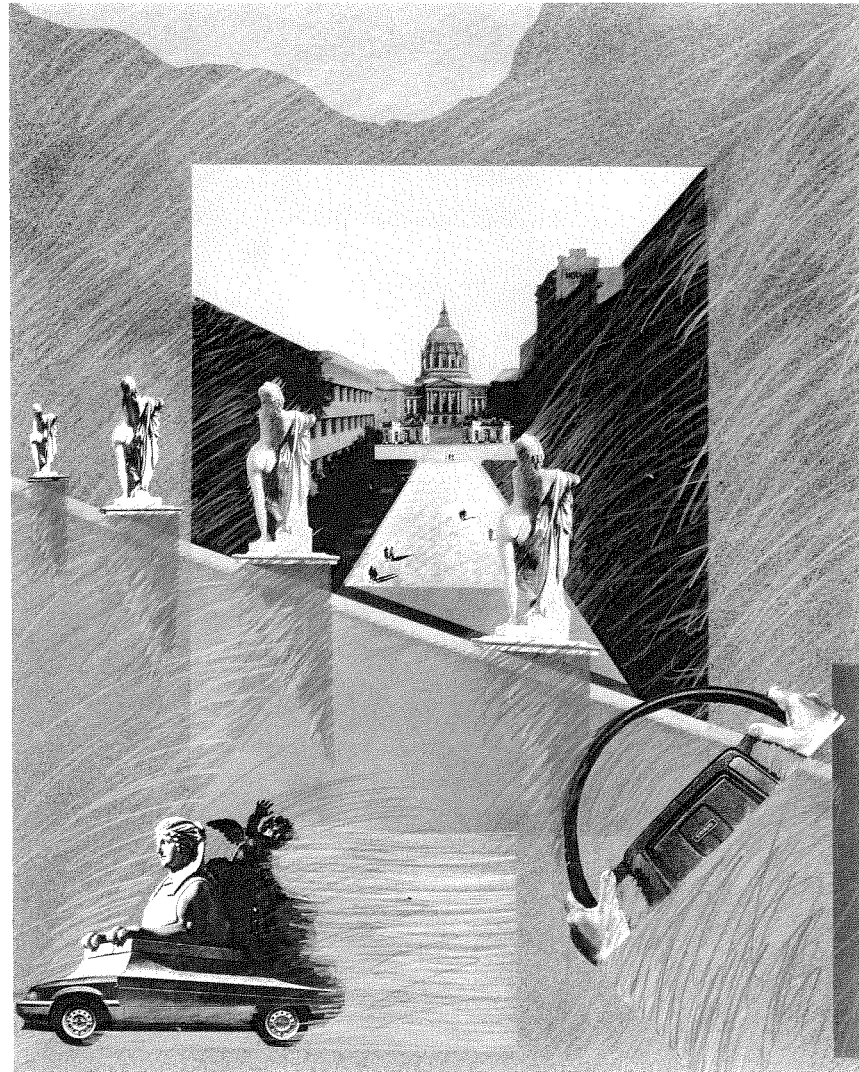
Brett Bennett

"Since ancient times, the abstract geometrical background of buildings and urban architecture has been enriched by the contrast with figural and pictorial representations and sculpture. Since the visual arts rejected this form of expression and began to compete with the abstraction of buildings this contrapuntal dimension has been lost."¹

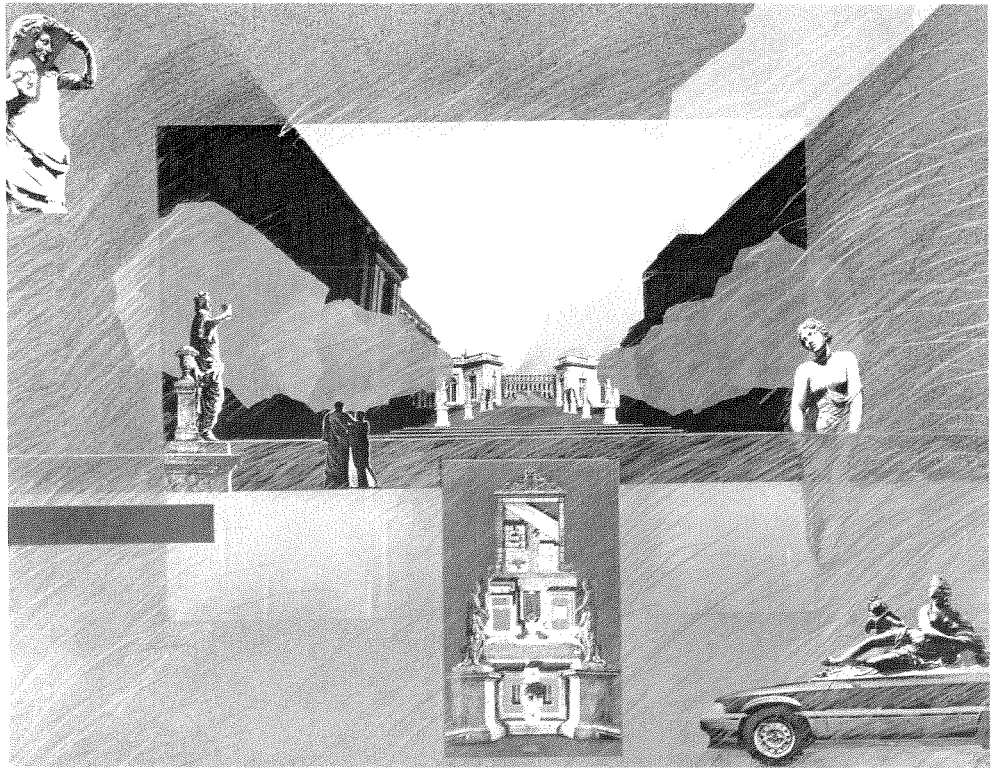
The collages illustrate a proposal for an area in San Francisco's Civic Center, between the War Memorial Opera House and Art Museum, including the continuation of the City Hall axis to the west. The intent has been to reestablish the counterpoint between the sculptural representation of the human figure and architecture.

In his essay "Architecture, Sculpture and Painting: Environment, Act and Illusion," Vincent Scully has proposed that figural sculpture has traditionally functioned as a representation of human action in a public or collective realm. In a rather literal response to this idea, the figures that populate these collages not only affect monumental stances, but engage in play or indulge in other nonheroic activities.

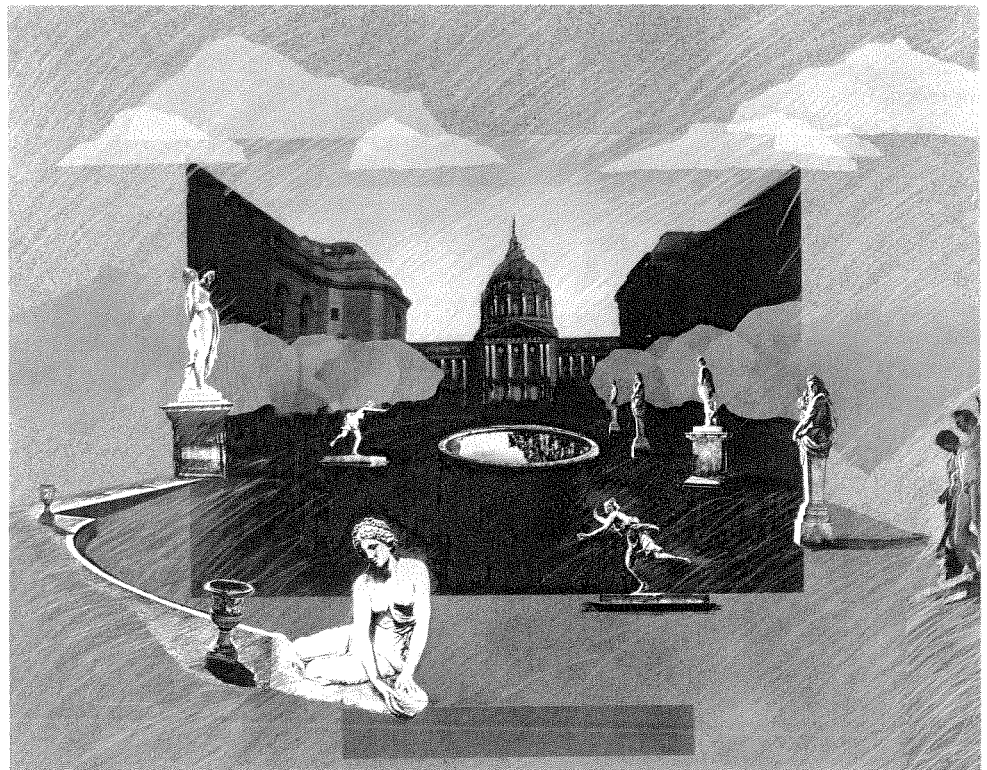
Also addressed is the automobile and its hegemony in the contemporary urban environment. The proposal attempts to include the viewer confined to a moving vehicle in the experience of this place. A façade is applied to the segment of the freeway that interrupts the civic axis, relating it to the surrounding architecture and



I The freeway, the true entry to the city, provides a privileged glimpse along the axial sightline, one that might be whimsically marked for the decelerating motorist.



2



3

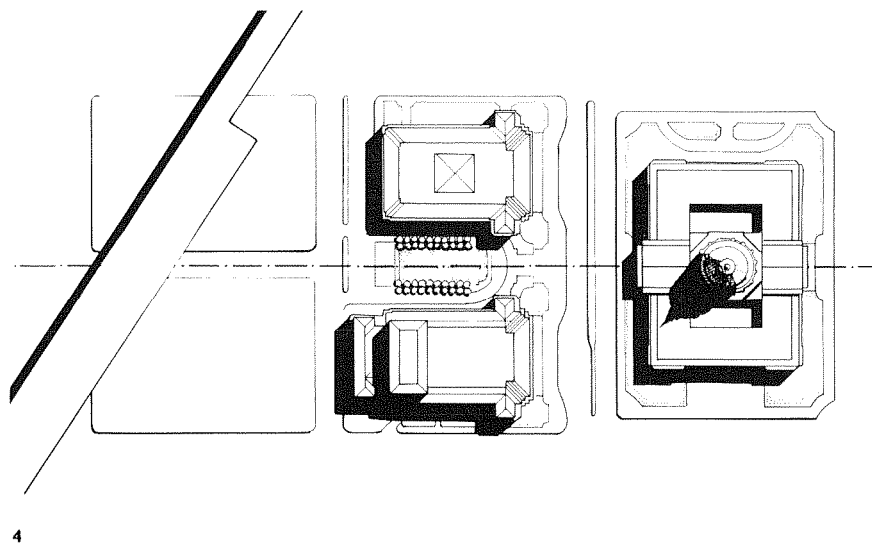
tying it to the ground plane of the pedestrian city. The placement of sculpture on the freeway would emphasize the motorist's experience of the freeway as an entrance to the city. The repetition of these pieces might also articulate the transition in velocity on the exit ramp and help to define the new scale of motion that prevails on the surface streets.

A final question arises: Does the auto-induced mobility of our current condition preclude the investment of a single location with such significance? Does the accessibility of escape subvert any concern for a particular (nonprivate) setting? Does a mobile society necessarily sacrifice permanence and pride of place?

In illustration of this question, the most intimate relation of sculpture to architecture—that of the figure to the base—has been disrupted. The automobile which displaces the architectural base threatens stasis and permanence, and perhaps the very foundation of architecture.

NOTE

- 1 *Rob Krier: on Architecture*, Academy Editions, London, St. Martin's Press, New York.



- 2 **Two pavilions** anchor the west end of a small park; the freeway, given a façade on the street, is brought down to earth: a backdrop in the near distance.

- 3 **The formerly desolate park** is now populated by figural sculpture. A counterpoint to the geometry of architecture, it represents a human presence and individual action in the public realm.

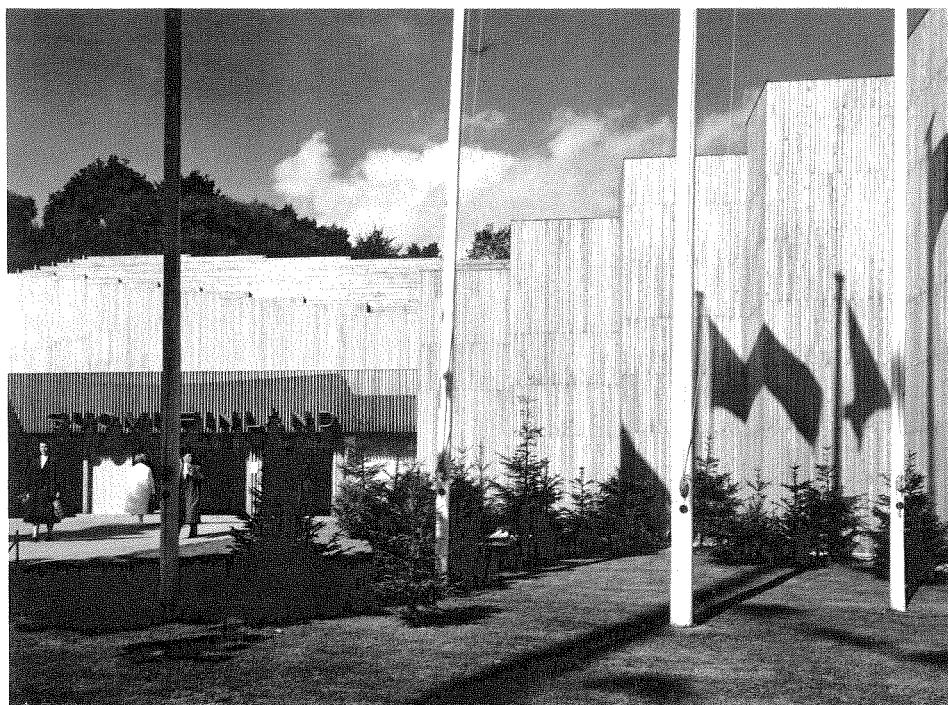
- 4 **The monumental City Hall** faces the majestic twins of the War Memorial Opera House and Art Museum. Between them its powerful axis continues to the west, only to be severed by the last exit of Interstate 101.

Reima Pietilae: Form Follows Approach

Malcolm Quantrill

The work of Reima Pietilae, neglected for a number of significant reasons, is the subject of our inquiry. Pietilae's first building, the Finnish Pavilion for the World's Fair in Brussels, dates from 1957; as a result, for almost the first 20 years of Pietilae's career, Aalto remained the most productive architect as well as the dominant force on the Finnish architectural scene. This meant that although Pietilae's early work demonstrated a highly original talent and attracted considerable attention, it was necessarily overshadowed by the Finnish master whose supremacy had been acknowledged as early as 1927.

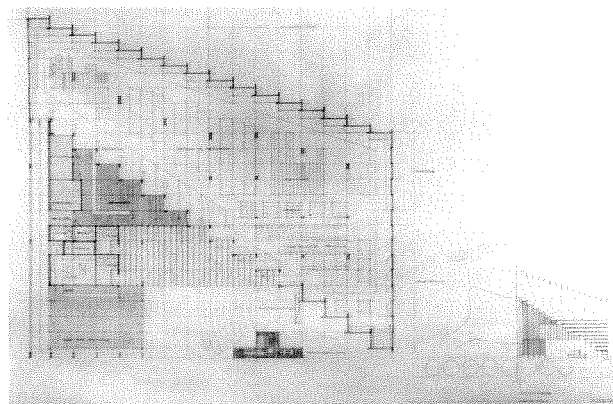
While Aalto's work exhibits much variety of theme, it also has a substantial amount of continuity in its preoccupations from the mid-1930s until his death 40 years later. The only real hiatus in Aalto's output occurred during the period around 1940–1945. In contrast, Pietilae lacked substantial commissions for almost a decade, from approximately 1963 to 1973. This gap in his production of buildings and the fact that not only was he deprived of the realization of his most cogent design of the 1960s—that for the Malmi Church—but also that his success in the competition for the New Delhi Embassy of 1963 was not rewarded with an actual commission until 1980, meant that his forties—often



1

1 **Finnish Pavilion** for the Brussels World's Fair (1958): View of Entrance.

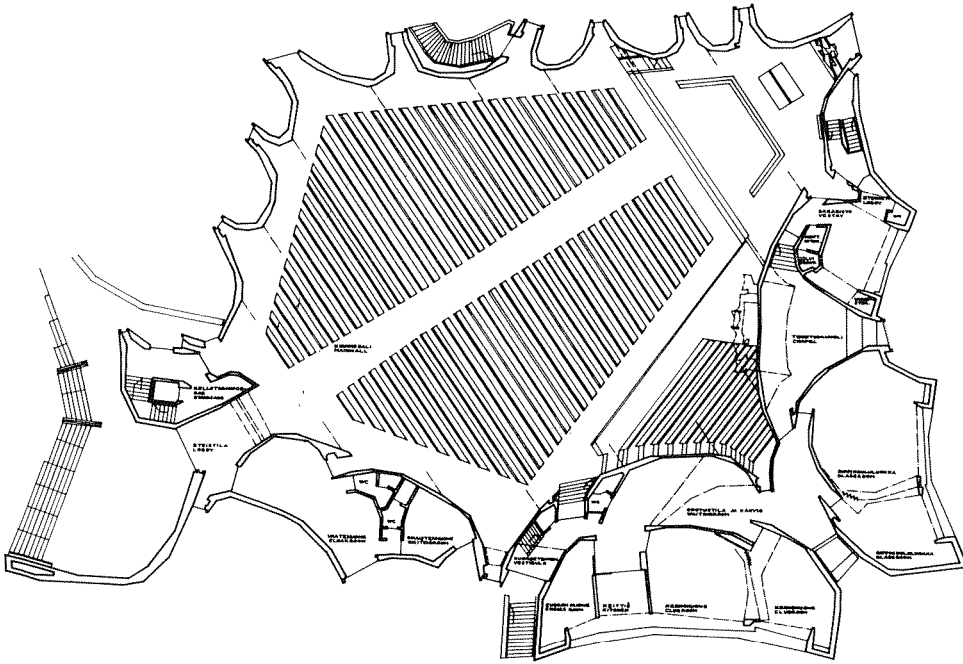
2 **Finnish Pavilion** for the Brussels World's Fair (1958): Plan and Site Plan.



2

All illustrations are reproduced by kind permission of the studio of Raili and Reima Pietilae.

This article is based on excerpts from: Malcolm Quantrill, *Reima Pietilae: Architecture Context and Modernism*, 1985, forthcoming.



3

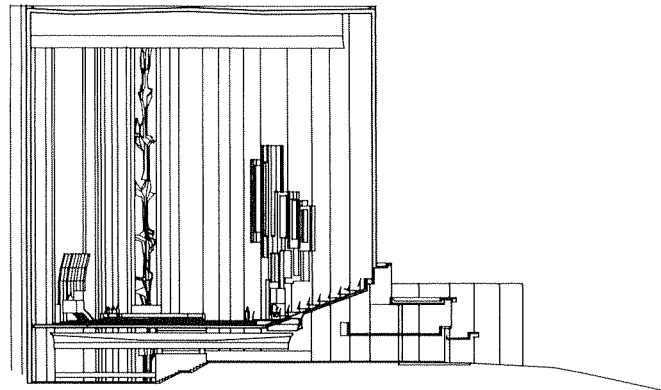
an architect's most fruitful years—produced little architecture. Yet, a close examination of the architect's intentions, as revealed in the whole body of projects and buildings, shows a persistent pattern of themes and variations similar to those we have located in Aalto's work¹; indeed, that is an underlying characteristic in the *oeuvre* of most outstanding artists.

The building with which Pietilae achieved this breakthrough was the Finnish Pavilion designed for the World's Fair in Brussels. The Pavilion won in competition in 1957 and was constructed for the 1958 Fair. Pietilae has explained that its concept was inspired by the theories and teaching of Professor Aulis Blomstedt, which in turn built on the ideas of Theo van Doesburg. But in Pietilae's hands these *modular* precepts have gone through a distinctive transformation. Although in his student work Pietilae experimented with modular ideas that were analogical to those of Le Corbusier, for the Brussels design he removed the modular

control from the realm of mathematics and took it boldly into the sphere of spatial experience. In Pietilae's own words:

My Brussels idea had to do with spatial modulation. It came, of course, from Blomstedt. It was an idea for making Finnish architecture natural and intellectual at the same time. . . . The modular structuralism of the Brussels Pavilion shows how one operates with this system artistically.²

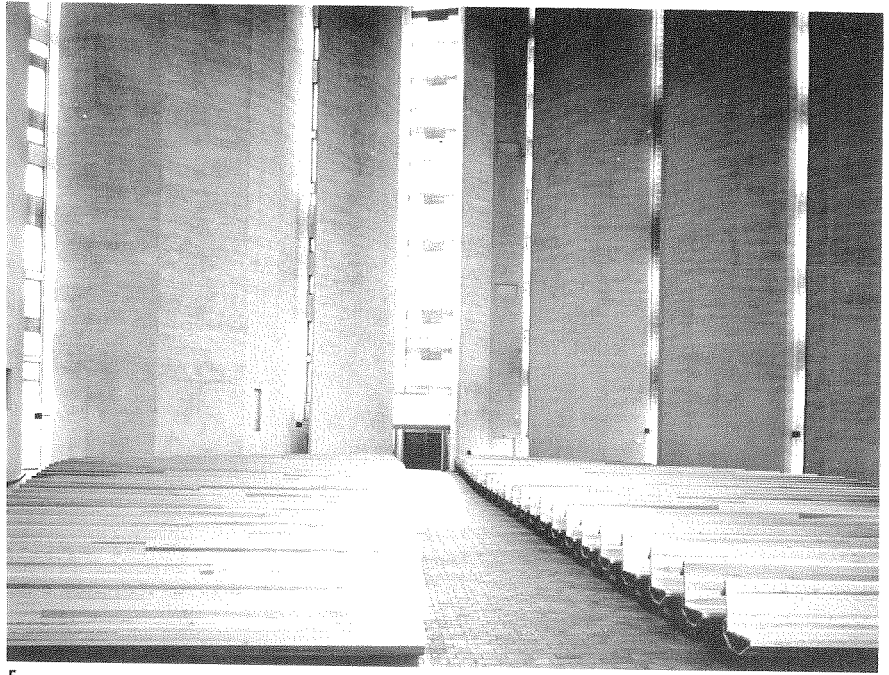
There are possible references in the Brussels Pavilion to Aalto's Sports Hall for the Technical University at Otaniemi (1949–1954), of which Pietilae's first major commission might be seen as a more specifically modular interpretation. From time to time Aalto's plans—and in the case of the Otaniemi Sports Hall, also the section—have a distinctly modular preoccupation.³ Aalto's Otaniemi design is, however, fundamentally a structural concept in response to the simple-function program of a single, large-span volume. In



4

3 Kaleva Church, Tampere (completed 1966): Plan.

4 Kaleva Church, Tampere: Section looking towards altar.



5

contrast, Pietilae's plan already embodies the geometrical thrust of a more complex three-dimensional exploration. Pietilae says, however, that: "[Whereas] its exterior sculpturalism is logically geometric, its structural system is a compromise."⁴

Although Pietilae's Brussels Pavilion had some superficial affinities with Aalto's Otaniemi Sports Hall, our closer examination shows that Pietilae's whole conceptual design derives more from his own, experimental, modular exercises than Aalto's structural solution. In fact, Pietilae's compositional technique has always been more systematic than Aalto's, and his attention to the modular basis of rhythm more studied than intuitive.

The exhibition "Morphology and Urbanism," held at the Pinx Gallery in Helsinki in 1966, revealed this systematic basis of Pietilae's approach to formal explorations. What he calls his *semimodular* "stick" studies (1957–1959) later found expression in the

concept of both the Suvikumpu Housing at Tapiola (original project 1962) and the design for the New Delhi Embassy (1963), while the more organic studies of urban configurations anticipate the free-form, *sculpted* envelope of Kaleva Church, the Malmi Church, and the Monte Carlo Centre.

In the case of Kaleva design, the "plan-wall" shape was generated by experimenting with paper forms. Both systems are *modular* in the sense that they impart an overall rhythmical control to Pietilae's planning strategies and formal structures. The object of these exercises was not a mere abstract analysis of forms *but* the provision of a notation to assist the architect in his mastery of formal language. The success of this method may be seen in Pietilae's sculpture, *The Broken Reed*, which occupies the focal position at the east end of his Kaleva Church at Tampere and is an authentic part of the architectural totality. The name, which was suggested by the Minister, Paavo Viljanen, is, of course, a

biblical metaphor; Pietilae says it is derived from the dead pine *kelo*, a focus for worship by both Lapps and Finns.

Kaleva Church, Tampere, the original-competition design for which dates from 1959, already demonstrates a marked departure from Aalto's church interiors. It must be remembered that its design had been immediately preceded by Aalto's most successful church, that for Vuoksenniska, Imatra (1956–1959), in which he had achieved his most complete "interweaving of the section and the plan shape" and "unity of horizontal and vertical construction." Thus, the Lutheran Church in Finland had been preconditioned to the acceptance of a plastic plan-form.

Pietilae's plan-form generates an equally daring treatment of the internal space; the single-volume nave possesses a truly medieval sense of monumentality. In fact, the competition actually called for "a monumental project" as the religious focus for 30,000 residents of East

Tampere. But the apparent massiveness of the “piers”—formed by the concave sections of the external walls *pressing in*—with simple flat vaults spanning the beams that are slung across the nave, is, in fact, denied by the play of light that breaks across the wall surfaces. Pietilae described his objective thus:

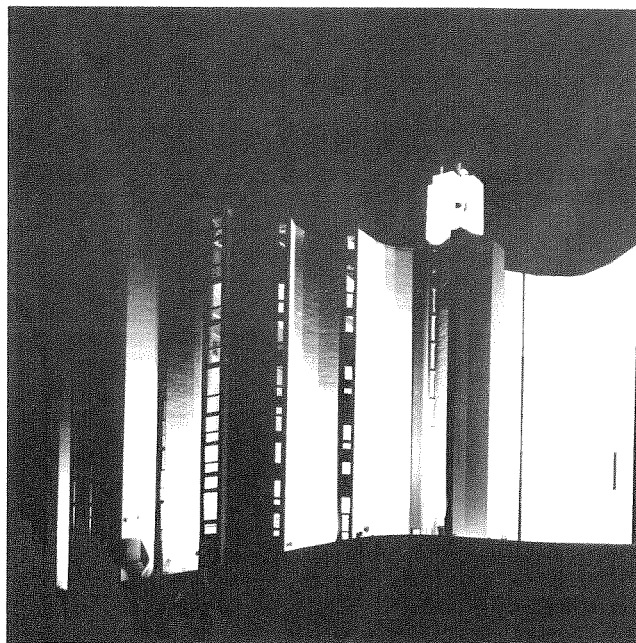
I tried to achieve a visual weightlessness by using rhythmic and light kinetics of broken line chains in constantly evolving series. It is similar to the quick sequences in organ music. Kaleva Church fights against the traditional idea of wall heaviness.⁵

The sculptural monumentality of the interior space is in contrast to the shifting forms of the concrete pulpit, where the fine detailing of the shuttering gives an insight to the lively character Pietilae had intended for the exterior. In addition, the wooden sculpture placed against the east window dominates the interior from the moment of entry, literally pulsating with life and reducing the adjacent element of the plain Lutheran cross to an entirely subservient role. Even the design of the organ case in the Kaleva Church, combined with its prominent position on the south wall, makes it more dominant than the cross, which hovers in a sweeping wing as though some great angel guards the choir ramp. In the pervasive liveliness of

Pietilae’s interior the cross is virtually a redundant *motif*; it seems to be superfluous in his image of the Church, both formally and symbolically, as is perhaps confirmed by his use of crosses outside the Hervanta Congregational Center (1979). For, in Kaleva Church, Pietilae has transformed the rhythmical freedom he introduced into the Brussels Pavilion and generated a dance of joy within a framework of appropriate solemnity.

Kaleva Church was a watershed in Pietilae’s development. It quite clearly demonstrated that the time he had devoted to the systematic study of form began to pay dividends in this second, full-size, architectural realization. In this single leap, from the springboard of the Brussels Pavilion he had removed himself from the immediate constraints of Blomstedt’s influence, and, at the same time, had moved closer to Aalto. And, just as Aalto had connected himself with the mainstream of European functionalist architecture through the *Turun Sanomat* building and the Paimio sanatorium, so with Kaleva Church Pietilae placed himself closer to the center of European expressionist tradition and measured up at once to the standards established by Gaudi, Steiner, Mendelsohn, and Scharoun.

Also, like Aalto—who, it should be recalled



6

6 Kaleva Church, Tampere:
Exterior view at night.



7

had retreated from internationalism after the Viipuri Library and evolved his own highly idiosyncratic Finnish expression—Pietilae set out to evolve an architectural language which, although springing from the Finnish *genius loci*, seeks to make connections with other cultures. He constantly searches out appropriate reference points in other cultural patterns; yet the essentially Finnish center of his own design-integrity remains firm.

However irregular a plan form, a flat roof optically cancels out those undulations—has a flattening effect, in other words—unless the irregularities are truly exaggerated. Pietilae conceived Kaleva Church, however, as an irregular *tube*; its interior qualities and the external silhouette are, therefore, inherent in his decision to impose this particular control on the total form of the building. He explains:

From the distance, driving up Vapaudenkatu [Independence Street], you

can see only the Bells of Kaleva, the Bell Cross; then a boxlike silhouette gradually starts to rise until it reaches the total outline of the building; there is then a moment when nothing happens (please note this moment of unchanged expressionlessness). From there on Kaleva begins to develop. You are walking through the entrance green . . . the building expression disappears, the elevation has made its vanishing function to be received and guided within.

A church elevation is not only static or dynamic but: *a choreography for a symbolic event.*⁶

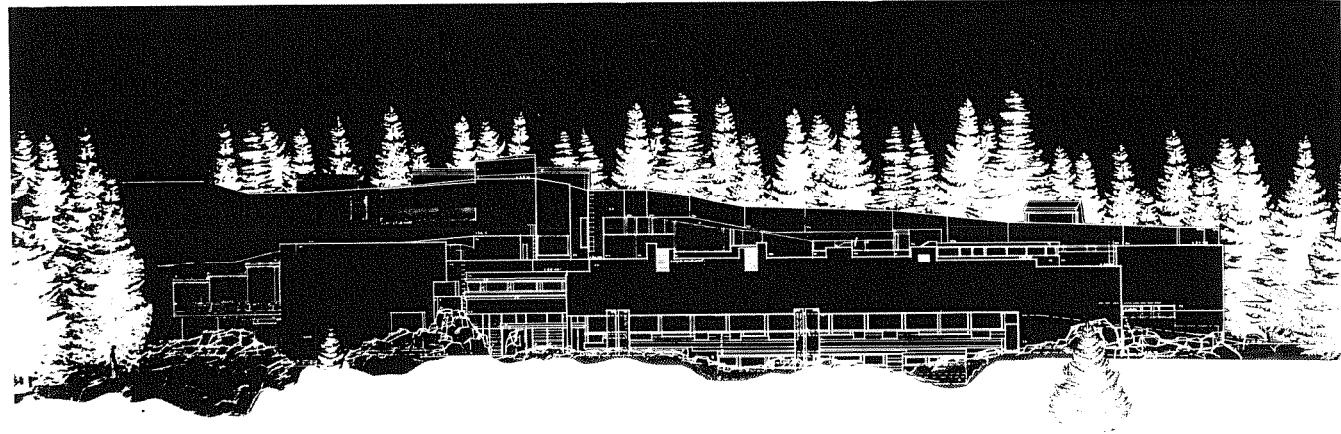
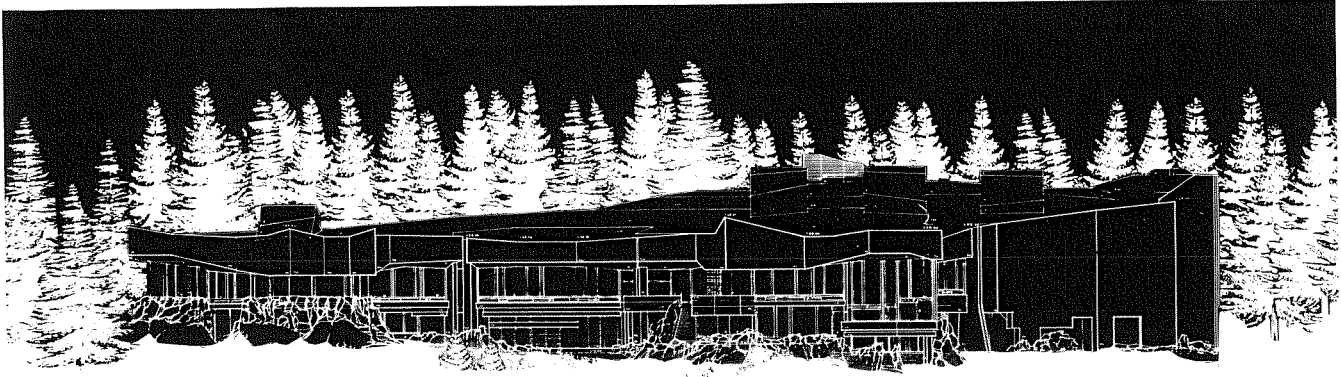
Pietilae's Student Center at Otaniemi, which has replaced the old Poli students' clubhouse in Lönnrotinkatu, Helsinki, coming after the Brussels Pavilion and Kaleva Church, is difficult to grasp although the image of "Dipoli," as it was later to be called, is clear enough. It is not an image of city and urbanity—but of forest and nature and of "a sense of belonging," a

connection and relationship between building and place. Nevertheless, however tantalizing it is from a distance, it is rather overwhelming at close quarters.

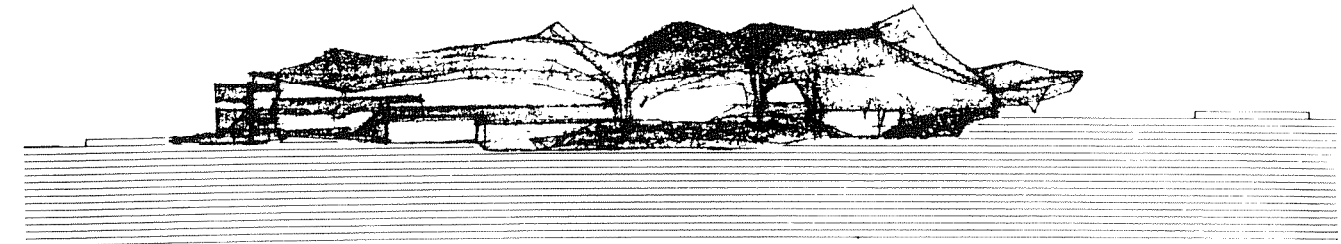
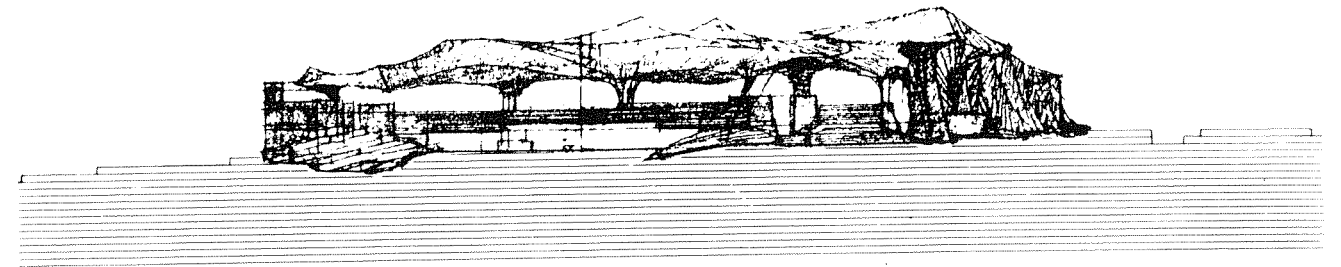
There is no doubt that the overall concept of the building is in the grip of a very strong plan. This strength derives from a hard "core" of basic functions from which soft "feelers" are put into the terrain. Such a marriage of a firm baseline with the exploratory character of major functions is, of course, familiar to us from Aalto's planning after the Villa Mairea.⁷ In the Dipoli design the hard core consists of the nonsocial and subsidiary functions at ground-floor level. These functions are tightly mustered into an approximately square form that is split diagonally by the students' foyer, which, in turn, cuts right through the center of the plan to the lecture-theater/cinema, separating out the toilet functions in the process.

On the principal level (first floor), the Main Hall, the

7 Dipoli Conference Center, Otaniemi (1966):
Model from above.



8



9

8 Dipoli Conference Center, Otaniemi:
Elevations.

9 Dipoli Conference Center: Form sketch.



10

10 Dipoli Conference Center, Otaniemi: Exterior view in autumn.



11

11 Dipoli Conference Center, Otaniemi: Exterior view in winter.

principal foyer, and the bar and restaurant areas form three great “hands” that stretch out irregularly to the south and west from the subservient body of regular spaces. On the lower floor these irregular public social spaces, comprising the students’ main entrance and a restaurant, bars, and night-club, impart a continuous free-flowing character to the interior. The shifts of axis combined with the persistent irregularity in the shaping of these spaces provide the key to Pietilae’s concept for this student social center planted in the Otaniemi forest. To the exterior it projects the image of a giant outcrop of granite, while from within the atmosphere is reminiscent of a grotto. Pietilae has remarked:

If a deposit of geomorphic-metaphoric function has been relocated somewhere, then space flows around it like water around stones in a brook. The ground floor is a terrestrial phenomenon around which linger the members of the animal. . . .

Dipoli is not a terrain building but a copper sculpture . . . there are three sliding walls casually separating three other halls for multipurpose functions. This set of four halls is a cave sequence of 100 meters. I feel as though I’m standing inside the body of a huge animal!

Pietilae’s use of varied horizontal divisions in the “Dipoli” fenestration is part of a more complex reasoning behind the organization of the façade as a whole. Of course, this organization could be seen as modular and based upon a semiconventional, proportional segmentation of the entire wall area. But more than that, it is concerned with attempting to dissolve the wall so that it becomes an *apatetic* membrane or skin between internal and external space.

To Pietilae the “Dipoli” context is forest, of which the building is merely part. In this forest context the external wall is not a barrier in the normal architectural sense, but a skin that adapts

the building to fit the natural environment, to give the man-made structure a sense of place. The artificiality of a large glazed area is, therefore, systematically broken down by “modular” subdivisions to echo the fragmentary patterns of nature. Thus, the heavy wooden window frames may have a modular basis on the architect’s drawing board, but his intention is to create an *apatetic* skin that adapts the built form to the natural context.

More than any other Finnish building of the past half-century Dipoli bridges the gap between those solid bourgeois comforts of national romanticism and the bizarre excitements of modern life. “Dipoli” is every bit as gritty as the original Poli building of Thome and Lindahl. “Dipoli” was built with the students’ own funds, and clearly Pietilae’s design expresses this vital sense of their independence. “Dipoli” shows the architect flexing his muscles and limbering up for his even more complex routines. As he explains:

I pictured the original granite shield surface on the site as if lifted six meters to form the roof shape of the building. The geomorphic force has, thus, its symbolic agent in Dipoli's landform sculpture. Is Dipoli not an early land artwork? Of course, there are imaginary ways of approaching this imagery in the spirit of the students' lodge: especially that tabooed being Jamerapartainen Insinoori (the Stubble-Bearded Engineer) whose dwelling was assumed to be in the vaults of the national romantic architecture of the old Poli. I have done my best to attract him to move to Dipoli. His front door has been relocated in Dipoli and the blank wall behind it dedicated as the entrance to his quarters."

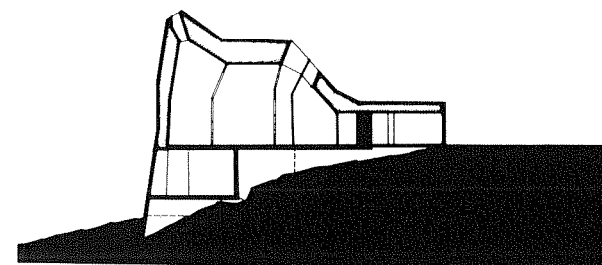
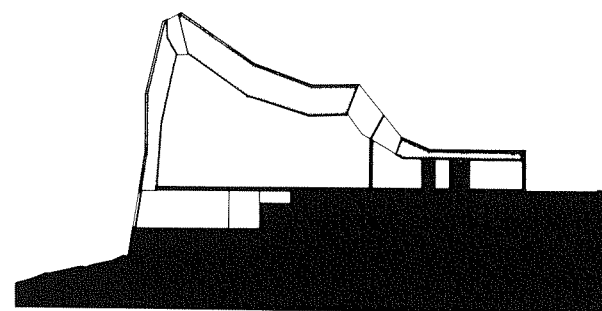
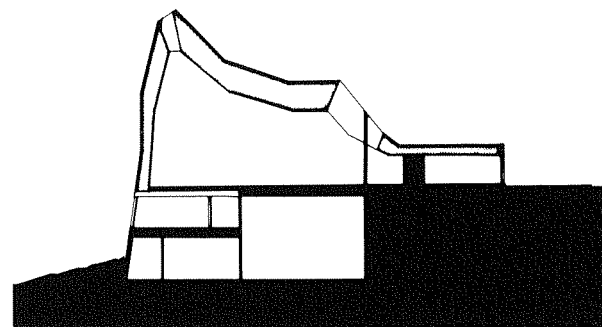
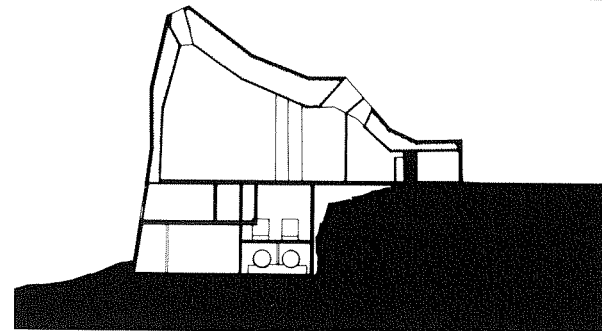
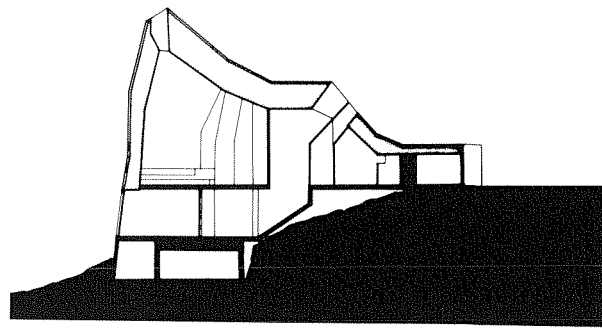
In both the Brussels Pavilion and the "Dipoli" building the section has the same formal characteristics as the plan. The stepped volume of the Brussels structure, however, converts the modular "stick" exercises into functional form and space; the "Dipoli" volume clearly distinguishes between the vertical enclosing walls and the sculptural roof or "lid." The Malmi Church Competition project of 1967 proposed an integration of plan and section into a monolithic whole. Gone are the modular "steps" that build up the form of the Brussels Pavilion; the vertical

enclosing walls of both Kaleva Church and "Dipoli" have also been superseded; in their place the Malmi envelope creates a plastic continuum of walls and ceiling.

Pietilae's explanation of its inception is as follows:

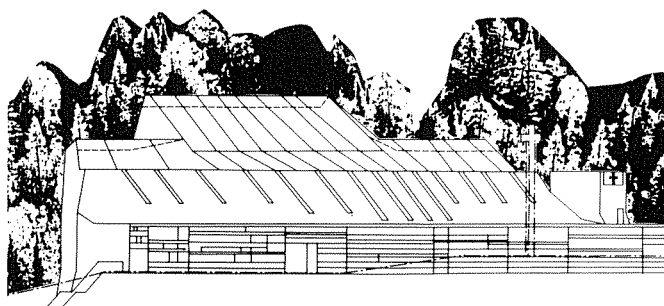
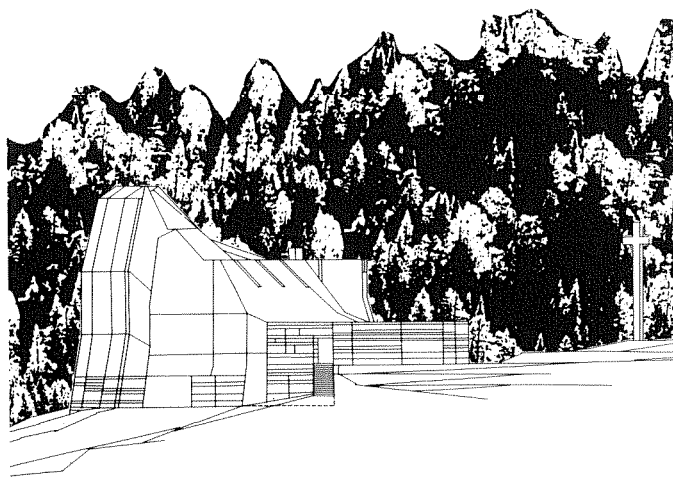
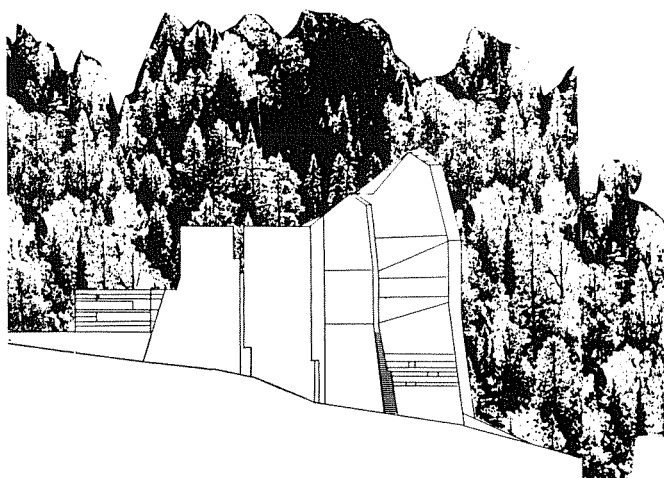
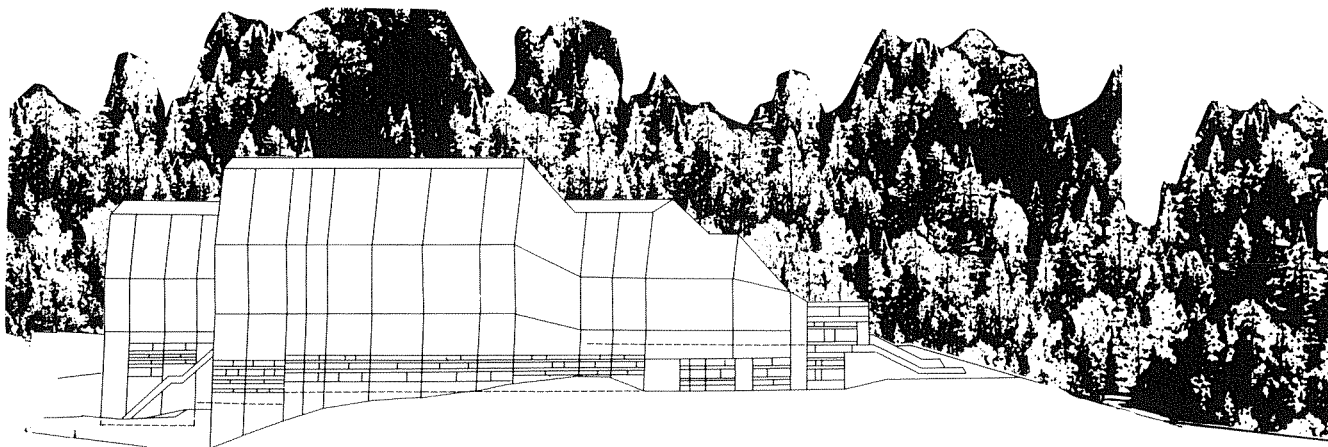
Our cat came to rest on the drawing board and lay across the drawing before me. It visually terrorized me into accepting the form language of its own physiognomy for my free sketch form. Missukka was a domestic Finnish cat—grey and striped transversely with darker grey bands. 'Well,' I said to her, 'I accept your shape because otherwise I cannot make this competition.' Then I drew a pencil line around the shape of the cat's body fixing its configuration on my plan. . . . Malmi also has another precedent in its idea: 'Siirtolohkare,' a boulder standing isolated by glacial ice. There are many examples of such rocks scattered around Finland, resulting from a dislocation by ice from their original 'mother rock.' Malmi Church could express metaphorically this human dislocation.¹⁰

For the sloping suburban site of Malmi, near Helsinki, he proposed a bold faceted outcrop that owes more to "Dipoli" than does his earlier Kaleva Church.



12

12 Malmi Church
Competition Project (1967):
Sections.



13

13 Malmi Church

Competition Project:
Elevations.

14 Official Residence for the President of Finland near Helsinki. Competition Project (1984): Main Floor Plan.

Aalto's Imatra Church certainly presents a formal "strangeness"; in Aalto's case, however, the unfamiliarity derives from a semimilitary, bunkerlike exterior combined with a somewhat baroque interior. In Aalto's church the two shells or "skins" are doing *different* things, but its exterior image is hardly organic. In contrast, as with "Dipoli," Pietilae sets out in his Malmi project to achieve that marriage of building to site, which creates a close relationship between architecture and nature, making the church a *member* of the landscape, contriving to construct a ubiquitous whole.¹¹ Thus, the image of the Malmi concept is essentially geomorphic—with the church as well as the chapel

and conference room clinging daringly to the edge of the escarpment.

Once again, as in the "Dipoli" design, the supporting accommodation is grouped to provide an anchor for the more adventurous forms that thrust out the rocklike character of the church. In aiming at this natural expression Pietilae may appear to look toward the work of Rudolph Steiner, although the Malmi concept is, in fact, distinct from both the anthroposophic ideal of Steiner and the plastic expressionism of Mendelsohn. Pietilae's intention, rather, is to echo natural structures, to use an architectural *metaphor* for rock formations. The section



14

also offered a cave-like interior, which suggests a primeval religious space.

Pietilae's Malmi project promised—through a carefully orchestrated and harmonic progression from plan to section—an interior of great spiritual potential. Not only is the geomorphic form of this design spatially stimulating but also Pietilae's proposals for introducing natural light into the church at high levels conceived dramatic effects reminiscent of baroque techniques. The exterior form, with its careful attention to the modeling of the faceted, north (main external) wall, shows just how much Pietilae's design control had developed since the construction of Kaleva and "Dipoli." Conceptually, the Malmi Church project represents the high point of Pietilae's imagery of the 1960s: The geomorphic ideas that originated at "Dipoli" culminated in the forms proposed by the Malmi Competition drawings.

It might be helpful to review the particular ideas and

characteristics that contribute to the uniqueness of Pietilae's architecture. These appear to fall under five broad headings:

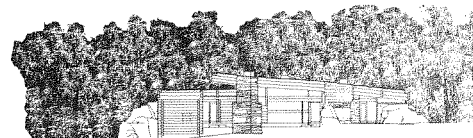
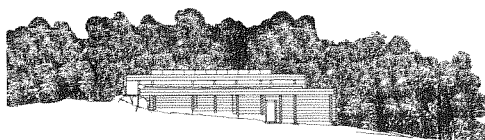
his interest in the creation of *symbolic landscapes*; his pursuit of *underlying* or *alternative* contexts for architecture (as distinct from the more obvious physical and visual frameworks of environments); his inclination to *overstate* an architectural intention in order to increase its imagic force and dramatic power; his studied *plurality* in the use of materials, reflecting both the 'nature of materials' philosophy and the impact of new technologies on design (paralleling Wright's later work); and his use of light as a *material* component in the exploration of space and form (firmly within the Finnish tradition and in continuation of Aalto's own preoccupations).

Pietilae's desire to fulfil his architectural intentions

within the frameworks of symbolic landscapes gives his work a haunting quality that makes it difficult to categorize and almost impossible to describe in the conventional language of criticism. This *lyrical* quality, which we find in works as diverse in form-idea and imagery as the Dipoli Centre and Lieksa Church, derives its elusiveness directly from the architect's pursuit of those underlying (alternative) contexts that constitute the deep structure of environmental memory and the psychological framework of existence and evolution. But Pietilae often achieves these context-responsive, memory-enriching landscapes with an underplaying of form and effect, generating subtle patterns of organic or formalized order within the material-light balance of interior spaces.

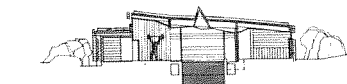
While this subtlety of effect is present in the fenestration of Dipoli, where the window-image is dissolved in the reflected structure of the surrounding forest, by conventional standards that

building would be judged to have an exaggerated muscularity. But this apparent "overstatement" must not be understood in the light of such conventions; rather the geological memory and primitive forces of nature that generated its metaphoric content have to be taken into account. Pietilae's design approach is not standard, and cannot be standardized. This does not mean each new Pietilae building is simply another exercise in originality. The difficulty is in detecting the continuity of intent, rather than of effect, of seeking the contextual connections beneath the surface. This difficulty is exacerbated by the architect's sheer brilliance of effect—with an astonishing range of light/surface/material/structure propositions in his work during the 1960s alone. If we look at the surfaces of Dipoli, Kaleva Church, and Suvikumpu housing, however, we find within this remarkable range of effects a very consistent concern for the surface of a building as a "living" membrane as opposed to a dead skin of dehydrated geometry.

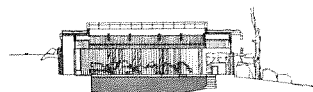


ELEVATION 1 1984

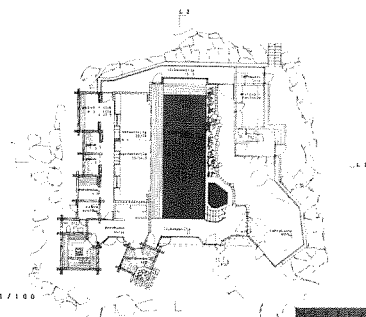
ELEVATION 2 1984



SECTION 1 1984

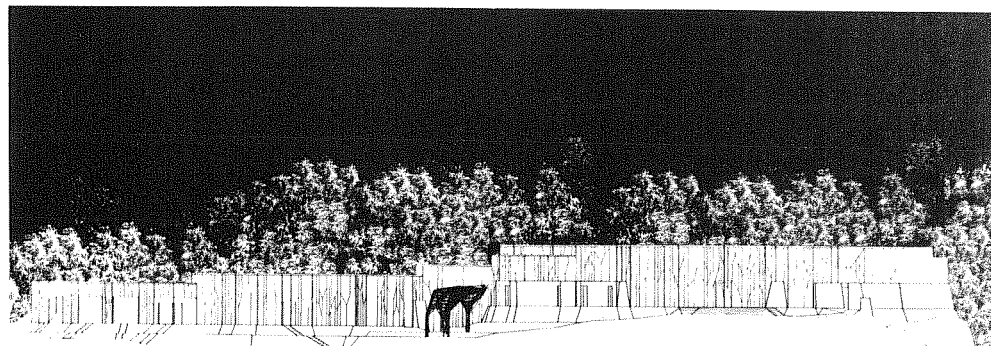


SECTION 2 1984



PLAN 1 1984

15



ELEVATION 3 1984

16 Official Residence for the President of Finland near Helsinki. Competition Project (1984): Elevation from the shore, with sections.

18 Official Residence for the President of Finland near Helsinki. Competition Project (1984): General View of Model (shore side).

15 Official Residence for the President of Finland near Helsinki. Competition Project (1984): Sauna Building.

19 Official Residence for the President of Finland near Helsinki. Competition Project (1984): View of Model, showing relationship of the Sauna to the Residence.

17 Official Residence for the President of Finland near Helsinki. Competition Project (1984): Entrance Elevation.

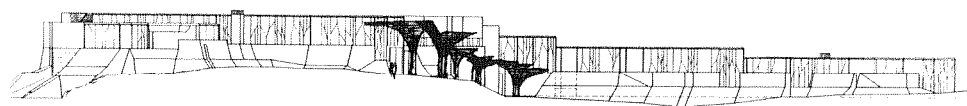


ELEVATION 4 1984

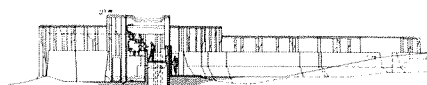


ELEVATION 5 1984

16



ELEVATION 6 1984



ELEVATION 7 1984



17



18



19

In a Pietilae building, therefore, the materials themselves are not important as expressive components—of the “nature of materials” philosophy—but become instead an integral part of the form-idea, of the surface-structure relationship, of the metaphoric, imagic quality of the whole. But this, the traditionalists would have argued, is after all “the nature of architecture,” i.e., that all materials should be used as parts of a coherent whole. The difference in Pietilae’s architecture is, however, that the “wholes” that he assembles are *modern* ones: But his eclecticism is not simply a “collection” of known pieces—at least, not in the sense of what we know and perceive visually. His aesthetics do not consist only of the arrangement of form, space, material, and light: The experiential *undertow* is more primeval, and, consequently, our reactions to his work are more extreme, our feelings about his buildings more exaggerated. With the possible exception of the Lieksa Church, it is difficult to enter into the spirit of a Pietilae building in a mood of quiet reflection. Rather we are quickly drawn into his *nets* of conceptual complexity and emotional vigor. This process does not usually yield conventional or “classical” aesthetic rewards. Perhaps one of the reasons why Pietilae’s work speaks in a modern voice is its persistent capacity to disturb

our educated sense of equilibrium. This possibly accounted, for example, for Louis Kahn’s reaction to Dipoli: “This is not architecture.”

During the summer of 1983 while on holiday in central Finland, Pietilae made some *notional* sketches in preparation for a Finnish competition that he knew would be formally announced in the autumn. This open competition was for the first official residence of the President of Finland to be built since the birth of the Republic in 1918. Those early notional sketches, made while Pietilae was enjoying his summer vacation in the Finnish countryside, are very much about environmental sensibility, i.e., the natural landscape and the sense of place: And those early thoughts were to prove central to Pietilae’s highly original solution.

Pietilae has spoken of the two premises of modern architecture that were formed between 1900 and 1920 and will be worked out during the 1980s; yet in the President’s residence he has chosen to return to his own very private and personal premise of the 1960s. This return has given him an opportunity to reexplore the architectural metaphors that had their origin in Dipoli and reached their optimum potential in the Malmi Church project.

The competition results for the President’s residence revealed that most of the other competitors either were unable or unwilling to address the problem in terms of Pietilae’s second premise. Almost all the entries selected for prizes, purchase, or honorable mention look back to an earlier period of modernism—not the exciting experiments of the 1920s—to the more stereotyped 1930s, already effectively rejected by Alvar Aalto as early as 1935. The Second Purchase Project by Kristian Gullichsen and his colleagues characterizes this return to the Finnish functionalist tradition,¹² in a design that attempts to bring urbanity to the rocky seashore but is not at all in the spirit of Aalto’s superb model at Saynatsalo. Only Marja-Riita Norri’s Second Purchase scheme seeks again the prefuctionalist roots of modernism. Indeed, the situation represented by the entries for this competition would seem to confirm Pietilae’s image of present-day Finnish architects all crowded into the bow of the boat to get a good view of the way ahead, leaving nobody to man the rudder and, thus, steer the craft.

But, perhaps, the greatest disappointment one senses in reviewing the Competition Exhibition at the Finnish Museum of Architecture stems from the feeling that the real nature of the site at Mantyniemi and its

prevailing characteristics had been ignored; instead of a Finnish sensibility to environment and to *occasion*, what had for the most part been substituted was a slick internationalist approach to elemental composition such as one might expect to find today almost *anywhere*.

The upheaval of Finnish granite is the site base from which Pietilae’s President’s “palace” grows; yet in this new design the granite shield is not the whole form as in Dipoli, nor are the cave and cavern interiors of Dipoli and Malmi Church appropriate to a President’s residence. Instead, the natural rock escarpment is embellished by a jewelled necklace that flows naturally across the body of the site. The metaphor for this precious symbol of the Finnish State is the crystalline structure of ice and its winter memory in the Finnish landscape—hence Pietilae’s motto for the project: “Mica Moraine.”¹³ This is not at all a design for a Finnish “White House”: Instead it speaks of the informality of nature, of its natural metaphor.

When I was studying the model in the Exhibition, a Finnish architect remarked that the form of the detached *sauna* did not reflect the spirit of the rest of the composition. Hearing this from a Finn I realized how much the new internationalism has

damaged the roots of Finnish architecture. For the *sauna* should never be part of a formal composition—if we can allow the ice metaphor its own formality—because it must establish its relationship to its ritual self and to the site. The basic, traditional *sauna* was originally dug into a hillside and, having a sod roof, belonged more to landscape than to architecture. If we did not know this before, we have certainly known it since Aalto's *decomposition* of the *sauna* and house relationship at the Villa Malrea of 1937. Yet many of the competition designs for the President's residence placed the Presidential *sauna* in the basement or cellar as though he were being relegated to a high-density apartment block.

Except for the echoes still present in Pietilae's poetics, the Finnish language of architecture originally shaped by Aalto seems to have been swallowed up by an international phrase-book standardization. Aalto, it should be recalled, wanted the architect's relationship to standardization to be only that "of the poet to the dictionary." Regrettably, also, Pietilae seems to be correct in his assessment that he is only teaching "certain unlearnables." Whereas we may not be able to teach environmental sensibility, Pietilae's work and his defense of his ideas offer us invaluable signposts towards

its realization. As the Ancient Egyptians knew well, without his symbolic landscapes man is in every sense impoverished.¹⁴

NOTES

- 1 Malcolm Quantrill, *Alvar Aalto, A Critical Study* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983).
- 2 In correspondence with the author, June 1983.
- 3 Quantrill, *op. cit.*, Chapter VI, pp. 140–154.
- 4 In correspondence with the author, June 1983.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Quantrill, *op. cit.*, pp. 83–91.
- 8 In correspondence with the author, June 1983.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 In conversation with the author in Helsinki, August 1983.
- 11 Malcolm Quantrill, "Alvar Aalto: Prophet of Ubiety," *RIBA Transactions*, Number 3, May 1983.
- 12 This tradition has been well established in Finland since the mid-1930s. See Quantrill, *Aalto and After: Transformations in Modern Finnish Architecture*, (Helsinki: Otava, 1986).
- 13 Competition notes on the "Mica Moraine" project by Reima Pietilae.

Architectural Idea and Composition:

The buildings follow the forms of the basic rock and vegetation of the particular "place"; conforming with them and deriving themes from them. Buildings and nature are a coherent unity.

The architecture emerges from the juxtaposition of the light-glass pavilions and the heavy, natural-stone walls.

The copper and glass of the windows are composed as a branching pattern allowing the forest to continue into the interior spaces.

- 14 See R. Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1959), p. 29.