

Places

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Caring About Places: Time

A fence along a yard, a row of trees along a meadow, the raised platform of a curb, a stage or the pedestal of a sculpture are significant visible indications of boundary and intent. A piece of land, a public square, a porch, may initially be noted by us or defined for us by such physical boundaries. But to become places they must have more than shape.

Traces of magical or compelling places, however briefly encountered, have marked our memories and set our expectations for relationships that we try to find or to construct in our lives.

Sir John Summerson, in *Heavenly Mansions* described the worlds we, as children, might have staked out under tables or pianos, using fabric walls. Being nearer child size, these shelters separated us from adults and comforted us as we explored imaginary terrain. But these spaces were often shared, claimed equally by our parents' feet. Such places were subject to constant reclamation—not only by the fabric walls, but also by our memories of former encampments and our expectations of future ones.

If we remain diligent, as adults, we may wish for opportunities to create

such spaces. Yet if our constitutions are not radical enough or stalwart enough daily to dismantle the walls constructed about us, or to refigure the public spaces next to them, we may long for other methods to establish temporary dwellings, or to understand and analyze the places around us. Time becomes one of the boundaries we wish to see. To understand the claims and uses existing now, we seek to set them across time in memory and imagination. Time takes place.

In the places that we call historic, such as Rome, where we are stimulated by all the visible fragments of its stages, it is easy to imagine various different times. One fragment of a capital can stimulate a reconstruction of temples and baths juxtaposed alongside the masses of cars, buses and markets that make up current public place existence.

In other places, other times may not have these visible fragments. Nevertheless, we must be capable of imagining what might have happened that we don't see, events which have enriched the fabrication and the memory of place.

A theatrical stage gives us a temporary setting for actions with

significances that reach beyond the moment. Public and private places can carry many meanings stemming from similar temporary uses. Events that enter the public memory are as important to place making as are heroic physical fragments.

Time, moments of order, the fall of words walling our passage, might last ten minutes or prompt a lifetime of spatial wondering. Our memory responds to shape, overlaying a room or garden or a square with another experience, adding memory of a place existing only in time to that of our own backyard. Places can exist simultaneously in both physical and mental ways, ensuring that the visual order we see is considerably enlivened and expanded by the places still in our heads. Places take time.

Alice Wingwall

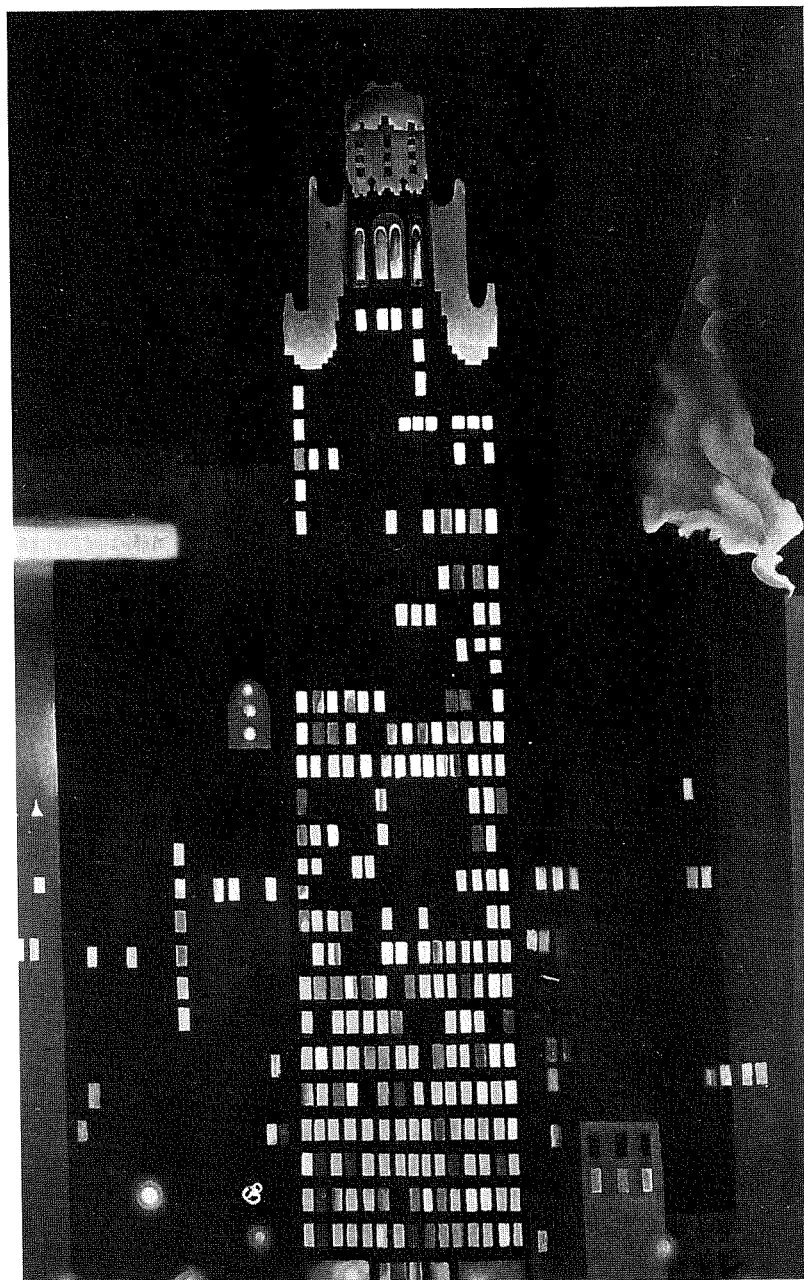
Alice Wingwall

Georgia O'Keeffe's *Radiator Building:* Icon of Glamorous Gotham

Elizabeth Duvert

Georgia O'Keeffe's *Radiator Building—Night, New York* presents us with an image of the American city on its twentieth-century rise, an image so powerful it still lures us from an alleged heritage of pastoral values and almost a century's experience of urban blight. During the period between the two world wars, New York City was transformed into a wonder-filled and delusively alluring stage set for the enactment of Americans' dreams of success. The city's skyscrapers provide both the setting and the stars for this urban drama, and O'Keeffe's painting of one of New York's key buildings captures the theatricality of the city's new image as well as the commercial spirit which promoted it. Completed in 1927, O'Keeffe's work depicts the metropolis Americans have desired and continue to desire as suggested by our most recent designs whose roots go back to the twenties and thirties when the Radiator Building was erected.¹ Although the Radiator Building is no longer illuminated at night, its tower dwarfed by the super-skyscrapers of the past two decades, O'Keeffe's portrait of this building as a central player in the city's dramatic transformation during the twenties and thirties remains today an icon of Americans' ongoing worship of glamorous Gotham.

The image of the city that O'Keeffe portrays is present not only in Ramond M. Hood's design for the Radiator Building but also in the comments of city planners and newspaper editorials of the day, in the art deco style of other



1 Radiator Building—Night, New York, 1927, Georgia O'Keeffe. The Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee.

skyscrapers built during this period, in the visionary drawings of the artist and architectural renderer Hugh Ferriss, and in the interpretation of the city's skyline by early filmmakers. Each of these, in turn, contributes to an understanding of O'Keeffe's *Radiator Building*, a painting in which the artist simultaneously celebrates the city's image and parodies it with wit.

O'Keeffe moved to New York in 1918. Of her early experience of the city, she writes: "At that time Park Avenue, lined with brownstone houses, seemed to stretch way beyond 59th street and on to infinity. It was a quiet sunny street—a pleasant place to walk even though the underground trains were visible in some places."² In 1925, she and Alfred Stieglitz, whom she had married in 1924, moved into an apartment on the thirtieth floor of the Shelton Hotel, built in 1922 and one of several new skyscraper hotels rising in Manhattan. O'Keeffe's city paintings date from this period—the earliest, 1925, and the latest, 1929, the year she spent her first summer in New Mexico and turned her attention to the Southwestern landscape which would ultimately become her home and the major subject of her art.

Acutely attuned to the character of place, O'Keeffe spoke of New York as looking just the way a city should look. Yet initially she was discouraged from taking on its image in her art. Both Stieglitz and the other men in the group of artists surrounding O'Keeffe

objected to her attempting to paint the man-made city. Male painters had found the city a frustrating subject, and O'Keeffe was advised to turn to nature, the "feminine" sphere, not to the city's architecture which required techniques of draftsmanship supposedly alien to a woman. Stieglitz refused to hang O'Keeffe's first New York painting in his 1925 "Seven Americans" show. Though furious at this omission, O'Keeffe was undeterred. In the following year in a show of her own, when the same painting was the first sold on opening day, the men's objections ceased. "From then on," the artist recalls, "they let me paint New York."³

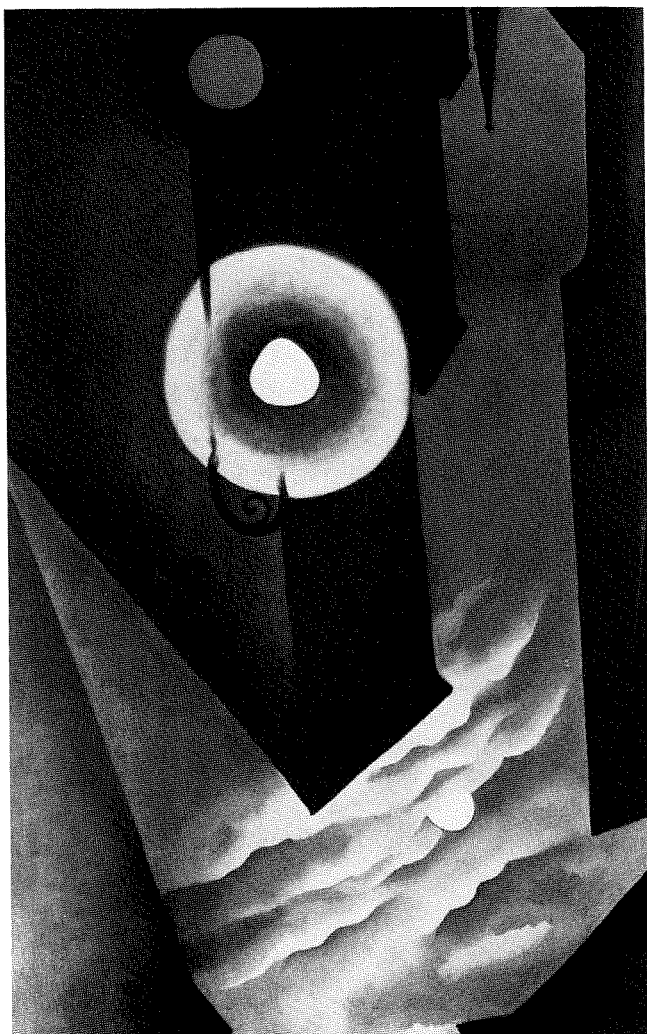
O'Keeffe's New York paintings—almost a score of which were completed in the short period between 1925 and 1929—reveal the city's transformation between the two world wars and incorporate several experiences of its rapidly changing architecture: the experience of the city's tall buildings seen from the streets, the panorama of the industrial city visible from its new architectural heights, and the city's nocturnal projection of a second self, the duplication of its architectural shapes by glittering lights.

In her first city painting, *New York with Moon* (1925), O'Keeffe juxtaposes the scene at street level to the moonlit sky of clouds, which is visible beyond the surrounding buildings. The streetlight's halo of light offers an artificial corollary to the natural illumination of a distant moon. Though the painting incorporates the natural world

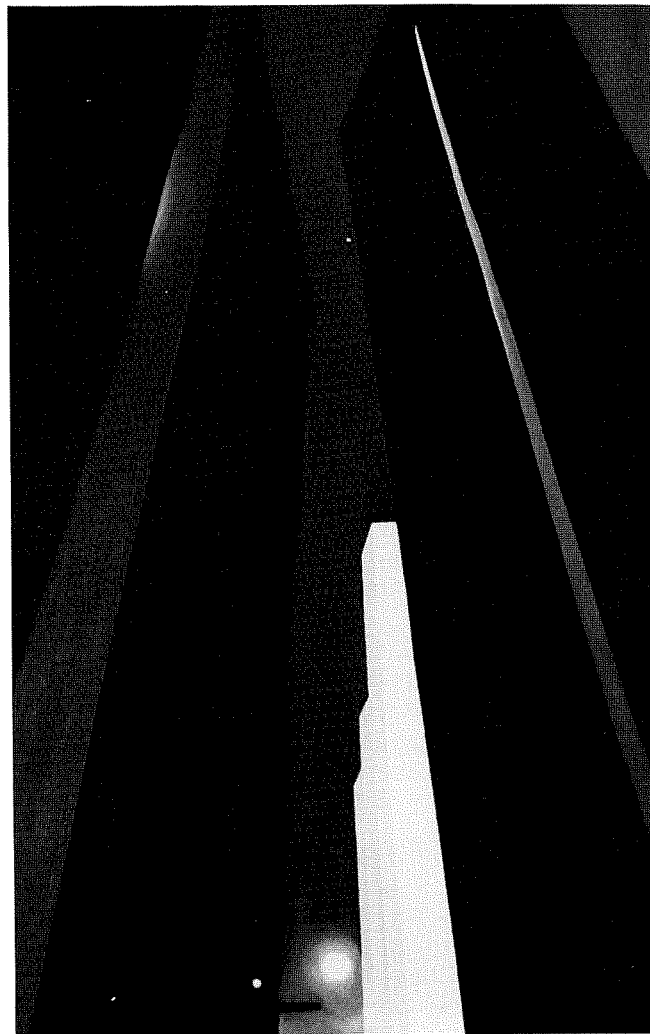
beyond the city's shape, the walls of its buildings glow from the red of the traffic light, which suggests that one stops here, enclosed by the buildings' overwhelming presence. The buildings' cornices, an architectural feature soon to be eliminated from New York skyscrapers, curve over the street, emphasizing the viewer's sense of enclosure. However, O'Keeffe also includes the familiar forms of a human landscape as it would be seen from the street below—the streetlamp, the traffic light, and the distant church spire, all reduced to miniature proportions by the skyscrapers' heights.

In several works, O'Keeffe depicts the skyscrapers' towering walls as anonymous shapes, emphasizing the viewer's sense of diminished stature below the sheerness of their vertical rise. In her two works, *A Street in New York* and *City Night*, both painted in 1926, architectural shapes dominate the canvas surface. In one painting O'Keeffe has used oblique lines drawn from the painting's right side toward its center, suggesting the horizontal sweep of canyon-like walls. In the other, her lines rise from the lower edges of the canvas to its top, accenting the vertical sweep of the black walls whose height seems to supersede even the moon's. Nevertheless, the central area of these paintings contains the image of a slender opening between the skyscrapers' walls through which sky, moon, clouds, or stars are still visible.

For her view of the city from above, O'Keeffe frequently reverses her



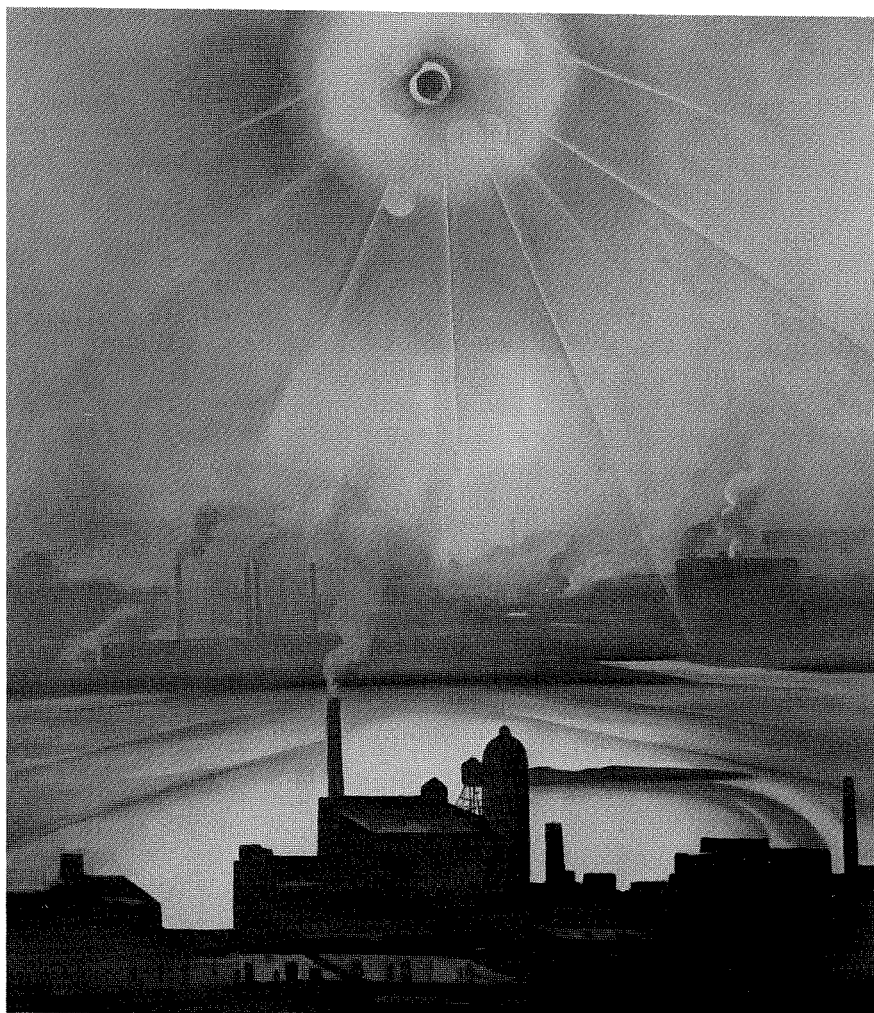
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2 New York with Moon, 1925, Georgia O'Keeffe. Private Collection. (From Georgia O'Keeffe, *Georgia O'Keeffe*, Viking Press, 1976.)

3 City Night, 1926, Georgia O'Keeffe. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts.



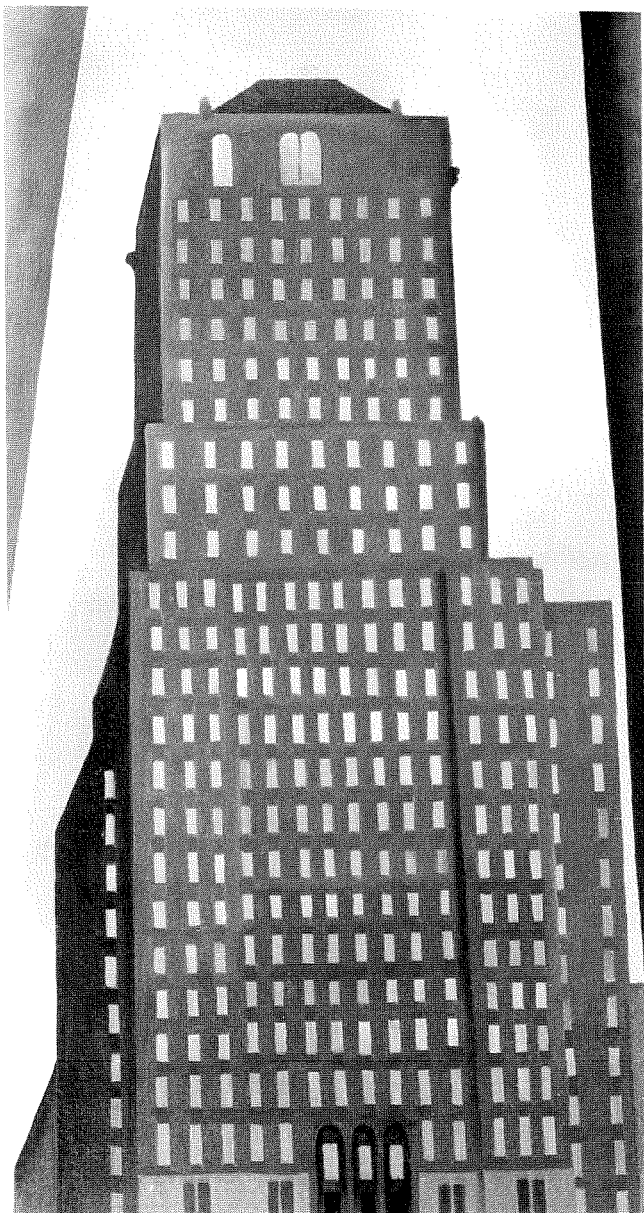
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4 East River from the Shelton, 1927–28,
Georgia O'Keeffe. New Jersey State Museum
Collection, Trenton. Purchased by the
Association for the Arts of the N.J. State
Museum with a Gift from Mary Lee Johnson,
1972.

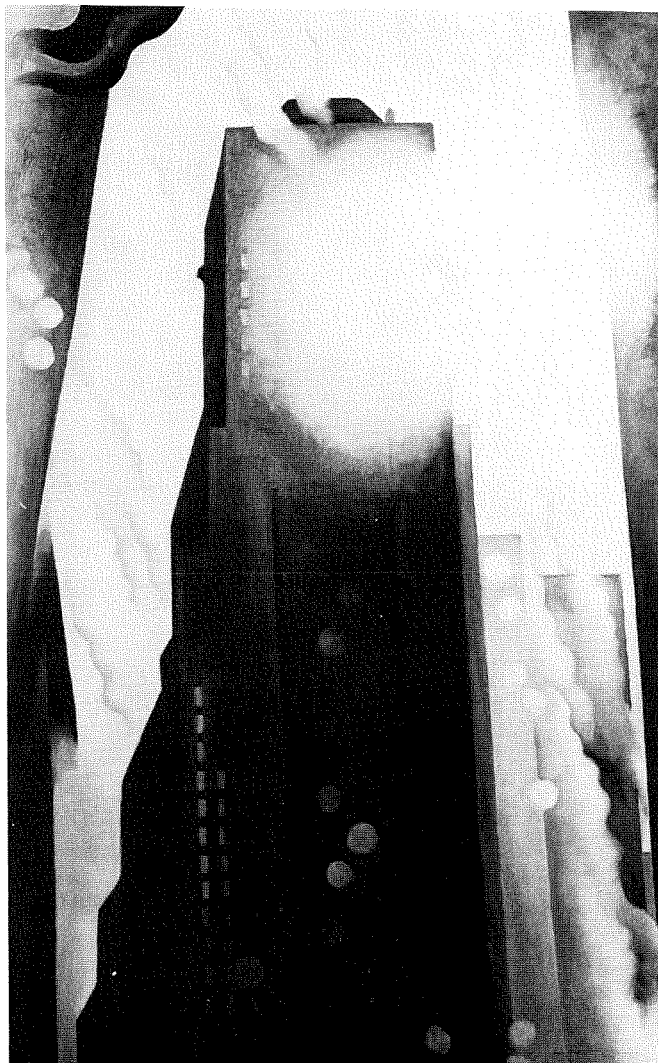
format, using a long, narrow canvas to portray the panorama of the East River which is visible from the windows of the Shelton. In *East River, Number 1* (1926), the natural world is the central motif, with its image of the river's light-reflecting expanse counterpointed only occasionally by the vertical forms of smokestacks along the river's edge. In *East River from the Shelton* (1927–1928), O'Keeffe uses a squarer format in which the dark forms of the industrial city seen from above share the canvas with a powerful image of the sun, its corona encircled by sunspots, its refracted rays radiating downward over the smoke-filled landscape below. In *River, New York* (1928), O'Keeffe again uses a long, narrow canvas; yet, in this painting the river itself is almost eclipsed by the artist's attention to the geometry of man-made structures on the river's two sides.

In two 1926 paintings, *Shelton Hotel, New York* and *The Shelton with Sunspots*, both views of the skyscraper hotel from the street below, O'Keeffe again frames her view with the partially visible walls of surrounding buildings; but in these works, the center of her canvas is neither a slender open space between buildings nor some unifying element of the natural world. Rather, the central portion of her composition is filled with an image of the skyscraper itself.

In *Shelton Hotel, New York*, the skyscraper's image is painted in earth-tones and covered with windows that are meticulously depicted on virtually every plane



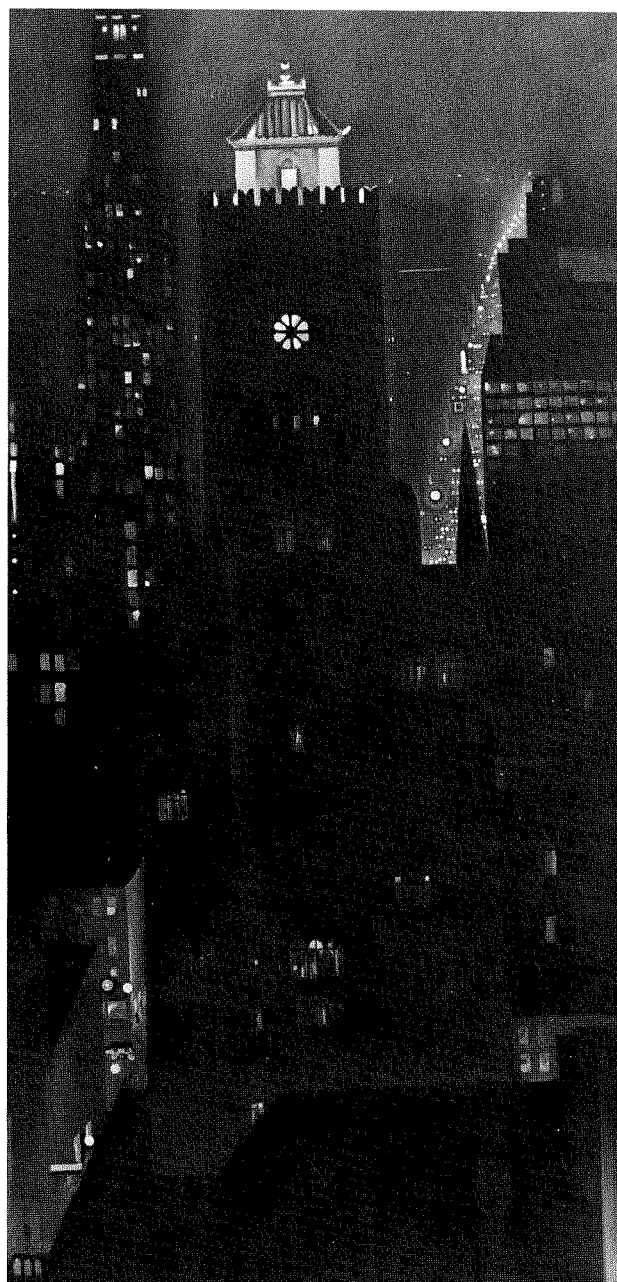
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5 Shelton Hotel, New York, No. I, 1926,
Georgia O'Keeffe. The Regis Collection.
Photograph courtesy of Kennedy Galleries.

6 The Shelton with Sunspots, 1926,
Georgia O'Keeffe. Collection of Inland Steel
Company.



7 New York Night, 1929, Georgia O'Keeffe.
Nebraska Art Association. Thomas C. Wood
Memorial Collection. Courtesy of Sheldon
Memorial Art Gallery, University of
Nebraska, Lincoln.

of its massive form. However, any notion of the hotel as human habitat, from whose windows its inhabitants could look out at the city whose life they share, is completely eclipsed in *The Shelton with Sunspots*. In this painting the building is the leading actor in the city's drama. Its myriad windows are barely suggested, for O'Keeffe focuses instead on the skyscraper's massive form whose image she has painted in unbroken planes of black and outlined against the white tones of the smoke-filled atmosphere in which it stands. O'Keeffe describes the origin of this painting: "I went out one morning to look at it before I started to work and there was the optical illusion of a bite out of one side of the tower made by the sun, with sunspots against the building and against the sky." Between the soaring image of the Shelton's black mass and the bite of the sun, O'Keeffe's vision of the city's drama has reached titanic proportions.

In two of her last paintings of New York, *Radiator Building—Night, New York* (1927) and *New York Night* (1929), O'Keeffe turns to the city in its nocturnal glitter. The natural world has virtually disappeared from these paintings, reduced to the faint image of a single pale star in the upper left corner of *Radiator Building*, hardly a competitor with the artificial galaxy presented in both canvases. Of *New York Night*, O'Keeffe remarks: "Lexington Avenue looked, in the night, like a very tall thin bottle with colored things going up and down inside it." Of the *Radiator Building*, she writes: "I walked across 42nd Street many

times at night when the black Radiator Building was new—so that had to be painted too.”

These last two paintings are markedly different from O’Keeffe’s first view of a city street lit by a single lamp post above which skyscrapers bound a moonlit sky. Their central image is a skyscraper tower artificially illuminating itself amid a carnival of city lights. Possessing an acute sensitivity to place, O’Keeffe artistically recreates in this series of paintings of New York the changing character of the city’s image in the decade of the 1920s. The earlier juxtaposition of the natural world with the city’s darkened interior gives way to a vision that is centered on the skyscraper itself, a vision from which the natural world has been permanently excluded and the battle between light and dark resolved by the city’s artificial creation of its own reflection.

Except for her paintings of the Shelton in which she lived, O’Keeffe’s *Radiator Building* is the only work that the artist names after a particular skyscraper. Its location⁴ in an area of the city familiar to O’Keeffe, its striking nocturnal image, and the controversy aroused by its color drew her attention as well as that of the rest of the city. That was, in fact, its goal. Completed and occupied in 1924, the Radiator Building was a forerunner of New York’s art deco skyscrapers whose style suited large cities, a commercial style created mostly for big business as good advertisement, entertaining to the public which it sought to attract.⁵

A look at the character of the city’s rapidly changing image and its expression in the Radiator Building’s design demonstrates how keenly O’Keeffe understood that image and portrayed it in *Radiator Building—Night, New York*.

At the heart of New York’s image in the 1920s and 1930s lay a self-conscious ambiguity. On the one hand, city planners sought material expression of human aspirations in its rising skyscrapers. The report of the Regional Planning Commission of New York City, published in 1931, noted:

There are two aspects in which the bold magnificence of New York skyscrapers cannot be questioned. The great isolated tower that thrusts itself into the clouds and is surrounded by open spaces or very low buildings, so that its shadow does no injury to neighboring buildings, may in the hands of the artist be an ennobling feature in the city. Secondly, the mass effect of a mountain of building, such as is obtained by looking at lower Manhattan from the wide expanse of the Upper Bay, is recognized as one of the wonders of the world, as an artificial creation.⁶

Against the image of the ennobling skyscraper or the wonder of New York’s skyline, a New York newspaper pitted the city’s reality:

... the spirit of New York . . . does not aspire: New York is content with this world, plenty content; New York has no wish to climb up out of the human scene and lose itself in the sun;

New York hates the sun and shuts it out with towering buildings that make dark canyons of the streets at midday, and visitors do not come to see the sunshine on Broadway.⁷

As the language of both the report and the newspaper suggests, the city seemed to have a life of its own, to be a living entity animated by its own spirit, directed by its own will, both perhaps resistant to the ennobling hand of the visionary artist. Yet to speak of the city as a personified being was merely to reveal the human desires determining its shape and to see in its material form their realization and their perpetuation.

Between skyward aspirations and mundane contentment, the city takes on the mediating role of glamorous stage set, a role simultaneously acknowledging its own artificiality and raising the pursuit of illusion to a way of life. What one comes to see in the city is its spectacle, its unabashed advertising of itself as an artificial wonder wrought by man alone. For in the early decades of the twentieth century, New York is transformed into a city conscious of being seen, and its skyscrapers generate that self-consciousness. From their towers, the city can for the first time look down upon itself and behold the scene in which the skyscraper is itself a part. Like the self-consciousness Roland Barthes perceives being generated in Paris by the presence of the Eiffel Tower, the skyscraper’s effect is to transform New York into a city looking at itself. Between being “an object which sees” and “a glance



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8 The American Radiator Building, from *The American Architect*.

which is seen,"⁸ the city's self-conscious dilemma is resolved by the projection of an illusion of itself as a stage set on which its citizens may enact their individual dramas, all the while maintaining the principal role for the buildings themselves, for they are the show before which a willing audience applauds the supposed reflection of its own imagined success.

The architect of the American Radiator Building, Raymond M. Hood, chose a tower for its form, black for its color, and floodlights to make it glow in the dark, making the building the perfect expression of the city's new image—self-consciously theatrical, pointedly commercial. In a period when the city's architecture displayed what Manfredo Tafuri has called "a proliferation of formal themes and linguistic references, which were generally divorced from structural problems," Hood's design announced what would come to be seen as "the self-proclaiming, publicity function of the architecture of the commercial metropolis. . . ."⁹

The Radiator Building was constructed at the start of a building boom in New York that has never been equaled (fifteen new office buildings were erected in 1925, a number unmatched in any year after World War II until 1957; thirty buildings were built in 1926, a number which has never been matched¹⁰). Like these buildings, Hood's Radiator Building is generally believed to have been influenced by Eliel Saarinen's second place entry in the 1922 competition for the Chicago Tribune Building.

Its narrow setbacks on all four sides also suggest a response to the 1916 New York zoning law which sought to alleviate the problem of the city's interior becoming increasingly darkened by the construction of towering buildings.¹¹ However, Hood's preference for the tower ultimately determined the Radiator Building's shape. The architect's predilection for the tower form is evident in both his winning entry in the 1922 Chicago competition (designed with John Mead Howells) and in his design for the Radiator Building. The consistent element in the drawings that Hood undertook for the Chicago Tribune Building is the building's mass; its tower shape remained unchanged while Hood worked on its decoration. Hood's love of the tower is even clearer in the Radiator Building where, instead of using the full frontage on West 40th Street for the lower levels of a building which would taper off at the upper levels in setbacks, Hood discards 16 feet on either side, making the whole structure an isolated tower, visually distinct and individualized amid the city's architectural mass. Perhaps more than other buildings of its day (and comparable, one might add, to the new skyscraper towers being constructed in American cities today), the Radiator Building exemplified what Hugh Ferriss called "a species of tower-buildings" and what Hood himself envisioned as a future "city of towers."¹²

Even so, Hood, writing for *The American Architect* in the year in which his building was completed, subordinates all aspects of the building's development to its color:

“Whatever value and interest, however, there may be in the study of the building itself must naturally be secondary to the study of the color of the exterior.” Hood believed that the need for so many windows in the building would make its towering shape look like anything but the solid, massive form he desired. Windows punched black holes into wall surfaces; but, if the building itself were black, the windows would blend into the wall, creating “a more unified design.” Hood’s commentary seems to be a response to the controversy that the building’s color aroused in a city already feeling the overwhelming effects of skyscrapers’ darkening its daylight existence. Hood cites historical precedent for the use of black in architectural design and the building’s location as justification for this departure from convention. To increase its visual appeal, the building’s upper levels would be ornamented in gold.¹³

Along with the controversy concerning its color, the Radiator Building’s striking nighttime illumination transformed the structure into an around-the-clock event in the life of the city. Its lighting installation enabled the owner “to vary the night appearance of the building from time to time, and to introduce spectacular displays on special occasions.”¹⁴ Night photographs of the building corroborate this variation in lighting pattern; at times only the upper tower was lit; at others, the illumination began at the first setback.

The architectural community readily praised the building as

event. A 1924 editorial in *The American Architect* touted the Radiator Building’s educational value: “It has attracted and held the attention of thousands who ordinarily give little heed to street architecture. The appearance of the building at night is one of the sights of the city. . . . The vast throngs that crowd this district at night are blocking traffic. . . .”¹⁵ The Radiator Building suggested to the architects of its day “bewildering possibilities as to the future use of surfaces with colors, glows, and lights in order to convert the high places of New York, as seen from distant streets, into a wonderland of elaborate, fanciful, and vivid masses and patterns.”¹⁶

A wonderland, and why not? For, as Rem Koolhaas has pointed out in *Delirious New York*, the origins of Gotham’s image lay in the fabricated fairylands constructed on Coney Island around the turn of the century. One of these, Luna Park, which opened in 1904, was New York’s first city of towers, “functionless, except to overstimulate the imagination and keep any recognizable earthly realities at a distance.” Its promoter used “electricity—the essential ingredient of the new paraphernalia of illusion—as an architectural duplicator,” making for the inhabitants of Gotham “a separate *city of night*.”¹⁷ A second park, Dreamland, the brainchild of William H. Reynolds (who was later to insist as the developer of the Chrysler Building that its tower be sheathed in aluminum against the architect’s wishes), included in its dreamscape a beacon tower, “an

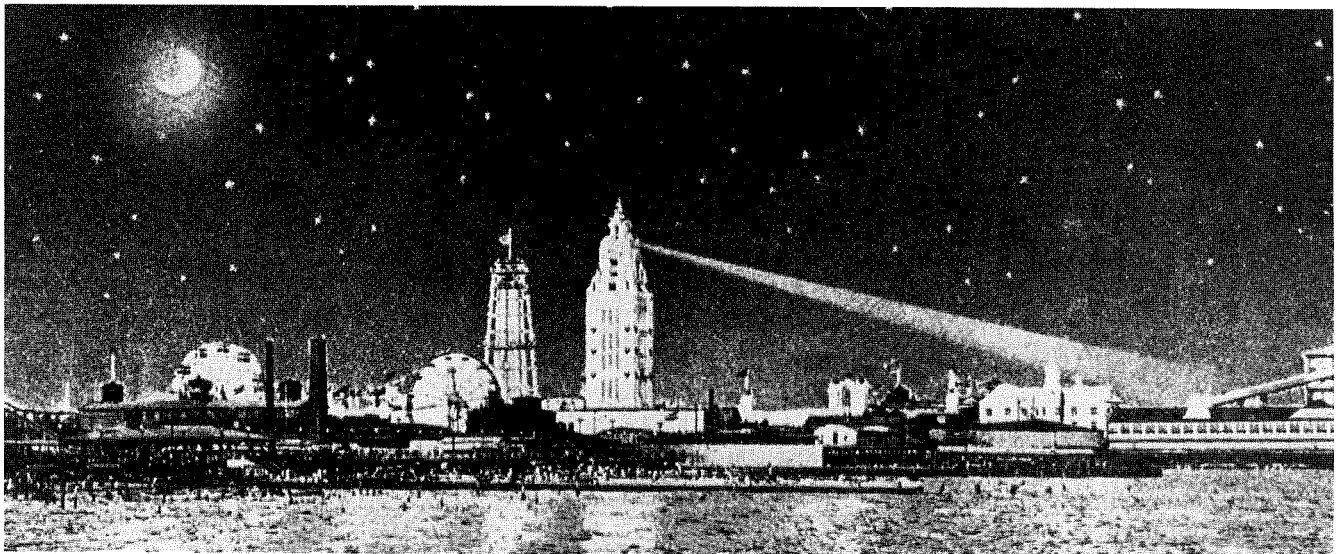


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9 The American Radiator Building, from *The American Architect*.



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10 Luna Park, Coney Island, from Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, Oxford University Press.

11 Dreamland's Beacon Tower, from Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, Oxford University Press.

architectural device that promotes self-consciousness.”¹⁸ The beacon tower, visible from the distance, lured city dwellers to the shores of dreamland while offering them an ascent to its heights for the momentary thrill of mastering all they surveyed. The tower was so popular that in 1908 Ernest Flagg designed such a tower to be added on top of New York’s Singer Building whose lower portion had been constructed in 1899. Other New York buildings quickly followed suit.

The device of a beacon light, sweeping the city with an electric glance, was quickly eclipsed by the lighted tower, now illuminating only itself, drawing eyes to its own continuous self-reverie. The skyscraper thus became an “automonument,” an empty symbol “available for meaning as a billboard is for advertisement, . . . a solipsism, celebrating only the fact of its disproportionate existence, the shameliness of its own process of creation.”¹⁹

And this self-advertisement is the motive for the Radiator Building’s nighttime illumination, a motive confirmed by the architect himself who recalled:

The use of floodlights on billboards for advertising at night was already established: Why not gild the top of the black building for effect by day and then floodlight it by night, utilizing the building as a billboard for itself? The owner agreed. For a company selling furnaces and heaters, a building that glowed in

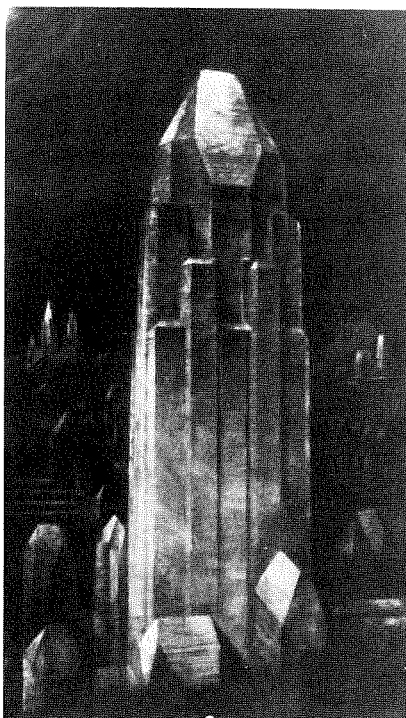
the dark like a torch was not such a wild idea.²⁰

As Hood’s fellow architect Harvey Wiley Corbett noted, since “commercialism is the guiding spirit of the age, the building which advertises itself is in harmony with that spirit.” The building becomes the company’s and its own best advertisement: “‘What is that black building?’ one asks at once when one sees it. ‘The American Radiator Building’ is the answer. And by that answer the first principle of commercialism, advertising, has been served.”²¹ Even the building’s interior is turned to this purpose. Its boiler room is transformed into a showroom at street level though, as Hood’s engineers note, the architect took “the greatest care . . . in designing the equipment within this room to make it as sightly as possible.”²²

The idea of the skyscraper as billboard, advertising both its owners’ products and itself, became a major design component in the art-deco architecture which flourished briefly in New York in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Competing for attention amid Manhattan’s architectural density, these buildings emphasized such features on their towers, façades, and entrances. The Chrysler Building, which was begun in 1928, displays an iconographic panoply of the automobile industry. Exterior walls are covered by a brick frieze of car wheels with aluminum hubcaps. The corbels are radiator caps borrowed from Mercury’s winged helmet, an emblem used on early Chrysler cars. The Empire

State building, which was begun in 1930, exemplifies in its lobby the use of the skyscraper’s image in the building’s decoration. Similarly, the entrance to the skyscraper at 60 Wall Tower, which was begun in 1930, displays a miniature model of the building itself. Hood’s own design for the McGraw-Hill Building of 1930–1931 appropriately incorporates reading into its exterior decoration, spelling out in bold block letters the company’s name on both the building’s entrance and across its heights.²³ Finally, buildings such as Central Park West at 66th Street, which was built in 1930, had walls shaded from a deep tone at the base to a lighter color at the building’s top to make the building appear taller than it was and to create the added illusion of sunlight, even on an overcast day.²⁴

When these buildings were not overtly attracting city dwellers to inhabit their seemingly sunlit space or to buy their company’s products, they were nonetheless subtly reminding New Yorkers of their own role in the drama of commercialism. As Cervin Robinson and Rosemarie Bletter note in *Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York*: “Forms taken directly from the theater appear in lobbies and at building entrances, or the lower floors of high buildings are given forms like painted sets facing onto the street.” These authors suggest for example, that the horizontal striping on the lobby walls of the Film Center Building mirrored the flow of Gotham’s citizens on their way to and from work.²⁵ A further example occurs



12

12 "Night in the Science Zone," Hugh Ferriss, from *The Metropolis of Tomorrow*, 1929.

in the Chrysler Building where a design for coved lighting over the elevator lobbies looked like rising curtains on a stage set announcing to the waiting public that the curtain was going up on its own performance.

It is not surprising that in Hugh Ferriss' 1929 volume of architectural drawings, *The Metropolis of Tomorrow*, the dominant metaphor is the theater, the world of illusion. Ferriss opens his volume with an imaginary spectator poised at dawn in a skyscraper above the city, "perched in some elevated stage box" awaiting the performance of a "gigantic spectacle, some cyclopean drama of forms" on which the curtain is about to rise. Ferriss calls Manhattan's mass of architectural forms "only a stage set." Though he tries to emphasize that the drama of metropolis is a human one and the city's citizens "the principals of the play," he questions their role and the stage's effect upon their performance:

But what influences have these actors and this stage reciprocally upon one another? How perfectly or imperfectly have the actors expressed themselves in their constructions—how well have the architects designed the set? And how great is the influence which the architectural background exercises over the actors—and is it a beneficial one?²⁶

Behind his interrogation of the city's architecture stands Ferriss' ambivalent contribution to the drama. For though Ferriss decries the

unplanned character of the city's architectural setting, "the more convincing his work, the more he promotes the realization of proposals he dislikes."²⁷ His images of epic monuments suggesting their construction by superhuman forces has prompted Tafuri to note in Ferriss' drawings an "anguish in the face of a potential revealed as uncontrollable by the individual. . . ."²⁸

In Ferriss' own "Imaginary Metropolis," the title of the last section of his book, he presents, among others, a strangely ambiguous image of a monolith from his imaginary city's zone of science. Accompanying his rendering is a short verbal sketch of this nocturnal stele commemorating man's triumph over organic nature. His building's shape recalls Hood's Radiator Building, itself an image of the human power of artifice.

In 1924 a New York newspaper, editorializing on the Radiator Building, praised that power. Its writer goes straight to the point: "Radiator wants none of Nature."

Radiator could fittingly rise only from a place where men are huddled together or have crowded dead matter together, anywhere where Nature is not: . . . it is sprung out of the city's very heart! . . . it is New York . . . New York has a meaning, and Radiator gathers it up and distills it.

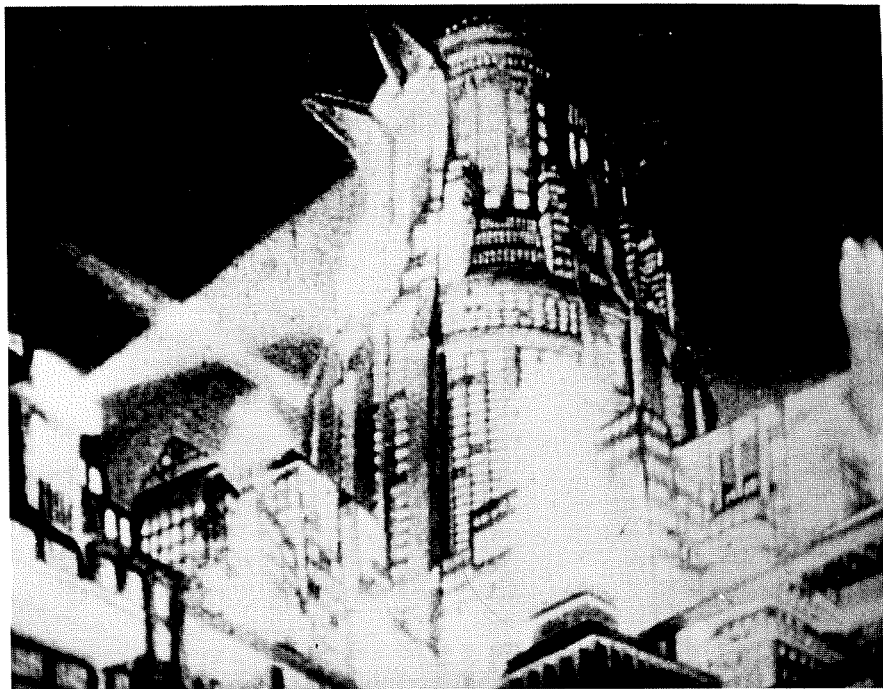
There is cynicism here. There is a sneer at the buildings which would clothe themselves in vestal white or homely brick-red, and

yet be the big business buildings of the twentieth century world. Radiator deliberately chooses the color of darkness, not of light, the color of iron, not of life. . . . It is beautiful with the beauty of sin. . . .

Behind the brutality is power, but not the power of Fate or God: it is the power of monster, of relentless machine. . . . With its mocking name, Radiator rears itself into the sky. Dead are its black walls; the light is repulsed by them; dead is the strange, tawny crown the building wears, its own color, not the color of the live sunlight. Whose is this spirit? Not Washington's and Johnny Appleseed's and U. S. Grant's, certainly! . . . Or is it Babylon? The spire of the Gothic was to point men to their Heavenly Master. But the Tower of Babel was to reach the skies, not point men thither; the Tower of Babel was built in the passion to demonstrate that Man, by means of Matter, is Master.²⁹

The editorial so appealed to the architectural community that *The American Architect* reprinted it the same year. The writer's image of a personified Radiator suggests that behind the floodlights stands the realization of man's ultimate fantasy, some architectural Golem mockingly manifesting its master's power.

Manhattan's art-deco skyline indeed looks like the appropriate setting for a futuristic fantasy, and it is not long before American films, image makers par excellence, turn the



13

13 Still from Fritz Lang's "Metropolis,"
1926. The Museum of Modern Art/Film
Stills Archives, New York.

city into a colossal movie set. As Robinson and Bletter note: "Images of some of these buildings, like the Waldorf-Astoria, the Chrysler and the RCA Victor building, or the Empire State, helped crystallize our image of Gotham, the city of skyscrapers and urban chic, without which such a film as *King Kong* [and we might add *Superman*] would be difficult to imagine."³⁰ In 1938 the city becomes the home of the superbeing able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. Its towers seem to require such a being, coequal to the Egyptian goddess Seshat, patroness of architects, who stares out from the tower of the RCA Victor Building or airborne like the dirigibles which were to tie up at the Empire State Building's mooring mast.

Even in the early 1920s American audiences were attending European films whose architect-designed sets were the subject of a 1921 article in the *Journal of the American Institute of Architects*. Seated in a dark theater in the heart of New York City, Americans may have been viewing an expressionistic fantasy imported from abroad, but the setting of one of these films, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, must have seemed strangely familiar. One of Lang's most striking images is a night view of a gigantic building whose tower, which is seen from below, is illuminated from within and floodlit from without. With this film, "the imagery of the modern city . . . has come full circle, for Lang was influenced in the creation of his sets by a view of the Manhattan skyline seen on a

boat trip to the States in 1924."³¹ Of that trip, Lang wrote:

I first came to America briefly in 1924 and it made a great impression on me. The first evening, when we arrived, we were still enemy aliens so we couldn't leave the ship. It was docked somewhere on the west side of New York. I looked into the streets—the glaring lights and the tall buildings—and there I conceived *Metropolis*.³²

When *Metropolis* opened in New York, 10,000 people lined up in front of the Rialto Theatre.³³ The year was 1927, the same year O'Keeffe painted *Radiator Building—Night, New York*.

As if announcing some gala film opening, searchlights flood the sky in O'Keeffe's own image of metropolis. Not as ominous as Fritz Lang's filmic version, O'Keeffe's painting directs attention to the fact that, in a city which applauds its own imagined success, the skyscraper itself dominates the show. Even as she celebrates an architectural event in the city's life, the artist confronts its image head-on with her characteristically uncompromising frontality. Reducing the Radiator Building's three-dimensional mass to a vertical silhouette and aligning its façade to the plane of her canvas, O'Keeffe moves the city's painted backdrop to center stage and, with urbane wit, parodies its commercialism with a joke of her own. With glowing red colors, O'Keeffe places her own advertisement next to an image of the city's most noticed skyscraper. Across the top of a

neighboring building where a neon sign actually flashed the words "Scientific American," Alfred Stieglitz's name goes up in lights. In the same year O'Keeffe painted *Radiator Building—Night, New York*, Stieglitz had written in an announcement for the Intimate Gallery he had opened two years before: "The Intimate Gallery is not a Business. . . . The Intimate Gallery competes with no one nor anything."³⁴ The artist he had advised not to attempt to master the city's new image had ideas of her own. On its terms, O'Keeffe had taken New York—its spirit, its glitter, and the glamour of its architecture, transforming them all into her own radiant black beauty.

NOTES

- 1 For a discussion of recent skyscraper designs and their roots in the urban architecture of the 1920s and 1930s, see Paul Goldberger, "The New American Skyscraper," *The New York Times Magazine* (November 8, 1981), pp. 68–73, 76, 78, 86, 88, 90, 92, 94, 96.
- 2 Georgia O'Keeffe, *Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York, NY: The Viking Press, 1976, unpagged). Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from O'Keeffe come from this text.
- 3 See Laurie Lisle, *Portrait of an Artist: A Biography of Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York, NY: Seaview Books, 1980), pp. 149–151.
- 4 The Radiator Building is located at 40 West Fortieth Street between Fifth Avenue and the Avenue of the Americas.
- 5 See Cervin Robinson and Rosemarie Haag Bletter, *Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 40.
- 6 Thomas Adams, *Regional Plan of New York and its Environs, Volume 2: The Building of the City* (New York, NY, 1931), p. 114.

- 7 "The Radiator Building," unsigned editorial from *The Villager* reprinted in *American Architect*, 126 (November 19, 1924), p. 483.
- 8 The phrases are borrowed from Barthes' description of the Eiffel Tower: "The Tower is an object which sees, a glance which is seen . . .," in *The Eiffel Tower and other Mythologies*, translated by Richard Howard (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1979), p. 4.
- 9 Manfredo Tafuri, "The Disenchanted Mountain: The Skyscraper and the City," in *The American City*, edited by Giorgio Ciucci, et al. (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1979), pp. 451, 457.
- 10 Robinson and Bletter, *op. cit.*, p. 12; see also footnote 22, p. 31.
- 11 The zoning law established "a line representing the minimum desired angle of light, sloping back from the center of the street; the facade of a building could rise vertically until the roof or cornice intersected this line. Additional stories above this height would have to be set back to stay within the line." Walter H. Kilham, Jr., *Raymond Hood, Architect* (New York, NY: Architectural Book Publishing Co., 1973), p. 85.
- 12 For a discussion of Hood's preference for the tower form, see Tod A. Marder, "Raymond Hood: City of Towers," 58 *Arts Magazine* 8 (April 1984), pp. 100–103. See also Robert A. M. Stern, with Thomas P. Catalano, *Raymond M. Hood* (New York, NY: Rizzoli International Publications, 1982).
- 13 Raymond M. Hood, "The American Radiator Company Building, New York," *The American Architect*, 126 (November 19, 1924), pp. 467–474.
- 14 Meyer, Strong, and Jones, Inc., consultant engineers, "Heating, Ventilating, Electric and Elevator Equipment for the American Radiator Building," *The American Architect*, 126 (November 19, 1924), p. 482.
- 15 "Editorial Comment," *The American Architect* 126 (November 19, 1924), p. 487.
- 16 Herbert Kroly, "New Dimensions in Architectural Effects," *Architectural Review* 57 (January 1925), p. 94; quoted in Robinson and Bletter, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
- 17 Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York; A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 34.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 32. Manfredo Tafuri similarly describes the American super-skyscrapers of the 1960s as "only inflated, empty signs, intent on communicating nothing beside their own surreal presence." *Op. cit.*, p. 500.
- 20 Hood, *op. cit.*, p. 70.
- 21 Harvey Wiley Corbett, "The American Radiator Building, New York City, Raymond M. Hood, Architect," *The Architectural Record* 55 (May 1924), p. 477.
- 22 Meyer, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 481.
- 23 Though not skyscrapers, Hood's 1929–1933 designs for Rex Cole, a distributor of General Electric refrigerators, make even more explicit the analogy between a company's building and its product. The whiteness and box-like shape of the building in Flushing, NY, looked almost like the refrigerators the company sold; the company's Bay Ridge showroom had on its top a replica of a real refrigerator, making the building's role as advertisement of its company's products inescapably clear.
- 24 See Robinson and Bletter for further discussion and numerous photographs of these buildings' features.
- 25 Robinson and Bletter, *op. cit.*, p. 10; also see note for color plate 24.
- 26 Hugh Ferriss, *The Metropolis of Tomorrow* (New York, NY: Ives Washburn, 1929), pp. 15–16.
- 27 Koolhaas, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
- 28 Tafuri, *op. cit.*, p. 448.
- 29 Hood, *op. cit.*, pp. 483–484.
- 30 Robinson and Bletter, *op. cit.*, p. 4. See also Giusi Rapisarda, "Die Stadt und ihr Doppelgänger: Von 'Metropolis' zu 'King Kong,'" *Archithese* 17, (1976), pp. 29–36, cited in Tafuri.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 66.
- 32 Quoted in Robinson and Bletter, *op. cit.*, p. 67, from Peter Bogdanovich, *Fritz Lang in America* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1967), p. 15.
- 33 *Ibid.*, footnote 97, p. 80.
- 34 See Lisle, *op. cit.*, pp. 150 and 124.

An earlier unillustrated version of this article appeared in *Revue Francaise d'études américaines*, Spring, 1980.

Radiant Lessons from the Failed Landscape of Desire

Joseph Grange

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid
plain behind me

T. S. Eliot
"The Waste Land"

These thoughts were occasioned by participation in a symposium on phenomenology and the environment.¹ Some time later, I realized that metaphysical issues were at stake, and not mere matters of design, functional niceties, and efficiency. We were *concretely* involved in creating a theory of reality for the contemporary person. What is more, the vision of the real that dimly emerged had ancient roots and our discussion was, in effect, a retrieval of a long forgotten tradition.

The tradition of which I speak has been obscured by the positivism and scientism of the present age and arrogantly cast onto the metaphysical junk pile. Among the adherents of this tradition are the greatest thinkers in the history of Western philosophy: Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, and Hegel. Its essential principle may be stated thus:

The whole is more than the sum of its parts. This simple thought, elegant in its simplicity, is a fecund ground for discourse about relationships between the person, society, and the environment. It tells us that wholes and parts and their interrelations constitute the central core of reality. Also it brings to the fore the question of identity and difference and the issue of time as passage and time as completion. In short, the grand themes of metaphysics are not universal abstrac-

tions, but rather gain concrete expression whenever questions of environmental life and quality are seriously raised.

To illustrate this, let me review succinctly the major themes of the conference to draw out the underlying metaphysical principles.

The symposium began with a discussion of the open spaces which establish boundaries around homes. Through a phenomenology of yards, it was established that movement is an essential ingredient in these areas of openness. Furthermore, such movement is made intelligible by three phases of human environmental interaction. First, every open space has to have a definitive threshold whereby one can sense, albeit dimly, the passage from one zone of the open to another. This discrimination is brought about by the body sensing the *difference* in various areas about the home (for example, the hedge that borders the front door that opens and the back door that leads out.) Second, what makes this sense of difference concrete is the *identity* granted each region by the bounded quality of its spatial zone. Thus, to be a this and not a that is of essential importance in establishing an intelligible flow of movement throughout a home and its surrounding spaces. Sheer, homogeneous space results in undifferentiated sameness. Third, the defining power of borders

allows the participant to enter by action or by vision modes of living space that demand appropriate responses.

All this tells us that when borders fail, dwelling is endangered. A complex ensemble of different spaces is required to anchor the identity of the human in the real world. This means that the act of dwelling in a human way always entails an extended unity of personal body, house, and yard. In fact, without such distinct regions, the emergence of community becomes impossible. For without the edging of the private into the public (as occurs when neighbors gossip over backyard fences) the maintenance of the tension between autonomy and shared values is impossible. Free speech requires backyards.

The metaphysical dimensions of this phenomenology of yards require further elaboration. The relation between framing and definitions is being pointed out. To be a real particular this is to be different from a real particular that. Thus identity is achieved through difference, not in spite of it.² The acknowledgment of the other is essential for the creation of the individual. The framing brought about by the centripetal zones of domestic outdoor space allows identity to be grasped through the admission of the other into the region

of place. Also this place of human dwelling is a meaningful whole by reason of the relations of its parts. Action, understood as movement with intent, flows through these separate spaces and binds them into a unity that is more than the sum of its parts. Whenever a human being truly dwells, he sets up a region of meaning that is charged with different levels of sensibility. A healthy environment allows the person to move through different spaces, sense their qualitative differences, and grasp a unifying pattern. Without such patterns, the human being sickens and dies.

We see, then, that identity through difference is the first outcome of the principle that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Nothing reveals this metaphysical principle more concretely than the way in which the yard brings together into a unity the difference between built space and natural space—the coincidence of these opposites gives birth to the meaning of human place.

To be human involves *being-in-place*, for place is the region within which a clearing for meaning is marked out. This understanding of the rock-bottom importance of meaning for human dwelling is forgotten by all those schools of “rational” architecture that, under the guise of modernism, have evolved in corporate America. Order, neutral

space, and so-called clean lines are anathema to the authentic metaphysical mind. We need the sharp contrast that comes from distinct difference: The human person as dweller will cultivate the whole that is inchoate in different parts.

“Being” and “logos” have a quaint sound to the modern ear; at best, they strike us as learned and arcane. But from the perspective so far developed, they take on new force. Being is not an empty word but the meaning granted by a place. *Logos* is not meaningless Greek but the very way in which a place shows forth its meaning.

Thus, place gathers being through its *logos*, and the human body grasps this *logos* through its own felt understanding of place. But for our somatic intelligence to begin to work, an initial contrast must be imposed upon its functionings. This inauguration of place is made possible through the identity of difference—the shock of contrast that is felt with intensity. Meaning emerges by contrast and so place is the ground of identity won through affirmed difference. We can only affirm what we sense to be different. Effective architecture engraves difference on our consciousness and, at the same time, permits the dweller to create identity through such difference. It compels us to assemble a sense of place.

The sterility of behavioral analysis of lived space—its

unending insistence on the flat dimension of stimulus and response—results from this neglect of the realm of meaning. To be human is to clear a place for meaning in our lives.

The symposium continued with a presentation of the teaching of architectural design. Students were required to interact with their clients, to discuss the lived meaning of the environment as they experienced it. Patient watching and analysis in the context of the project replace the withdrawal of the architect into his private studio.

The rationale for this insistence on intimate, painstaking analysis of the site is the understanding of architecture as the expression of symbolic intention through material form. The qualitative, felt, and meaningful totality of human perception is stressed rather than its quantity. The notion of design as problem-solving with an emphasis on functional technology is emphatically rejected. Instead, design was seen as evocative and revelatory of what is already there, the established matrix of meaning that constitutes the lived pattern of the neighborhood. Old buildings, bearing the weight of neighborhood history, worn with the tread of many generations, could very well be the hub of a neighborhood’s social well-being. Replacing these

buildings with shiny new design modules creates discontinuity and a sense of dislocation, for the vernacular architecture of a place often carries with it an irreplaceable sense of the past.

The spiritual arises from the physical. This axiom demands that all design be grounded in the spirit of a place and its invocation. In terms of our basic metaphysical principle, we can say that totality arises from the particularity of place. The whole, in other words, is felt through its parts, for the universal is enshrined in the finite and mirrors itself in all particulars. Real places for real human beings are interactive, not passive. Once again, the theme of *logos* arises: Phenomenological design lets be the being of a place in all its fullness.

Education in terms of design requires an effort to let the body (not the rational mind) of the planner remember its place. The body has its own *logos*: A prereflective affinity with the world. This means that the flesh has its own mind,³ a way of knowing that the incarnate person experiences in his living through an environment. Planners tend to forget this dimension of human experience. In attempting to remember this fact, the design student ought to be caught up in the web of interrelations that constitute the reality of any concrete

place. This pattern of interconnectedness forms a whole that is more than the sum of its parts, and the ground of this felt whole is the human body rooting itself historically, socially, and ethically in the environment.

By way of a pedagogical reminder, we can lay down the following table of metaphysical connections:

<i>There is no Being</i>	
<i>without Place</i>	
for there is no	consciousness
	without place
	no history
	without place
	no speech
	without place
	no language
	without place
	no action
	without place.

To teach design is to evoke the power of a particular place. That power is anchored in the whole that speaks through its particular parts.

The final presentation began with these words: "For the first time in history, hell has become a technical possibility rather than [just] a spiritual reality." The theme was Architecture and the Sacred; it can serve both as a beginning and a completion of these metaphysical reflections.

The drive behind our industrialized society is the manufacture of desire. Congealed in objects and

made into a fetish, this alienation of the self from its own most proper concerns creates a social world dependent upon self-estrangement for its survival. Furthermore, this ultimate irrationality is turned into a highly concentrated form of rationality through planning, marketing, and consumerism. It throws up alongside its rush towards gratification a suitable architecture—one that reflects the interchangeable quality of desires; that is to say, a built environment that is always and everywhere the same.

To be driven towards what is not in our best interest seems the very definition of evil. Seeking completion, we desire what shatters our integration as persons. Desire is not the problem. Since we are finite we never become self-sufficient. Desire is the sign of our humanity. What matters most are the objects offered for the satisfaction of our desires. Their pitiful quality suggests the growing decadence of our culture. However, life has its own cunning and despite our dissatisfactions, we continue to experience an unsatiable urge towards wholeness. Due to the quantification of existence, however, our culture identifies being with having. The resultant addition never really adds up because there is always an additional "more" to be had. Failing to understand that the whole is more than the sum of its parts, we go on recklessly

adding more and more and end up with only parts and more parts. These parts, at best, tend to be concentrations of wealth and power used to influence our society towards “better” things; at worst, they signal only the viciously intense presence of greed.

This bleak landscape of failed desire can be changed by “recollecting the Sacred.” What is the Sacred? It is the Whole that expresses itself through the insistent particularity of its parts. Such a whole does not yield itself to quantitative analysis. The “how much?” asks the wrong question. To interrogate the Sacred means to ask after the quality, value, and meaning of the particular. This is what Tennyson intended by his “eternity in a grain of sand.” It is also what Zen sees in the commonplace and the ordinary.

From this perspective the importance of phenomenology with its insistence upon “a return to things themselves” is made clear. Environmental understanding and its application to design must back away from our contemporary condition of high abstraction. The extreme of quantitative and reductionist planning needs radical correction. Phenomenology which sees all relations as harboring and expressing meaning provides a method whereby we can locate the whole that unites

its parts into a more significant unity.

What this means explicitly for environmental design can be fairly clearly stated. Whenever a designer looks at an environment, three principles must be foremost in his mind. First, things are *meanings*, not material objects. Second, these meanings are nodal points of expression that open out into a field of relationships. Third, the goal of environmental design is to knit together these concentrations of meaning so that the participant-dweller can experience the radical unity that binds up these different qualities.

Sacred architecture, in particular the Gothic style, is a paradigmatic example of this. At bottom and in essence the medieval energy that created Chartres saw that all building is interconnectedness. Furthermore, this ensemble of wholeness had a double level—both functionally and symbolically it addressed the human person as a whole. This layering established connections between levels so that a single “thing” could express two or more meanings at the same time. Thus a polyvalent symbolism emerged that provided a point and moment of convergence within which the whole and its parts could be experienced. I speak, of course, of the architecture of light that is at the heart of the stone of Chartres. The

first “solar” architecture suggests to us what we can do with our own more profane environment. The suffusion of the whole through the parts and the parts’ particular mirroring of that luminous whole constitute the “more” of the Sacred. The metaphysical genius of Medieval Being created a vertical axis that allows for the horizontal spread of the human as its mirror-image.

Throughout the architecture of the Sacred there is an insistence upon limitations of the human condition. Yet paradoxically, this endorsement of finitude evokes the sense of the infinite. The gift of finitude is the recognition of what lies beyond. Once more, we see the principle of identity through difference yielding up a sober and concrete truth: It is the finite that grants access to the infinite.

The ultimate human recognition of finitude is death. What does the question of death have to do with environmental design? Our landscape is littered with the bloated corpses of desire. Everywhere one looks, the objects of failed desire obstruct our view: Shopping malls, parked cars, discarded furniture, and obsolete appliances—to name but a few elements of our *de trop* culture. At the same time, scarcity and limits are used to describe our era. How can we reconcile these opposing realities?

When we speak of death, we speak of the human experience of the end of time. This is the heart of our conflict. It separates us from nature. In nature one sees processes evolving in time towards wholeness and incompleteness. That is to say, in nature, the flower that completes the shrub dies as its seed is cast forth to begin the cycle again. Passage characterizes natural time, and the wholeness that is encountered in nature forever leads towards incompleteness. To be whole and incomplete is nature's answer to the riddle of death.

And what of our human response? Do we refuse the gift? And how can death be regarded as a gift? Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time* called death "my ownmost possibility." This means that death is the occasion for authenticity; that is to say, I can only *be* myself when I face up to my own possibility of not being. Death seals my being with a stamp of resoluteness. It is in the face of my death that I achieve my being through my activities. Thus death is no enemy. It is rather "my own."

In a culture plagued by failed desires such words are bitter medicine.⁴ Yet they capture the essence of the metaphysics that lay at the heart of our environmental discourse. To be a "One," a definite this, is not to be another. Owning up to one's limits is the meaning of the acceptance of death. Nature

has no difficulty in attaining this, for its wholeness constitutes a passage into incompleteness that makes death understandable and bearable. In a culture such as ours no equivalent understanding of limit and death seems available. We preach frugality but squander our present for the sake of having more. We deny death as a matter of cultural course.

The radiant derives from the unity of wholeness. It flows from a single source, establishing lines of connection throughout the world. In following these lines of radiance as they shine through our bleak landscape, certain objective lessons stand forth.

In the first place, understanding of the human/environmental matrix must proceed by way of unity. To be together, however, is not to descend into an undifferentiated sameness. Such a lack of difference is the very hallmark of our built environment. Rather what is required is the unity that arises through real, particular, insistent parts relating to a complete whole. This one, as we may wish to call it, is more than the sum of its parts. The "more" associated with the whole is the result of its fundamental drive towards novelty, difference, and change. This is the lesson of nature. The completeness of nature concludes with an invitation to start again. Thus death is the passage to a fresh start.

Novelty arises from the perpetually perishing. Being born and dying constitute the boundaries whereby the universe edges into the advance of novelty.⁵

From this metaphysical perspective, death is the very gift of value itself. It sets limits and lets us be our very real, particular, insistent, and stubborn selves; yet this finitude by reason of the whole passes over into the whole and thereby adds to its weight, value, and passage. If we seek immortality, it can be said that the opportunity is already there. We become part of the great community, and our contributions are not measured by reason of self-interest but rather by their meaning for others and for the whole. Thus a metaphysics of unity through relations of meaning lifts from the shoulders of humankind the need for selfish satisfaction of desires. In place of our fragmented landscape of bleak desires, we face a beckoning whole that invites our individual participation.

In sum, then, the environment—natural or built—shows forth a relational unity that suggests ever wider wholes tending toward incompleteness. At the very least environmental studies ought to incorporate analogical thought within scientific studies. Such comparative thinking would allow us to think limit, particularity, parts, and even desire and human death

against a backdrop of meaning, wholeness, unity, and activity. Such thinking constitutes a new course of study for all students of the environment—an educational whole that would replace the obsessive craving for technique that now dominates much of what passes for ecological study. Metaphysics, in other words, has never died. It lies obscured at the heart of all environmental inquiry that seeks a complete self-understanding.

NOTES

- 1 The Symposium took place in the Fall of 1983 under the aegis of the Society for Phenomenology and the Human Sciences. Participants whose papers were drawn upon in this work include: Robert Mugerauer, Botand Bognar, and Gary Coates. Further information about the participants can be obtained by writing the Chairman, Professor David Seamon, Department of Architecture, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS.
- 2 This is, of course, the thought of Hegel. See the "Preface" to *The Phenomenology of Mind*.
- 3 Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* is a sustained analysis of this primacy of somatic intelligence in terms of our being in the world.
- 4 See, for example, Ernest Becker's *The Denial of Death* for a complex analysis of how the refusal to die constitutes the very ground of our culture.
- 5 The work of Alfred North Whitehead is a complete and coherent study of the meaning of this insight. See, for example, Part V, "God and the World," in *Process and Reality*.

Mr. Shadi's Garden: Expressing Love and Hope in the Landscape

Marcia McNally



In 1938 Sundar Shadi bought a view lot on the Arlington in El Cerrito, CA, overlooking the San Francisco Bay. Today, the city's bay vistas play second fiddle to Mr. Shadi's garden, a gift he designs for the community on his one-acre hillside.

Every year, year round, every day, Mr. Shadi works on his projects. City residents treasure the spectacular seasonal metamorphosis that Mr. Shadi creates in his garden. Winter ends and spring comes to El Cerrito when Mr. Shadi erects his Easter cross and begins his annual planting. After weeks of his nourishing care, 15,000 flowers, planted in Indian and Persian rug designs, bloom bold color and it is summer. Mr. Shadi celebrates the fall harvest with a gardened Halloween scene. Fall unfolds into Christmas with a sculptured story depicting the pilgrimage to Bethlehem.

These seasonal displays are one man's offering to his community and region. His story is one to consider in light of Randy Hester's recent "Labors of Love" article, particularly as Mr. Shadi's garden offers new solutions to the creation of more loving and well loved environments.¹

Mr. Shadi

Mr. Shadi came to the United States from the Punjab in India, in the early 1920s to study pomology and subtropical horticulture at the University of California, Berkeley. He worked as a building contractor

in the East Bay until he retired in 1950. He is 85 years old.

Retirement cleared the way for many, many years of public service. For 22 years he organized a city-wide celebration of United Nations Day in El Cerrito. He has also served as a Parks and Recreation commissioner, as chairman of the talent show for the Richmond Unified School district, and as the Dad's Club district chairman.

His Gifts

One might think that some 20 years of community service would be gift enough. Mr. Shadi's most significant contribution, however, is the messages he sends out from his garden. These displays began with Christmas decorations 35 years ago, when Mr. and Mrs. Shadi first strung lights along the front eaves of their home and in the trees near the house. The next day they looked at the lights and decided a Star of Bethlehem would be nice, particularly if they were to perch it at the top of their hill so it could be seen from far away. The following year they ordered three pressed Masonite wise men from a catalogue for their front yard. The scene has grown each year since then.

Today the Christmas scene includes 67 life-sized sheep, 30 camels, 10 or 12 donkeys, a few goats, 2 shepherds, a dog for the shepherd, the star, and the entire town of Bethlehem (at least 90 houses), the wise men, an angel, and many pilgrims (see the Winter Plan). Mr. Shadi makes the figures from paper

"Mr. Shadi planting his rugs."
(Photograph by Randy Hester)

mâché; Mrs. Shadi sews their clothes. The attention to detail is extraordinary: the pilgrims carry jugs on their heads; the camels have elaborate saddles. This story, as Mr. Shadi calls it, is placed up on their steep hillside and is readily visible from the sidewalk, complete with a Bible for viewing parents to read the story of the birth of baby Jesus to their children.

At night lights and Christmas carols piped over a loud speaker enhance the story. An estimated 90,000 people come to see this scene every year. As early as November Mr. Shadi starts receiving calls from interested community groups from around the Bay region, many of whom arrive for the viewing in December in chartered buses. During the holidays the El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce is deluged with calls asking for Mr. Shadi's address.

After Christmas there is a lull in the activity outside. Inside, however, Mr. Shadi is busy preparing for his summer "rugs." The five rugs are made of flowers, 15,000 in all, and are arranged in Indian and Persian rug patterns, each in a 30-foot by 50-foot plot (see the Spring Plan). This project began 18 years ago when a neighbor told Mr. Shadi that his mixed flower and vegetable garden made a nice rug design.²

In the second week of March, Mr. Shadi starts to work outside on the spring garden. The terracing and planting takes 4 to 5 weeks, 11 to 12 hours a day, 7 days a week to complete. (When I called to set up

an interview he politely asked if I would call back in two weeks, that he had 15,000 flowers to plant.) The planning process is an exercise in abstract thinking. It begins with a sketch on a five- by eight-inch spiral pad in crayon. The sketch is drawn to show the desired forms and colors and notes the number of rows and types of annuals to use. (He originally would go to Montgomery Wards and Brueners to copy their rug designs, but in a few years exhausted their stock so now he designs his own patterns, different each year.) Mr. Shadi completes the process by translating the design into form on the ground with a piece of string and a tape measure.

When Mr. Shadi is ready to plant his rugs, he calls Lemuria Nursery in San Pablo to order the flowers: marigolds, lobelia, and verbena for the center medallions and viola and sweet alysum for the borders. The Lemurias special order from their suppliers, who are by now well aware of the customer ordering. The *only* constraint on this order is that all 15,000 of the flowers need to be the same size and to bloom all at the same time. In exchange for good service and a good price, Mr. Shadi advertises for his nurserymen every year by erecting a sign to tell viewers, "Flowers by Lemuria Nursery."

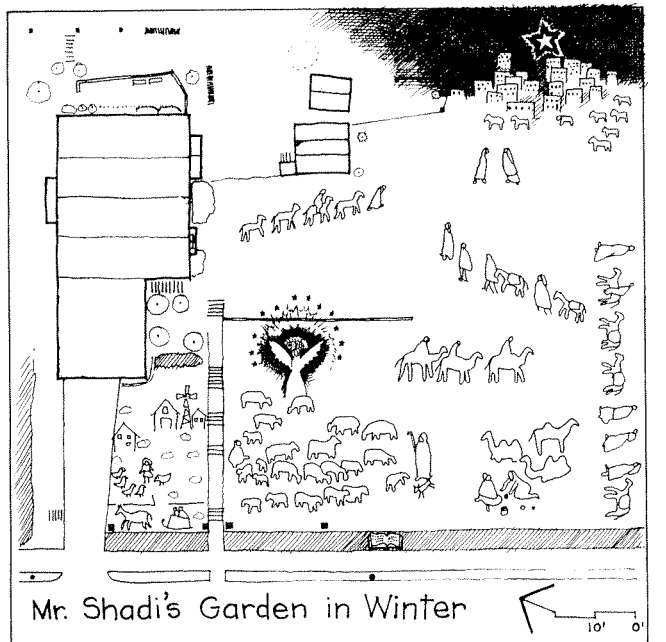
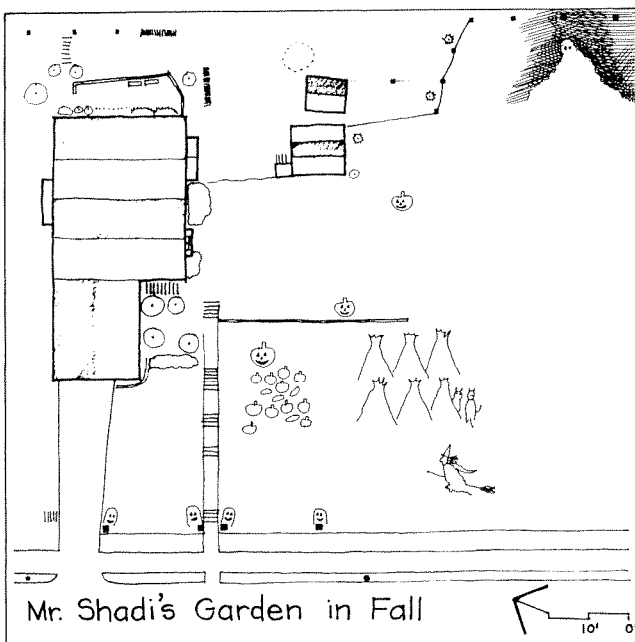
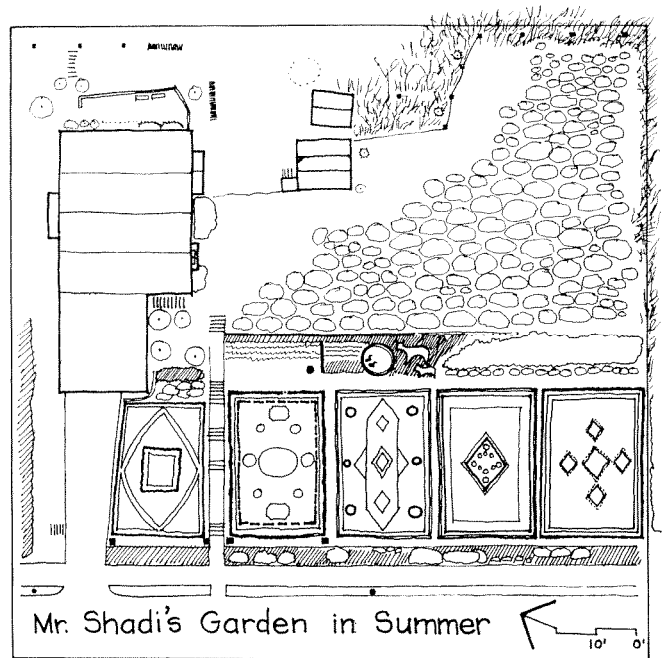
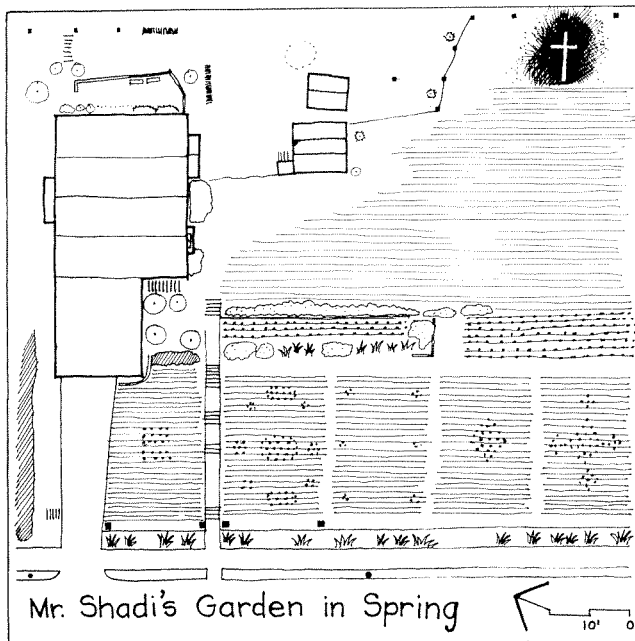
By mid-June the terraces have exploded with color (see the Summer Plan). The Shadis invite the local press to photograph the rugs, and the press lets the public know that the show is on. Some years Mr. Shadi creates an honorary

ensignia for a local civic group celebrating a significant anniversary, and invites the group to his home for a tea party and a tour.

Mr. Shadi is very conscious of seasonality and continuity. Each rug plan is dated, numbered, and photographed every year. His hillside exhibits a sense of time passing. Between the Christmas scene and the summer rugs, while the land lies waiting in terraces, he erects an Easter Cross on the top of his hill and decorates it with lights so that it can be seen from far away. In the fall, the compost from the summer's flowers both nourishes the soil and forms a protective cover for the otherwise muddy hill, making it easier to set up the Christmas story.

His Vision

When asked why he did all this, Mr. Shadi's response is simple. He says that he enjoys the work. When I asked Mr. Shadi why he didn't plant perennials and save himself a lot of trouble, he said that it would deprive him of the challenge of figuring out how to orchestrate the rugs so that every flower would bloom at the same time. He does the Christmas story because people tell him it just wouldn't seem like Christmas without it. Mr. Shadi was in the hospital last fall after he fell off a ladder, but had to hurry back to work to get the scene set up "because I didn't want to disappoint the people." He says that it makes him happy to see so many people enjoying his scenes. "If 80,000 or 90,000 people every year have seen the Christmas show, and



2a "Mr. Shadi's Garden in Spring."
(Sketches by Randy Hester)

2c "Mr. Shadi's Garden in Summer."
(Sketches by Randy Hester)

2b "Mr. Shadi's Garden in Fall."
(Sketches by Randy Hester)

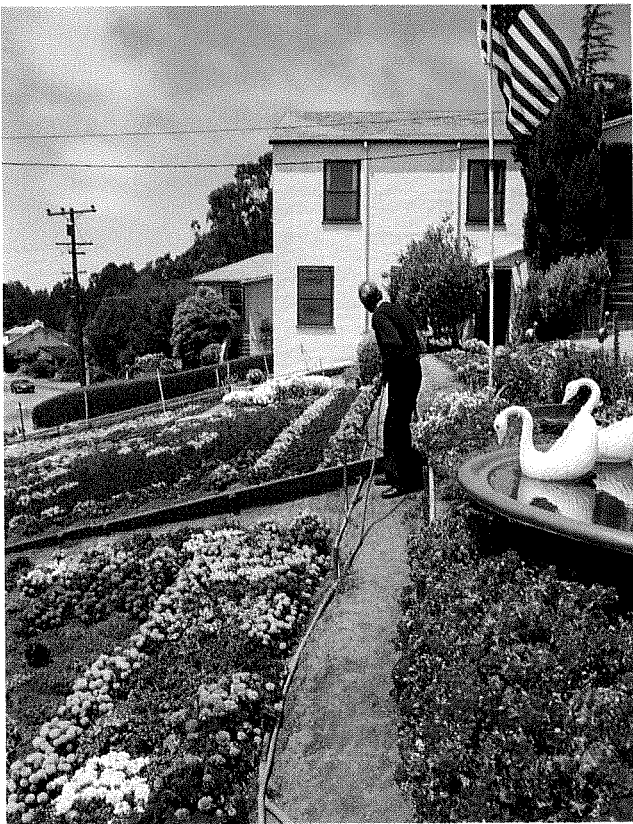
2d "Mr. Shadi's Garden in Winter."
(Sketches by Randy Hester)



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3 "Spring's terraces awaiting Summer's splendor." (Photograph by Randy Hester)

4 "Mr. Shadi tending to his yard." (Photograph by Marcia McNally)



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5 "The 1984 Summer rugs." (Photograph by Marcia McNally)

6 "Christmas Angel." (Photograph by Randy Hester)

I've been doing it now for 35 years, just imagine how many millions have seen it by now!"

Mr. Shadi has a vision, a dream about what his town needs. Using noncontroversial and universally recognized forms to convey his message of love and hope for humanity, he has created images that a broad range of people can understand and ponder. The Bethlehem scene, for example, expresses the spiritual significance of Christmas for viewers, rather than the more common commercial themes associated with the holiday season. Mr. Shadi often uses the Persian rug forms to recognize, with honorary gardens, such international organizations as the United Nations and the Red Cross. "They are wonderful organizations, they do for children and the community. I do it to honor them."

Mr. Shadi has been made an honorary member of many civic groups. His neighbors, his town, the region, everyone who knows him, are crazy about him. Everyone I spoke with, whether a newspaper reporter, a neighbor passing by, a curious tourist, *everyone* said something nice about him: "Oh, you have no idea how famous he is . . . he's such a lovely man. . . ." When I called City Hall to get some information, the secretary said, "Oh, I hope you send us a copy of your article, we're real fans of his down here!" The first day I visited his home, a neighbor stopped her car in the middle of the street and called out, "Hello Mr. Shadi, we're going to just sit here and watch you work for a little while. The children

love to watch the flowers grow." One neighbor told me that he had moved up to the Arlington so he could live by Mr. Shadi. "The rugs are really gorgeous," he said, "aren't they? He has a wonderful philosophy of life. He shares his compassion for the world through the beauty of his art."

Community Issues

In a significant way, Mr. Shadi's labors differ from those described by Hester. He is not cast in an adversarial role with the community. It can be argued that he has not needed community support to execute his projects, that he acts as a private citizen on private property. Yet support has been critical to his continued success.

For example, the neighbors do not complain about the traffic generated by his Christmas story. The local police department has given him a sawhorse "No Parking" sign to put out on the road whenever he feels the need, which he says isn't often. "People are reasonable," he says, "they park on the side roads and walk." It is amazing that there is no conflict, because the Arlington is a major traffic corridor for the El Cerrito hill area and has only one lane in each direction.

At Christmas, Mr. Shadi is careful not to irritate his neighbors. He keeps the lights and music on from 6 to 10 pm only "so that people can sleep." He dismantles the scene on December 27th so that he won't "annoy" the community after the holiday.

When asked whether he feels that he has ever faced any obstacles in creating his hillside scenes, Mr. Shadi talks mostly of weather damage and vandalism. He says that he hasn't had much of a problem with either. Ten of his Christmas figures have been stolen, but most of them were returned. Mr. Shadi explains that people don't damage the scenes because they think they are lucky for and valuable to the community.

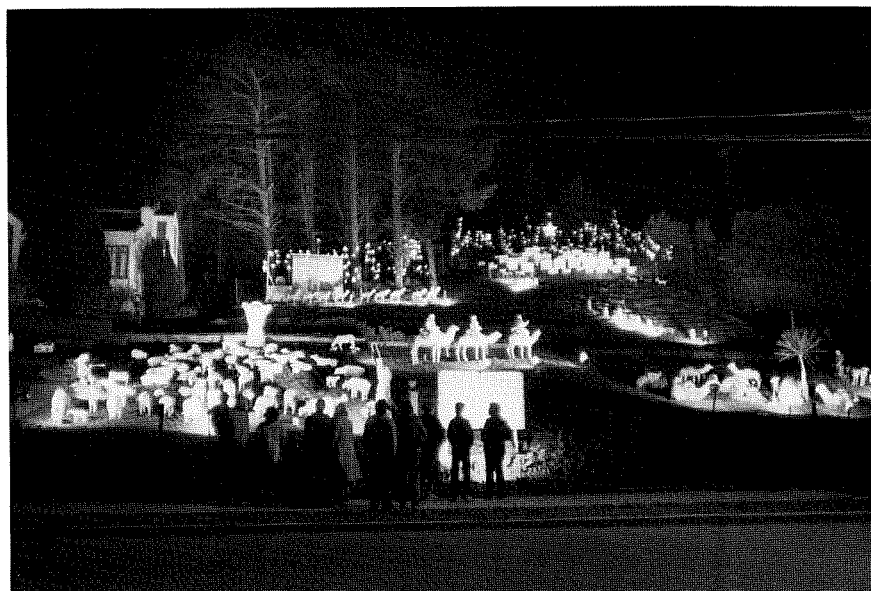
The issue of transferring the gardens from the creator to the community is more complicated. Mr. Shadi usually does not use the community as a resource, although many people offer their help. (But he says, they can only work on Saturdays, while he works all week long, or they lack gardening skills.) The Indian rug gardens have not been a participatory effort (Mrs. Shadi laughs, "During this time of year, there is clearly room for only one gardener . . ."). Mrs. Shadi does contribute to the Christmas story, in making the clothes. The local high school sends a few boys every year to help move the Christmas figures, each of which weighs up to 185 pounds. However, Mr. Shadi arranges the figures himself to make them look more "natural."

While it is certainly easier to realize a dream if it is done privately, what will happen in a few years? Mr. Shadi will not be able to continue at his current pace indefinitely. Who will tend to his labors then? Mr. Shadi's garden raises the old issue of placelessness in our everyday environments in a new

way. It is a special place. In the summer it blazes and sparkles with color. Mr. Shadi's ability to orchestrate the effect of his rugs is marvelous. Tens of thousands come to see these attractions every year in El Cerrito, a community whose other points of interest include public buildings, a shopping center, and several parks. In neighboring Berkeley, only 50,000 people visit the city's Rose Garden each year, only 50,000 visit the university's Botanical Garden. Mr. Shadi's garden gives the area's residents a place to take visitors, a place to show off and be proud of.

Of course broad-based advocacy for this type of labor of love raises another issue. This labor of love is done on private land, by a private citizen, with private funds. Yet, without stretching the definition too much, Mr. Shadi's garden is El Cerrito's most popular "public" open space. Should the city subsidize such an obvious gift to the community? Although the community benefits tremendously from Mr. Shadi's garden, he bears the cost of the flowers (\$1,000 a year), the electric and water bills, and the maintenance, etc.

Public funding, however, could come with strings attached. It is conceivable that in the multicultural East Bay pressure to produce different scenes with different messages could cost Mr. Shadi the control over his garden. Moreover, at what point would official recognition of his projects become an invasion of privacy? Mr. Shadi's garden does not appear on the Chamber of Commerce's map as a



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7 "Neighbors coming out to look at Christmas scene at night." (Photograph by Mike Maloney, courtesy of the *San Francisco Chronicle*)

point of interest, yet his address is given out routinely to interested callers.

Maybe it is time to look to private labors of love as a path to modifying the alienating environments we have created in suburbs over the past 30 years. Mr. Shadi's garden is certainly an innovative medium for relating his message of hope for humanity. It is one man's, one artist's, one

ambassador's stunning expression of love for his community. Perhaps if we look closer into our own communities, we will find more gifts of love to celebrate. They may not be as intricate as Mr. Shadi's garden, but they will probably flourish if properly recognized. Maybe it is time to begin to foster a heightened sense of community by recognizing and promoting these gems.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank Debbie Byrd, Patsy Eubanks, Randy Hester, and Dorothy Shadi for their contributions to this effort. I would especially like to thank Mr. Shadi, mostly just for being himself.

NOTES

- 1 See Randy Hester, "Labors of Love in the Public Landscape," *Places*, 1, No. 1 (1983), pp. 18–27.
- 2 Deborah Byrd Kilmer, "Tradition Blooms in El Cerrito," *West County Times*, 20 June 1980, p. 1.

Robert Mugerauer

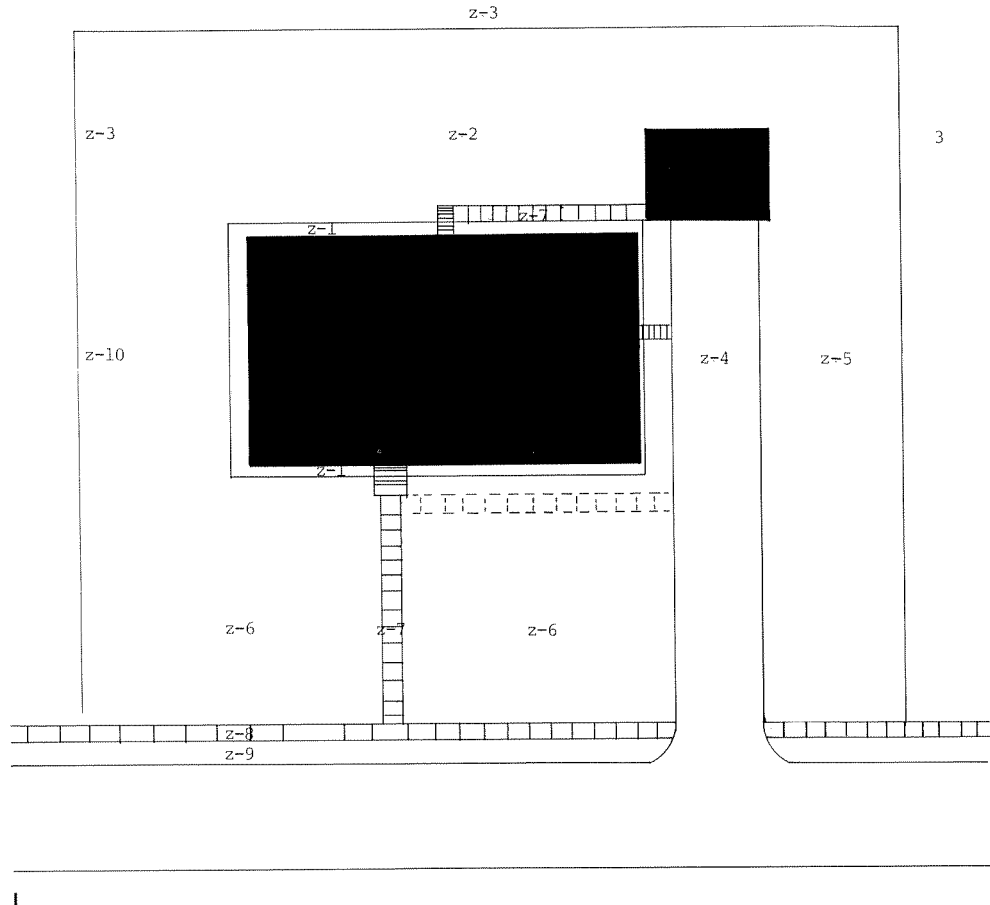
What about the yards around the houses in which we live? Do we understand these small, intimate places? To try, let us imagine several scenarios of movement in, for example, a midwestern household.

I. Movements

A. Getting up from the kitchen table, you open the *back* door, walk out of the house, and go down the back steps past the coiled garden hose and newly planted marigolds. You cross the back yard and continue to the back fence, which, on closer inspection, probably does not need repair after all. The neighbor's diseased elm tree, however, still looks as if it could fall.

B. Putting on your jacket, you check for your car keys as you open the *side* door. Once outside, you head toward the garage, but before you get into your car, you look to see whether your son has cut the strip of grass on the far side of the driveway. Naturally, he has not.

C. The newspaper should be here by now. From the living room you go out the *front* door, down the steps, and continue down the front walk to the sidewalk. Glad that the paper has not landed in the big evergreen again, you retrieve it from near the curb and wave to Ignaz across the street before you go back in.



I "Midwestern Yards: 10 Possible Zones

1. inner border: inmost and minimal yard
 2. back yard proper
 3. boundary
 4. drive
 5. side border
 6. front yard proper
 7. walks
 8. sidewalk
 9. front border
 10. side yard "
- (Drawing by Carol Silverman)

Nothing extraordinary happens here. But, these ordinary movements delineate the major areas of what we call yards—at least in the midwest.

II. Noting the Zones

In a more formal manner, we can distinguish ten major zones, that is, ten different sorts of space. Here “zones” means something like areas or parts—to be understood in a way parallel to discovering that we have arms, legs, and so on, as parts of our body. I do not claim that there always or only are ten zones. Rather, I believe that at least ten distinct zones typically present themselves in our daily lives and that describing these is a step toward a phenomenology of our home place.

A. If we consider the house as the center of our movement, the first scenario shows three zones.

1. The first zone is that which *borders* the house. This space is slight; in fact, it is almost unnoticed. It does appear as distinct, however, precisely because it is an insistent fringe. It is where we coil a hose and where the faucet leaks, where we plant flowers or bordering shrubs, where we lean a broom or snow shovel or leave muddy shoes.

2. The second zone is what we might call the *back yard* proper. We will need to

return to it in detail; clearly, though, it is what we generally mean when we say we are going into the back yard or when we tell the kids to play in the back yard—where we can keep an eye on them. This is a place of some (spatial and psychic) depth for family activity.

3. Beyond the back yard, say at the back fence, we find both the end of the yard and the *boundary* with the neighbor behind us. Like the inner fringe, this outer edge is easily overlooked, largely because we do little there, except when we use the boundary zone to talk to a neighbor or when we tend to it as a boundary.

B. The second scenario indicates two more zones.

4. The movement out the side door (which could be out a back door, for that matter) is to a garage and driveway. This entire zone may be paved or not. The fact that it is often paved simply asserts the unity of this distinct area: a strip, as it were, of *parking area and driveway*, running from house to street.

5. As was noted in checking whether the grass had been cut, there is a further strip beyond the driveway. The simple sense is that it is an *outer border area* with the neighbor. This zone—between driveway and boundary proper (e.g. the fence)—is easily overlooked and neglected.

C. The third scenario presents four more zones.

6. & 7. Most prominent is the *front yard*, the obvious public area which opens to community and communal activities. This zone contains a *walk* from the front door to the sidewalk. Whether a walk goes straight from house to street across the front yard or along the inner border zone to the driveway leaving the front yard “unbroken,” is not crucial. Clearly, the front yard is another major zone.

8. The *sidewalk* itself, though it may not be a yard in the most obvious sense, at least crosses the yard and marks, through or over it, the accepted area of public movement.

9. Beyond the sidewalk is another *marginal strip*, between sidewalk and street. Like the sidewalk, it clearly is not front yard proper. But, this zone is a reassertion or reemergence of the front yard, whose continuity is again signaled by the grass. Here we see that the sidewalk crosses the yard and is contained within it; the sidewalk does not end the yard as the street beyond does.

D. A fourth scenario might be helpful.

10. The additional scenario treats walking across the back yard or front yard, not to the drive and to the garage, but in the opposite

direction to. . . . We scarcely have a word for it. Can we say *side yard*? More likely, we would talk about going “around the side of the house.” Here, though, is another zone, perhaps most distinct as a problematic space, either almost forgotten or invisible (as a continuation of the front or back yard or as another side-border). More of this later.

If we put all these zones together, we have a typical midwestern yard. We should note, of course, that there are local and regional variations. For example, there are alternative walks (in the back); there are yards with no side walks, and so on. And, obviously, most homes would have either a side door or a back door and walk, not both.

III. What goes on here?

These ten zones may actually be distinct. This is most clearly seen from the ways they are “filled in” by things and by the activities which take place in each zone.

A. Two zones, the back yard and front yard proper, are open places which get filled in as we live and act outdoors. Note that they are open for activity partly because they are bounded; that is, clearly, they are defined or set off as “our place,” open for activity and thus are more like the house than like a boundary strip. They are outdoor domestic areas analogous to the



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interior space of the house. This “openness for what we want to do” appears in the autonomous or self-contained character of what we typically do here: the back and front yards are places for play, for gardening, for cooking outdoors, and for just sitting, walking, or “puttering around.” In addition, the front and back yards are prominent visual zones, to be looked into. Accordingly, they often get filled in by toys and sports equipment, by barbecue grills and lawn chairs, by vegetable gardens and flowerbeds, or by trees which nurture our aesthetic sense and contribute to a restful, natural atmosphere.

More domestic needs show up. Wash may be hung up to dry in the back yard since that yard is not so public, or perhaps around the side of the house. Washlines, like a volleyball net, a vegetable garden, a flowerbed, and large trees, create islands of sorts in the yard. The ambivalent sense of whether these islands are *distinct places set into the yard* (and

thus really apart from the yard) or merely *specialized highlights of the yard* is seen in children playing in the yard and running through the grass, flowerbeds, and drying clothes.

Other household requirements, such as space for garbage cans, compost piles, and air-conditioners, define certain spots as service areas. Not surprisingly, these tend to be kept out of the back and front yards and clustered instead in the transitional or ignored zone, such as the side border, especially around the garage and its immediate area.

Related yard uses involve storage, work projects, and pets. On the one hand, we need to store firewood, for example. It is interesting to notice how much wood is stored, whether out of sight behind a garage or more visibly along the side of the house, in the inner border zone. On the other hand, we need to store large items such as cars and boats. The temporary placement of an activity or object is one matter and leaving an old



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car or boat in one spot permanently is another. Connected to these storage uses is the yard’s function as the scene for work or a project such as home improvement or building a boat. It matters “how long” the activity goes on and the objects remain. Longer lasting uses seem to change the zones; shorter uses do not. Thus, having a permanently standing project changes a back or front yard into something else—into something like yard as lumberyard, that is, closer to nondomestic yards. (Gardening seems to be an exception to this; it even may be expected to be always underway).

Social or community acceptance of storage and work-project duration and placement naturally counts a good deal here. Communal practices and customs, displayed in the yards and by what is or is not in them, largely specify the tone or atmosphere of houses and yards in the community. Similar differences occur in the number and placement of pets. The doghouse may

2 “Front Yard as visual zone

Neenah, wi”
(Photograph by Robert Mugerauer)

3 “Family activity in the back yard

Neenah, wi”
(Photograph by Robert Mugerauer)

become an interesting island in the back yard, like the garden, or may be set aside as marginal, like a service area.

Of course, all these details largely omit the differences between the back yard and the front yard. While the front yard often is the more public and the back more private, it is not as simple as that. For example, several households may treat back yards as common and thus achieve an intimate but communal space. Then, too, what is deemed proper public and private activity varies and changes. Where does volleyball go? The barbecue grill? Sitting in one's undershirt with a cigar? In which direction should a porch face?

In any case, the major zones, *back yard and front yard* proper, are essentially *autonomous, centripetal spaces*, set off from boundary and marginal spaces and free or open for the uses which take place within them, and which fill them in.

B. To shift the focus: Recall the other, less dominant zones. These seem to be a motley collection of strips and edges. But that does not mean they are merely leftover areas. In fact, they are just the opposite; they are very specific sorts of space.

1. The inner border zone around the house, which may be used as the space for

utility access or filled with shrubs, also is the *innermost yard*. It frames the house: It not only sets limits to the house within it, but also—setting the house aside into its own area—opens the house up, connecting it to the outside. Because the border zone defines the house inside and the realm outside and mediates or bridges these two places, the zone itself is a kind of threshold. Hence, steps usually span and delimit the border: The steps and inner border extend approximately the same distance out from the house. As a border which simultaneously encloses and opens the house, the border zone is the minimal yard. This is seen in urban settings where the yard has shrunk almost beyond recognition, becoming vestigial space. It remains the least yard a house can have.

The importance and distinction of the inner border zone is seen in the focus we give to it. For example, we fill it with color (typically, with flowers) and often stress its upward extension (with shrubs and climbing vines). At the same time, the border zone tends to disappear insofar as it successfully frames the house and also bridges the house and the outside. The same is true for any good frame. Furthermore, the border zone helps define the back and front yards; it is part of the boundary which in delineating back and front yard, allows back and front yard to assume their

centripetal character. As complements to the inner border, these outer borders complete the definition of the back and front yards proper, which are set within its enclosure.

2. There are also the strips of yard at the *outer borders*. More obviously, these outer border zones emphasize the unity of the yard despite their apparent disconnection. Their presence indicates that the multiplicity—of drive, walk, and sidewalk, of movement and connection to community—is part of and contained within the yard. The continuity is affirmed insofar as the drive, walk, and sidewalk are shown to be laid over the yard (or to be parts of the yard itself?). As noted, the continuity of the grass in these border zones and in the front and back yard is a major means to this affirmation. Other unifying devices are trees or shrubs large enough to overhang and connect the spaces from above or of the same kind as those in the inner areas.

Of course, the unity of the yard presents important landscaping and design problems because it is difficult to accomplish and to maintain. If these many zones are not successfully gathered and held together as zones of one yard, they become disconnected and detached—as marginal and forgotten spaces; the yard itself fails; the dwelling which is needed in house and yard—that is to say our

home—is endangered. Where the border zones do succeed, however, the complexity in unity appears and may be experienced.

3. The walks may be seen as internal connecting zones, operating among other yard zones and allowing regular patterns of movement among those other zones. These walks get set with stone or are paved because they are paths of regular, even heavy, movement within a yard. Of course, they also are a first stage of movement out of house and yard; they connect house with the drive and sidewalk.

4. The drive and sidewalk, as noted, may be seen either as communal access to and across the yard or as the part of the yard which itself opens the household to community. In the latter case, whereas the back and front yards are bounded, centripetal spaces, the drive and sidewalk are centrifugal connections to the outside. The drive and sidewalk, then, open not for activity within them, but to activity beyond themselves. Further, the ambiguity of sidewalk and drive as a *part* of yard and also as *not a part*, is seen in their appropriateness for play, work, or sitting—as compared to back and front yards. They appear as yard when we cook, and set out chairs, and when children are allowed to play there. They may be dangerous, however, because they are spaces for cars and passers-by, that is, because they are

places for leaving, arriving, and passing through. Accordingly, we limit their use for movement. Walkways are a different, more internal zone than driveways and sidewalks; they are less ambiguous in "direction." Children may play on walks to a much greater extent than in drives or on sidewalks. Drives and sidewalks are intermediate in this respect, compared with walk and street.

5. It is no accident that the area set off on one side barely has a name in English. We almost have to invent "side yard." In most ways this zone tends to merge with one of the other zones. For example, it may be a part of the basically private back yard. This occurs, for example, when play and lounging space extend around the corner of the house. Here, the activities may be deemed enclosed or almost invisible even though in view of the front sidewalk. This can be seen, for instance, when the side yard is used to hang wash or to snooze in a hammock. The zone may also be contiguous with the front yard because of the continuation of the landscaping and the area's restriction to more properly public activities. Of course, the side yard also can be another side border, paralleling the side border on the other side of the house. In all these cases, it is interesting to note how the side yard tends to disappear, that is, to be an indistinct zone. No doubt that is one

reason why, when trying to build homes and yards without adequate space, we feel more comfortable reducing or eliminating the side yard rather than the front or back yards. The issue may be reduced to how much side border is needed.

6. Finally, the crucial outer boundaries, zones so compressed as to coincide with the ground under a fence or even to an imaginary line, are the most precisely defined. As the space where legal and social relationships, responsibilities, and rights are set side by side, these zones are a separate dimension of the yard. Their unusually clear and visible demarcation, which is accomplished, for example, by means of fence, hedges, and tree rows, often shows this separation.

Again, in varying degrees, the boundary can be left open, as it often is when several back yards merge for common use. Still, even here, the boundaries are clearly known and then let go, as is seen by the more subtle boundary marks of cut grass. It is interesting to note the sense of boundary when neighbors water and cut lawns and rake leaves. The yard surface itself manifests boundary and control through maintenance.

Another version of the boundary occurs when the yard ends not at a property line but at a point which the homeowner decides. This occurs when the homeowner



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4 "Drive and sidewalk are ambivalent spaces"

Oshkosh, WI"
(Photograph by Robert Mugerauer)



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5 "Fences and Maintenance as boundary

Wauwatosa, WI

(Photograph by Milton Bates)

also owns the land beyond the yard which adjoins the yard. The setting off of yard is a matter of choice. The boundary zone still appears and the yard still gets defined by stoppage, for example, by stopping maintenance on grass or by fence and trees—as when trees indicate where the yard leaves off and the orchard begins. Hence, the yard's limit is fixed, even if one freely chooses to set off just so much, in this or that way.

In sum, these zones which appear as strips and edges have at least two major characteristics in relation to the back and front yards. First, in their *centripetal* dimension, these zones belong together and to the house and also help define back and front yards. They open up a space among themselves; they enable a clearing to open for back yard and front yard and the front yard's more autonomous centripetal features. Second, in their *extrinsic dimension*, these zones connect both house and yard to the outside, establishing and maintaining place in relation to neighbors. In the balance of both dimensions, these zones amount to dynamic space pulling against and bearing toward the unity of all the zones, that is, toward accomplishing the yard as a whole.

IV What does it mean?

Describing the distinct zones which constitute a yard

reveals that yards are a complex ensemble of different spaces. Insofar as there are ten (or seven or five) possible zones, we can better understand what yards are, how they are used, and their mediating character on house and community. Then, too, seeing the zones makes clearer the subtle range and styles, or possibilities, for dwelling.

Yards need to be thought of as belonging to a home and its activities. They allow an extension of the home's activities: lounging and resting, working on a hobby, and socializing. In this extension the enlargement is purely, but crucially, spatial. This fact becomes vital because any house can be too small at times. Often we need to get some distance from one another, while still maintaining our relationships. The yard allows release without leaving home. For example, in the course of a fight, when matters are "too much" or when we need to make a symbolic gesture, we may storm out of the house and into the yard. Hence, the yard is, so to speak, stored for when it is needed.

In addition, as yard adjoins yard, it becomes the location of neighborliness: We welcome others to our place and share it with them. Finally, the yard enlarges our natural arena. The yard is the place where, through its ordinary open character, we are connected to nature. The



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**"Yards Contribute to
Neighborhood Character."**

6 83rd St., Wauwatosa, WI
(Photograph by Milton Bates)

7 Kavanaugh St., Wauwatosa, WI
(Photograph by Milton Bates)

**8 Honeycreek Parkway,
Wauwatosa, WI**
(Photograph by Milton Bates)

9 Church St., Wauwatosa, WI
(Photograph by Milton Bates)

yard is a “natural area” (here setting aside the issue of the *extent* to which yards are part of the natural), because, in yards, we encounter plants and animals, sun and heat, rain and snow. In short, this communal and natural arena allows and encourages us to move beyond ourselves and fosters the opportunity to go about doing something practical or useful and to bring about something beautiful as we work in the garden and in the flowerbed and with neighbors. Insofar as yard extends dwelling in these ways and yet maintains and even enhances the house as the center, we properly think of person and place by way of the *progression*: *body, house, yard*.

As *mediator* between house and community, the yard is especially balanced between public and private. We might say it is “private, yet open.” Within the house we have space which is private, but not really open (open by invitation only); beyond our property are open spaces like parks and town squares, but these are not private. Yards are private, yet open, spaces for the social. Children move and play from yard to yard; neighbors, passersby, and mailcarriers come through. A yard is a place for easy, casual conversation. Of course, just as these private and public extensions of our place occur by way of yards, yards also *separate*. They give us distance from the purely public space of road and sidewalk and from

nearby neighbors. The importance of zones is clearly shown by their arrangement as territory which has codes of access. This arrangement is directly linked to degrees of intimacy and distance. While strangers are allowed the sidewalk, the privilege does not extend to the front yard within the walk, and dramatically, even less so to the zone which borders the house itself.

Often portions of yards not only are set off or distinguished from house and for outside work and play, but also are “separate” in the sense of “just being there.” For example, with minimal use or marking as “mine,” yard space may function in its emptiness as a buffer zone—as a “pure” visual, physical, psycho-social separator. This space, in a broad way, keeps our own used areas for ourselves, that is, as the context for our own distinctive lives. Of course, there are all sorts of interesting variations; but, to reiterate the basic point, *it is a fundamental characteristic of yards that they are places which connect and separate*.

This joining and separating needs to be thought of in several ways. 1. *Historically*, the yards mark and implement situations of and changes in ownership, relationships, and responsibilities. 2. *Behaviorally and psychologically*, yards allow and manifest human processes and the needs of living

together. 3. *Culturally*, the overall gestalt of yards is built into neighborhood as patterns of yard types and styles and thus becomes what we call atmosphere or character and, as a gestalt, moves toward defining the sense of local place. 4. *Ontologically*, yards allow our own being to come forth in both our private and public capacities. That is, yards are places in the deep sense that they are where self and other emerge and encounter one another. To be human involves being located, as embodied, in the intimate places known as house and yard.

The Eye in Place

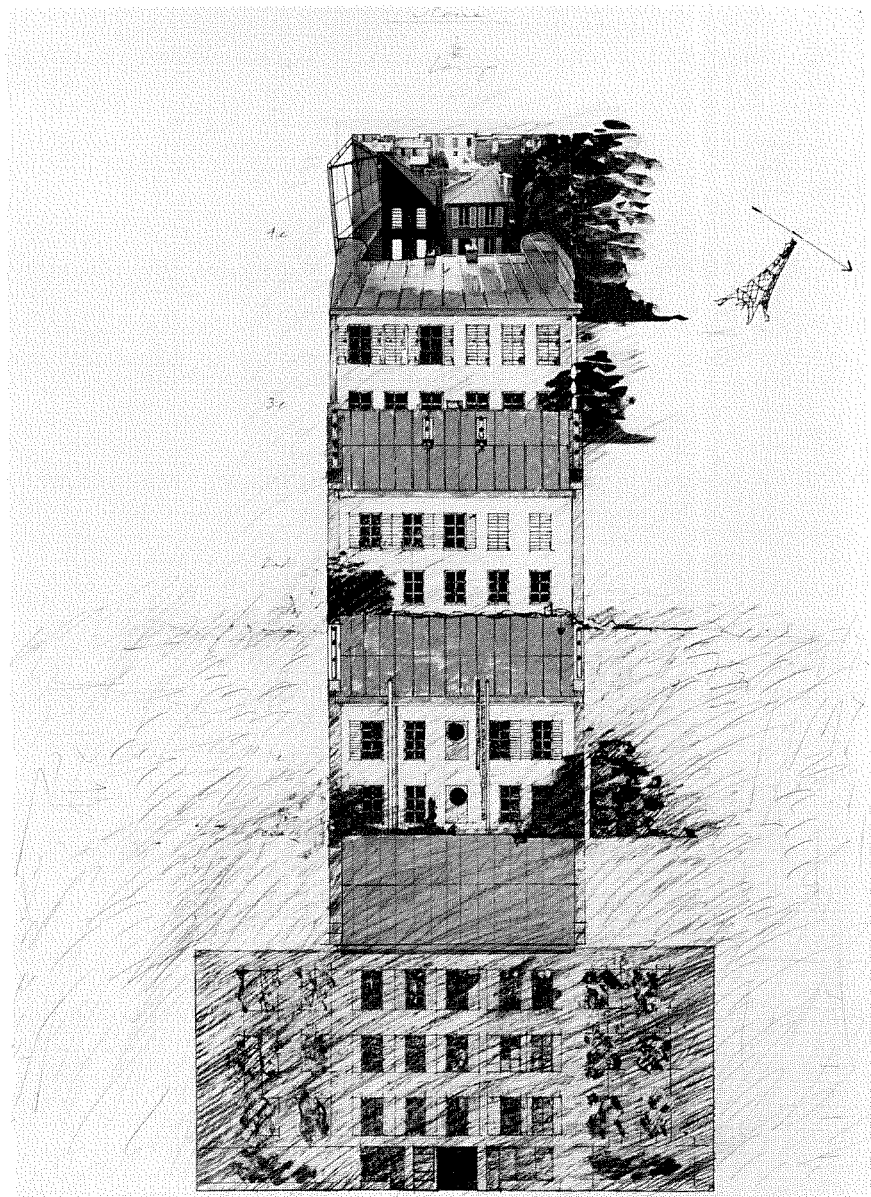
Lars Lerup

Premise

Who is the author of a text? Theorists of literature like Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes suggest that the power of language combined with the reader's interpretation takes control of a text out of the hands of its author. Authorship may be claimed by the reader, as well, inasmuch as anyone, writer or reader, can make language his own, and assert his selfhood through its rules and regulations. The world of drawing (and the world of perspective, in particular) harbors demanding constraints that force authorship to be shared among the medium, the renderer, and the observer. This insight leads to the following reflections on the role of the observer in the creation of a place in perspective.

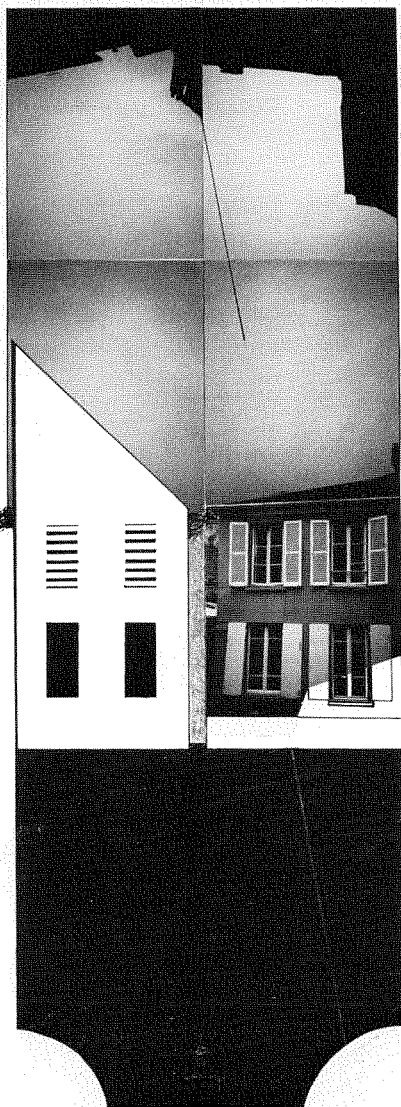
Ever since the Renaissance, perspective has been the dominant tool for describing the scene of buildings; a particular eyepoint has been assumed. That eye is a monocular geometric construction, an artificial position in space. An observer of a drawing must, therefore, look across this impassable barrier between himself and the scene that has been depicted. All illustrations of place have been channeled through this cyclopean gateway that renders them all fundamentally the same—inaccessible, distant, and cool.

Various attempts by a renderer to inscribe a subject in the form of full-fledged replicas of people or mere scale figures, or to mark the scene with human tracks—a half-empty wine glass and an open book on a table in a drawing by Le



I The Stage

"How blue the sky was" from the
 Madman's point
 of
 view



Corbusier—only make the distance between the observer and the scene more obvious.

My effort to include the perspectival eye *inside* the scene in the drawings and their captions suggests that the autonomy of the scene cannot be challenged, but the way we looked at it can—the way we include ourselves inside the parameters of the perspectival scene. In other words, the issue is not only how well we render that which is forever uninhabitable but also how, via intersubjectivity, we may give the geometric eye its proper bias. Consequently, place cannot be ascribed solely to the scene depicted, but to both the technique of the perspective drawing and the subjective point of view of the observer.

The Project and the Drawings

The perspectives shown are from the project *Love/House*, a setting designed to house two lovers, which consists of one existing house for her and an imaginary house where he waits for her. The two houses are in a real place, in a real city, the fourth innermost court away from a busy street in a neighborhood in Paris.

Her house is a typical “pavilion,” patterned on the perimeter block building visible from the street, with a cellar, a piano nobile, an upper story, and an attic that has been turned into a bedroom. His house is derived from hers via a series of condensations and displacements; a mere shadow of a house, a paper house, an imaginary scaffold for his waiting. The project

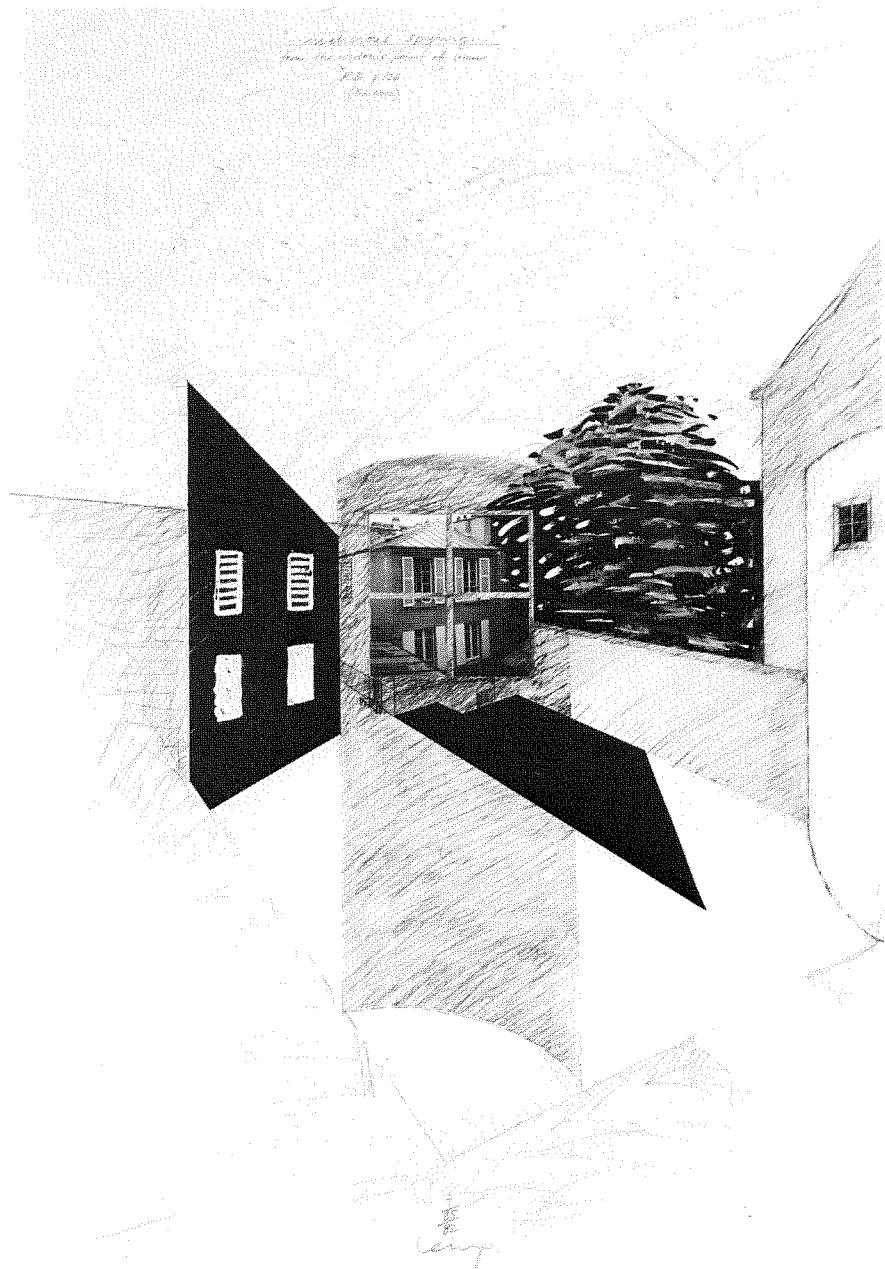
consists of about 50 drawings, some analytic, others speculative and/or illustrative of the houses and their context. The drawings shown here describe the houses and their immediate setting, and two perspectival views. It is these two perspectives that form the kernel of this discussion.

The drawings depict the two houses, his and hers, side-by-side, the court and its immediate context, each from a different point of view. These different points of view are formed by two inhabitants living across the court from the lovers, a madman and a widow. It is through their eyes that you, the observer, will see the *Love/House*. Momentarily you will slip inside the scene through madness and widowhood. Flooded thus, the depicted scenes may acquire a supplementary placeness.

“How Blue the Sky Was,”¹ from the Madman’s Point of View

Miraculously he lived among us, and by all standards he was quite mad. An immigrant stone worker from Italy, he had come to help build Paris. Somehow in the process he had gone mad, and his lunacy had been treated at Sainte Anne’s Psychiatric Hospital. In a moment of sanity he was let out to live in the court. Like the legendary village fool, he reminded us of the precarious limits of sanity.

His foes came at night and he attempted to fend them off by screaming at the top of his lungs, often for hours on end, and it kept us all up. During the day he would function almost normally; it was



3 “... malicious spying . . .” from the Widow’s Point of View

only his somewhat bizarre dress that gave him away. Half man, half woman, he wore a woman's hat and a man's suit. He was an obsessive collector of old shoes, umbrellas, and various other garments. He was very lively. Meeting you, he would stop, offer a broad, warm smile, and show off his colorful socks. Frequently "Le Fou" would toss large bundles of crumpled paper down into the court from the window facing the *Love/House*, then come downstairs, pick up the paper, and looking upwards, he would twirl in a full circle holding the bundle in his arms, like a mother would a child. He would repeat the complete procedure time and again.

The drawing is a composite of photographs and rendering, and depicts the court as it would appear in a twirl. Le Fou's madness is only in the projected eye, not in the depicted scene, which remains autonomous and cool.

"Malicious Spying,"² from the Widow's Point of View

Across from the madman lived a widow. She came from the provinces. Her husband died a long time ago. She never spoke about him. She had retired, and she spent her days shopping, cooking, reading, and tending her flowers when the season permitted.

Every summer relatives came, young and old, and stayed for a week or two. Then she would leave for a month while the house sat empty. She walked with a slight limp and had a very prominent nose. She was known simply as "The Nose." From our point of view her life was steady, unchangeable, repetitious, and cast in an eternal calm. She would gossip with her neighbors and smile and laugh, then in due time she would retire, cook, eat, read, maybe take a nap, and shop for the next meal. Coming back from her

shopping rounds she would set her bags down, take out the key, and while opening her door peek into the court. If she didn't notice us watching, her eyes would dart around rapidly like an animal's and take in the scene. Later she would be seen parting the curtain in the upstairs window overlooking the court.

The drawing is a composite of a photograph and a rendering and depicts the court from the widow's upstairs window. Only a slight flutter of the curtain would reveal her presence to those in the court. Her secret speculations about the lovers are in the projected eye; again, the scene remains autonomous and cool.

NOTES

1 Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1978), p. 197.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 126.

From *A Lover's Discourse* by Roland Barthes, translated by Richard Howard. Translation copyright © 1979 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Hill & Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc.

Alice Wingwall

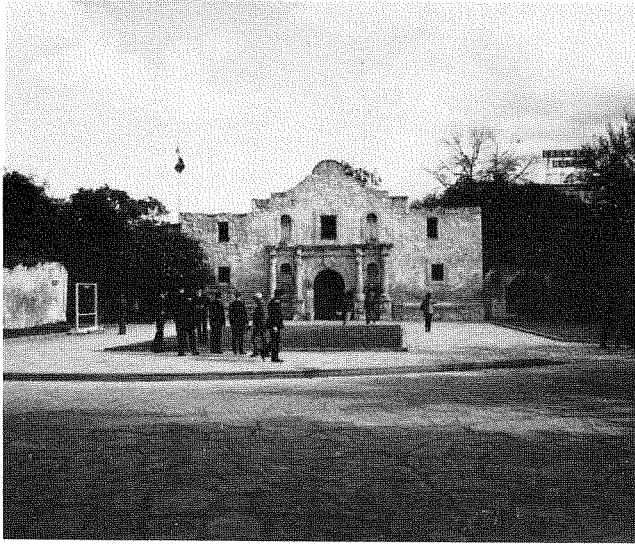
A photograph is a frame of mind. The space contained within its boundaries harbors a place we choose to imagine in, to explore with the mind's eye as if it were the body. The vertical and horizontal edges are like a real architectural structure, a seemingly small opening through which we view objects and spaces chosen to be juxtaposed within another space. Looking at a photograph, we seem to enter the space as we would a room. The effect is rather like looking into the rooms of a dollhouse from the open side—looking at a world much smaller than our physical selves. Through a window we see a space that we imagine ourselves to be placed in and stimulated, even protected, by.

The frame of the still photograph makes it a powerful architectural structure. The boundaries, like the walls and ceiling of a room, indicate certain limits, and reveal decisions about what is contained and about what is left outside. The relationships that are constructed, that are designed, indicate what we choose to include, what we consider important. “Outside the walls” is an appropriate description of the area and objects not chosen for inclusion. In Rome the locational relationship was so critical that the term “fuori le mure” was used with the name of a building to indicate its placement outside the walls beyond the inner city. “Inside the walls” aptly describes the space given power by the frame of the photograph. The photographer creates a space we wish to enter, to investigate. Photographs are like rooms.



I Uxmal, Yucatan
The Nunnery

All photographs are by Alice Wingwall unless otherwise credited.



2



3

- 2 **The Alamo**, San Antonio, TX
- 3 **San Francisco de la Espada**,
near San Antonio, TX (anonymous)
- 4 **Sonentheil House**,
Galveston, TX
Boy photographing his parents.
- 5 **Mission San Antonio of Padua**,
near Jolon, CA
- 6 **Mission San Juan Batista**,
CA
- 7 **San Trovaso**,
Venice, Italy (family photograph)
- 8 **San Trovaso**,
Venice, Italy

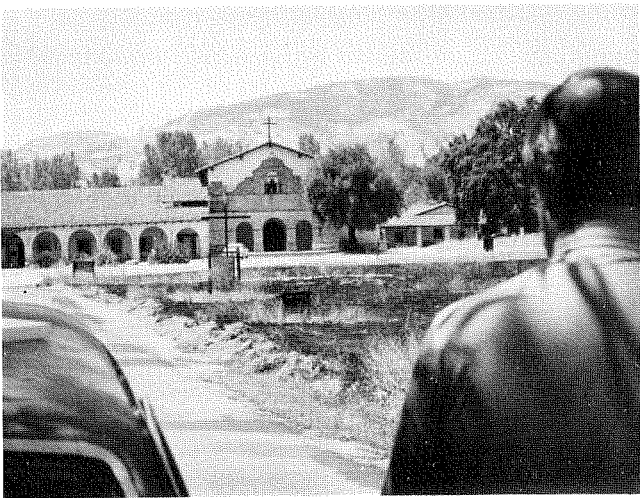
Architectural elements are pervasive in certain kinds of snapshot photography. Snapshots are now ubiquitous, and in snapshots, many choices of place are made. Hordes of tourists congregate in front of the Alamo in Texas and in front of the Pantheon in Rome. After viewing the building for a time—long or short—groups or individuals position themselves in front of the columns in large groups, or shelter between columns in individual poses. Near other missions in Texas, in front of presidential memorials in Washington, DC, in the great Bernini colonnades and the square of St. Peter's in Rome, or next to the fragments of the Roman Forum, similar scenes are enacted nervously or buoyantly. One group replaces another, Polaroid TM cameras stick out their tongues of images, Instamatics are advanced as smiles are cajoled. The Polaroid TM owners can decide then if they have been appropriately placed and recorded; the Instamatic carriers must wonder until they return home if they are correctly positioned in front of the monuments they have collectively visited. Another very large number of snapshots have entered the

world, have toured the world. Even a segment of a photograph sold at the Texas missions notes the presence of the visitor.

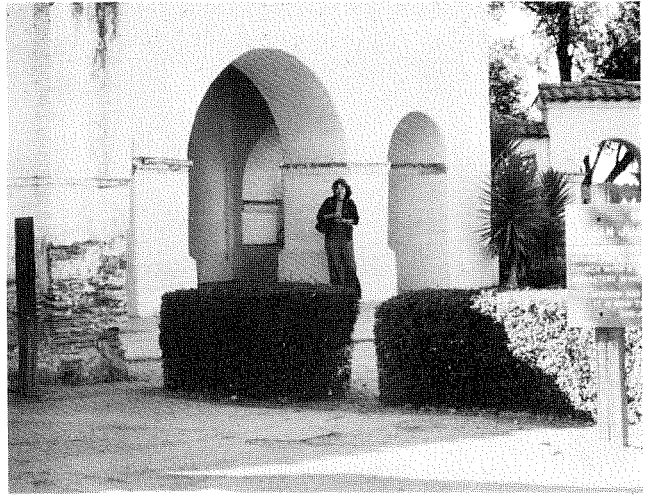
Susan Sontag in *On Photography* describes these snapshots as consumerism, as a taking of pieces away. Is this so? What is taken, in addition to the photograph itself? People deliberately travel to famous buildings and monuments. They not only view the monuments, but also fabricate their own postcards; that is, they deliberately photograph themselves near the monuments, showing their presence in near and far places, at local and international buildings. In Galveston, TX, a young man photographs his parents in front of the city's most beautiful houses. In California, a man photographing Spanish missions also records the presence of his wife in front of one. In front of a lesser-known church in Venice, Italy, a man assumes a possessive stance to be photographed by a friend. Another family is recorded viewing the same church. Three generations of a family have been placed at different times in a photographic room with the same sculpture on the corner of St. Mark's, Venice.



4



5



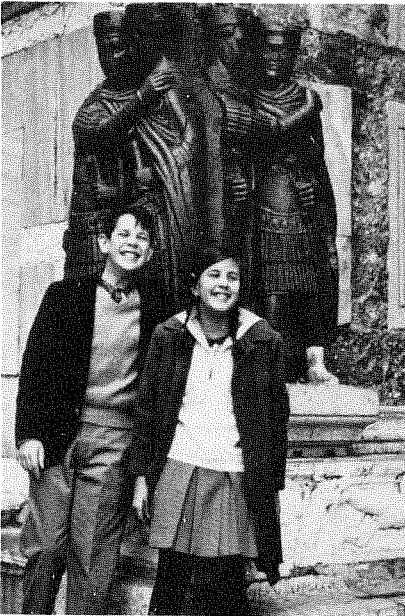
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7



8



9, 10, 11 Three generations in St. Mark's,
Venice, Italy
(Photographs courtesy of Lucian and Jane
Marquis)

12 Einstein House,
from Nova documentary

13 Temple of Castor and Pollux,
Roman Forum,
Rome, Italy

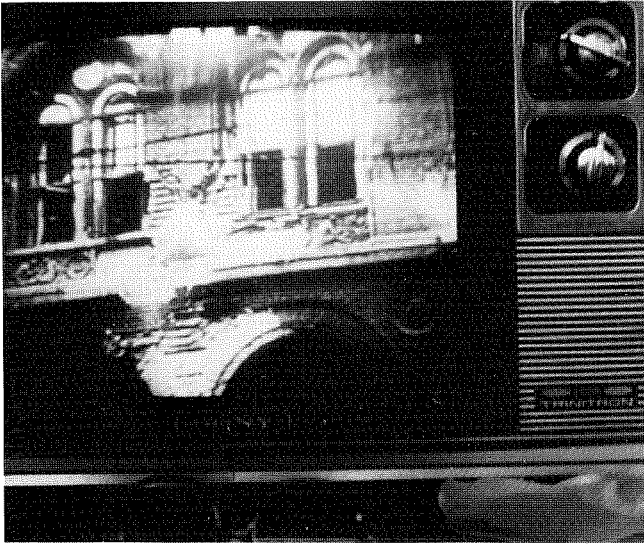
The first sits demurely by the sculpture's side, the second spoofs the gestures of the sculpture, and the third (and youngest pair) smiles obligingly. All these records are collected for home review.

Susan Sontag views such snapshots, such photographs, as both objects and duplicates of other objects, and she disapproves of them as image systems whose knowledge she "sees" as being neither ethical nor political. She understands well enough the appeal of photographs to interpretation and to fantasy, and she agrees that they can be a defense against anxiety (loss of place, in my view), can be a piece of space, and can be mysterious. However, her biases do not seem to allow her to appreciate the photograph's power as a projective, poetic, or imagining medium. Jerzy Koszinski connects photographs to spatial anxiety. A main protagonist of his novel, *Pinball*, is an aging composer. As he speeds down the freeway he muses that the more people lose a sense of control over space and place, the more they turn to images of places, to photographs.

Tourist photography includes an act of taking possession, to be sure—

rather than a taking away, or a subtracting from, there is a taking with, a joining to. The fabrication of "postcards" at important monuments lets the former visitor look again, lets the visitor reenter the architectural space, by thinking toward it to construct a place memory. This taking and reviewing of photographs occurs without physical destruction of the buildings. Dismantling monuments to obtain pieces to take home was a common practice in the past. We have only to see the Elgin marbles in the British Museum to realize how widespread was the practice of grabbing off chunks of a structure; so often it was accomplished in the name of virtuous culture. Tourist snapshots are a way of monumentalizing the self and the building by an architectural projection, by a proximity to built places. A claim is made upon the building, so that a particular place is amplified both in private and in collective memory. The photograph, rather than being simply the duplicate of an object, is both an object itself (a paper with an image of a building and the person) and a recollection of a building visited.

It is important to notice that the



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information in these photographs is not just about architecture, but is also about the viewer at the building. Often, half of the building is not even in the photograph, and the still figure, captured in a setting, is equivalent to the setting as part of a place in a way that the active moving figure is not. "Presence-in-a-place" rather than the architecture itself is the subject of the photograph. The photograph enumerates the building-as-visited; the people shown in it become a part of the building, much as the columns, windows, or sculpture are. Because the people are visually equal to the other parts of the structure, their presence assumes the massiveness and the timelessness of the building. In the photograph, at least, the visitor may be a more weighty part of the monument than he was able to be during the actual visit—hence the importance of the tourist snapshot in the life of the traveler. The building might have overwhelmed the visitor when he visited it, but in the photograph he is able to balance himself and the building.

The still photograph is more important as a frame to look into than a film is, particularly in

television screening. At first, the edge of the television screen is visible and encompassing, but soon, because of our attention to constantly changing narrative images, the frame disappears. We pass through a sort of looking glass (Lewis Carroll *was* a visionary). The movement of the narrative's images not only makes us feel that we have crossed some threshold or boundary, but also seems to construct a space of continuous layers. The suggested space is just as continually dispersed by the narrative movement, and there is little chance to position oneself, to find a place. The same thing tends to happen when we look at journalistic photographs. We often pass through or ignore the frame. This is because such photographs often show movement and intend to narrate an event. We are told that movement occurs and will continue to occur. It is movement, not place, that is described.

Paying attention to the frame and to the space it encapsulates is a type of contemplation that gives photographs a semblance of architectural shelter. Photographing oneself against a building is an act of taking place, an act of using the



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printed image to replace the self in a beloved space. Roland Barthes, in *Camera Lucida*, speaks of certain photographs of houses as "there that I should like to live."¹ These projections through photographs are a subconscious yet restless searching, perhaps not for real physical shelter, but for the memory of all shelter, all houses, all that community of rooms and walls which makes our image of dwelling.

In addition to deliberate design and to an interpretive sense of the photograph as a room or as an architectural shelter, conventional devices establish or emphasize the three-dimensional quality of the photograph. One has to do with the contrast range of black and white photography. Depending upon the composition, the deepest blacks make deep tunnel spaces while total whites flatten or eradicate space. The Roman columns are boxed by their frames, but the white flattens behind them so that there is no sense of spatial depth and the sculptural columns are emphasized. With a wide range of contrast, there is a strong diminution of perspective. Smaller areas appear in the far distance—the back of the room. Some color relationships do



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not allow this sense of “reading to the back of the room.” If the colors are closely relational and the forms are tightly locked by the close colors, the color and design are isotropic. There is no great range of contrast and little spatial depth—the patterns flatten to the surface of the photograph. The effect is similar to that of a photograph with an all-white background. The isotropic color phenomenon enhances the flatness and the insubstantial quality of the paper that holds the photograph.

The seeming uselessness of these collected papers that have little physical or political substance bothers Susan Sontag. Since we cannot get a sense of “fine-art” description of color or an effective sense of spatial composition or building information, but only a sense of particular people at all the same monuments, most of these snapshots leave us without adequate information. Their room quality is most cogent to the individual or group who took the photographs. The taking home of the “taking place” image increases the practice of privatism that is already well-established by the hegemony of the television set

and the car. Instead of spending time with other people at a monument, sharing the space and view, the tourist takes his building recollections in private. So we have a simultaneity of individual thoughts on building and place, rather than a community of thought at the real building. But we should not forget that these images do maintain their presence in the memory. As rooms they guard the memories of places. In all likelihood, the image after a time actually becomes the building or monument, in the mind of its look-along observer.

The idea that the photographic image has become the monument, or at least replaces the experience of the real monument, is not new—it is just more difficult to accept when such a plethora of images exists. We have only to look at the power of the 19th-century photographs of Egypt by Francis Frith. For several generations before travel became widespread, his pyramids, sands, and views of colossal statues were what the world knew of Egypt. The photographic room/monument engaged the notion of monumentality without scale and with images of fixed, noble immobility of both

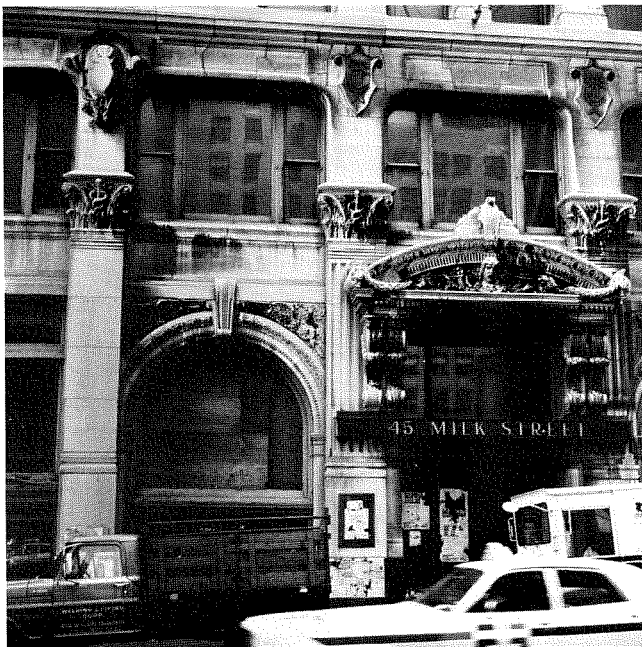
space and time, conflicted with the notion of infinite flux brought by the image of shifting and blowing sands—all still somehow contained in a photographic box.

Some 40 years later, the work of Eugène Atget more immediately conveyed the photograph as a room. All his architectural photographs have an intimate scale, even when they are vistas down streets. His many entries, shop windows, courtyards, reflections in windows, and street views seem like specific rooms. Each photograph make us feel that we are in a special place, that we have been able to decipher the secrets of the city itself because we have gained this intimate knowledge, have been given access to these rooms all across the great city. The architectural shelter of the photographs gives us a knowledge of the quartier, the arrondissement, makes us actual dwellers of the city. Then and now, these photographs are like a series of rooms juxtaposed, by which we know the house that is Paris.

Some of my photographs for *The City Observed: Boston* show intimate detail in a manner that has roots in Atget’s selective views.



15



16

14 The Sphinx and Great Pyramid at Giza, Egypt

(Photograph by Francis Frith, 1857.

© the New York Public Library. Courtesy of the General Research Division, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.)

15 Maison du Prince de Conde, rue Monsieur-le-Prince, 4 (1899–1900)

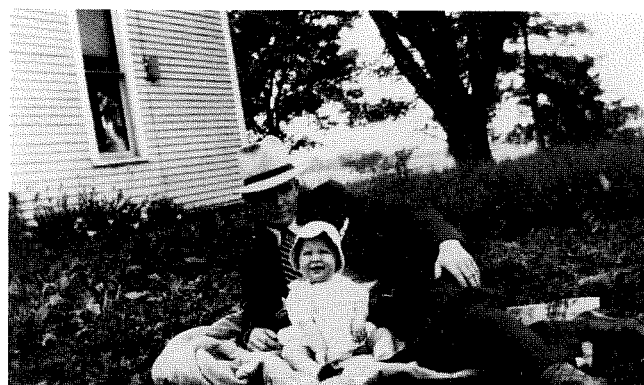
from *The Work of Atget, The Art of Old Paris*, by John Szarkowski and Maria Morris Hambourg
(Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York)

16 45 Milk Street, Boston, MA

(Previously published in *The City Observed: Boston*, Random House, New York, 1982.)



17



18

Similarly, the familiarity that is suggested by snapshots of tourists at monuments has roots in the idea of intimate places described in Atget's photographs. The tourist has made the monument his, has partaken of parts of the building, has made him/herself equal to some part of the monument. The visit and the revisit through the photograph are a way of gaining personal knowledge about something larger than the self in the way that Atget first demonstrated with his photographs of Paris.

There is another kind of snapshot photography that is not tourist photography, but consists of snapshots taken at home. Family-album snapshots generally include an important architectural element, such as the family house, although many times the inclusion of the house is subconscious. A farm family gathers against the back wall of its house or the mother of the family is placed on her porch, but she and the porch are not centered in the photograph. The subject of the latter photograph seems to be the relationship of the house to the barn or outbuilding. In both photographs the houses are slipped

in from the side; the family is centered in the first and appears in the second, but the complex gets as much attention as they do.

In a photograph from the 1930s of a baby on its porch, the baby is the subject of the snapshot, but the visible porch has become a powerful framing element. It is important that the house across the street has also been included. I suspect that the photographer was almost entirely unaware of the architectural elements. In a contemporary color snapshot more babies are chronicled at their vacation cottage. Both family and house are centered and have an equivalent balance and meaning. In this photograph it is unclear whether the house was intentionally recorded because it was only temporarily available, or whether it simply was the best place to photograph the family because of its centered steps. In yet another snapshot of father and daughter it seems that the photograph was intended to be out in the landscape. However, a house has appeared on the left side of the photograph. This house is more like a subtle intruder that has crept into the photograph

17 Baby on porch,
Indianapolis, IN
(family snapshot, circa 1937)

18 Father with baby,
Indiana
(family snapshot, circa 1936)



19

as an unintended, but necessary, witness.

Since the photographers did not intend, I suspect, to have the houses “in the picture,” I call this kind of architectural photography *inadvertent*. The poser and the recorder draw on a building to set the context, to indicate the necessity to be “placed.” The architectural element makes an informed and occupiable space by its *mere appearance*. Whether or not some of the photographs mean to show or to stake a claim on the house, or whether the desire to indicate a house positioning is inarticulate, all the photographs reveal the seductive power of the image of the house. These photographs forcefully frame the house or dwelling as primal place. They do so by conjoining person and building in one photographic space. Remembering my Italian, I am moved by the poignant realization that, holding a room (camera) in my hand, I fabricate another (photographic) room.

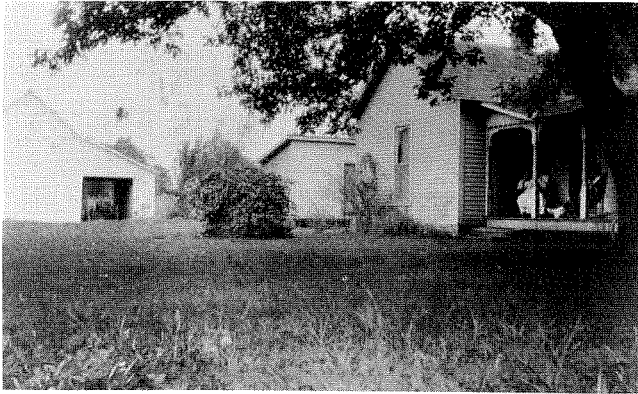
To add a thought of mine to one from Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida*, these tiny suggested rooms

cause repeated “tiny jubilations.”²

Susan Sontag worries that (possibly inferior) visual systems will replace verbal systems. Much evidence supports her fears. However, the two systems are often interrelated. (Here we are, writing about photographs.) The photograph is a dreaming medium—philosophically and poetically we learned extensions of the photograph from Roland Barthes. Inspired by his notion of the “punctum”—what seizes the heart—I have taken two photographs and dreamed a house from them.

19 Family photograph,

Chilmark, MA
(family snapshot, circa 1968)



20

Dark Room, Dream Rooms

A new room came to Nancy Hall
sooner than she expected.
A different kind of room,
a diminutive room,
a room-in-a-box,
the Italians called a *camera oscura*
a dark room.

Mr. Eastman, among others,
made it popular,
that is, affordable,
even for small farmers.
We need light to use this chamber
it's our room for light writing,
our graphing of ourselves
to make our memories visible.
This room allowed a new kind of lining up
for marking yesterday as tomorrow.

She came onto her porch
from the left frame
of the photograph,
sat in one chair
and put her feet up on another chair.
Thin wooden piers extended a roof
over her simply pictured porch.
The light was not strong enough
to see into her house.
Her camera stayed outside
it did not show her kitchen or parlor.
These rooms remain hidden from me
in a framed silence.



21

Ancient Addresses

Short shadows advance from each eave of a barn.
Is it mid-morning or early afternoon,
late spring or early fall?
From the photograph we cannot tell
which is east, west or south.
We can only say "left" or "right"
not ten o'clock, or two.
Those times of day could make this light.
Light that strikes a suspended dance,
a staged symmetry, some hope
for orderly formation in life.

On this day, the actors are already,
or still, in their summer whites.
All of the whites differ, causing layers
to move as if wings
across our eyes.
There is no sound
except for the rustle of neighboring whites.
Off-whites.

Two women leave their doors.
Enter the protagonists.
(In white. Come center
in front of white barn.)
A mother's dress is almond white
the palest of beiges, barely seen.

The barn was painted white
a few years earlier.
Its weathered paint
gone very slightly yellow.

If the sun's rays were more angled they
might hide the difference between the barn
and the almond white dress before it.

The sun has bleached both whites
almost as white
as the edge of the photograph,
the border not touched with salts of silver,
not meant to play the game
of white on white.
An inadvertent player all the same
in the slow stately meeting
of mother and daughter
around a horse of a different color.

Have these two white figures just burst
from the doors of a giant clock,
coming forward on railed paths,
to tell us whether it's ten, or two?
Judging from the age of my aunt,
held still in her father's arms,
the women's white figures
will function for another dozen years.
Until, colliding, between ten and two,
at the center, in death,
they stopped the works.
They died in the same year,
the daughter first,
the mother following, dramatically soon.
Fiddling with the counterweights
of horses, men and children
did nothing to make them work again.

White shades, then, left and right,
foreshadowing their exeunt,
clearly, whitely
confusedly, in off-white signals
kept in place by a photographer,
who, watching their white connection,
strangely, did not group them
at the center of the barn,
but watched their separate movements
their separate stillnesses
as I watch them now.
As I see their play now,
I know, and ponder,
the strangeness of this framing
and distancing.
Instead of, "A little closer together, please,"
the photographer has let the barn
tell the figures where to stand.
As well as any clock,
the barn directs their work.
It dictates their paths
and gives them their distances
before the watchful eye of a lens,
against the black page of a photo album,
against the black edge of time,
near the middle of one day.

20, 21 Indiana Farm in photographs,
Hendricks County, IN
(family snapshot circa 1916)



22

A photograph is indeed a special kind of room—a stage designed by its photographer—that demands our *active* participation at each view. In this stage the photographer sets a drama in motion (albeit in stillness). The viewer, in turn, must cue present acts and decisions and make imaginative insertions. Looking again at Atget's Paris entrances and the three farm photographs, we see many choices of entry, exit, passage, repose; an area of shadow in which we reflect upon what happened here yesterday and what alternative acts are possible tomorrow. In addition to the transmission of intimacy and detail in the houses they show, such photographs (by master or amateur) are unusually evocative. Their architectural existence compels us to partake in the design of photographic mysteries, to participate in replacing the drama everytime we look at them. That is, after all, the very grandness of their simple design.

NOTES

- 1 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 38.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

- 22 **Indiana Farm** in photograph, Hendricks County, IN
(family snapshot circa 1916)

Michael Palmer

"There are no first figures."

*Roland Barthes*¹

In writing we confront various manifestations of time. There is the "real time" of the writing itself, the slippery succession of nows during which we compose. There is the phenomenological duration of the text, the time of its silent reading or oral delivery. Enfolded in the text is a labyrinth of tenses designating past, present and projected future action, a metaphoric representation of being-in-time. In a poem of course the various measures, lines, stress groupings and stanzas, articulate the smaller and larger periods of the piece and define its particular tempo. If the work is sooner or later accepted as significant, it will alter perceptions of previous works and will continue to acquire its audience into the future. Amid diverse perceptions it will exist across time.

Space is perhaps initially the page standing for the silence within which writing is enfolded. Space also designates the interior silences of a text, the junctures between stanzas, lines, words, even letters. Space in this respect is a function of time, marking levels of duration, allowing the text to breathe. One can speak too of the undisclosed space in which one works as affecting the character of things: cork-lined room, airplane, prison, terrace above the sea. I know one famous French writer who composed the better part of a book in the Metro on his way to work. Its form: fragments of anecdote, voices rapidly succeeding one another, questions hanging in the air.

In dance, movement articulates space even as it is in turn being fashioned by it. You and the dancers make a dance in a rehearsal space but you must project it into a variety of possible performance spaces—proscenium theaters, lofts, gymnasiums, parks, et al. In the composition of most dance, unlike most poetry, you have a deadline. The work is announced for such and such a date, the audience (you hope) will be there and the work had better be there as well. This fixed time of composition profoundly affects how you work. You must attend to the calendar and ultimately submit to it, even as the work must submit, in some sense, to the dimensions and conditions of the place of performance, "real space." "Real space" is both a limit and an initiator of movement and sound. It defines the event as surely as temporal periods define the poem. When the particular dance event ends it is gone. There are no pages to turn back, and it has vanished into a space now empty and darkened. This ephemerality, the experience of evanescent durations, is essential to its nature. Performance draws its quite desperate meaning from it.

I have worked since 1974 with Margaret Jenkins and her company of highly trained dancers on a great many collaborative projects. The one rule established at the beginning, was that each collaboration should take a different form. At times I have worked with Margy in the studio on the structure of a piece, at times I have worked alone on a tape to accompany the work, and at times

we have collaborated on movement and sound in such a way that it was impossible afterwards to figure out who was to blame for what. We have made live sound scores and scores that counterpoint live and taped voices or live voices and electronic sound. The third crucial element of the collaboration has always been the company of dancers whom Margy has chosen for their ability to generate and extend movement on their own. Trained dancers, they also function in this process as "untrained" speakers moving through space. Words or verbal signs acquire a gestural character in this space, even as gestures (the raising of an arm) acquire often mysterious semiotic weight. Thus in a sense language becomes movement and movement language where the two meet.

Margy and I began to sketch plans for our most recent collaboration during the summer of 1983, exchanging quite general ideas about what we felt we needed to do, as well as the possible textures and length of the work and procedural models. We asked Barbara Stauffacher Solomon to conceive a set and the musician-composer J. A. (Dino) Deane to work with me to construct a text-sound score. In the Fall, as Margy began to work with the dancers in the studio, Dino and I selected texts and fragments of texts from the manuscript of my book *FIRST FIGURE* (North Point Press, October 1984). In addition I wrote three new texts while studying videotapes of the rehearsals. We then gave this word information to Margy who



1



2

1, 2, 3 "First Figure" 1984.

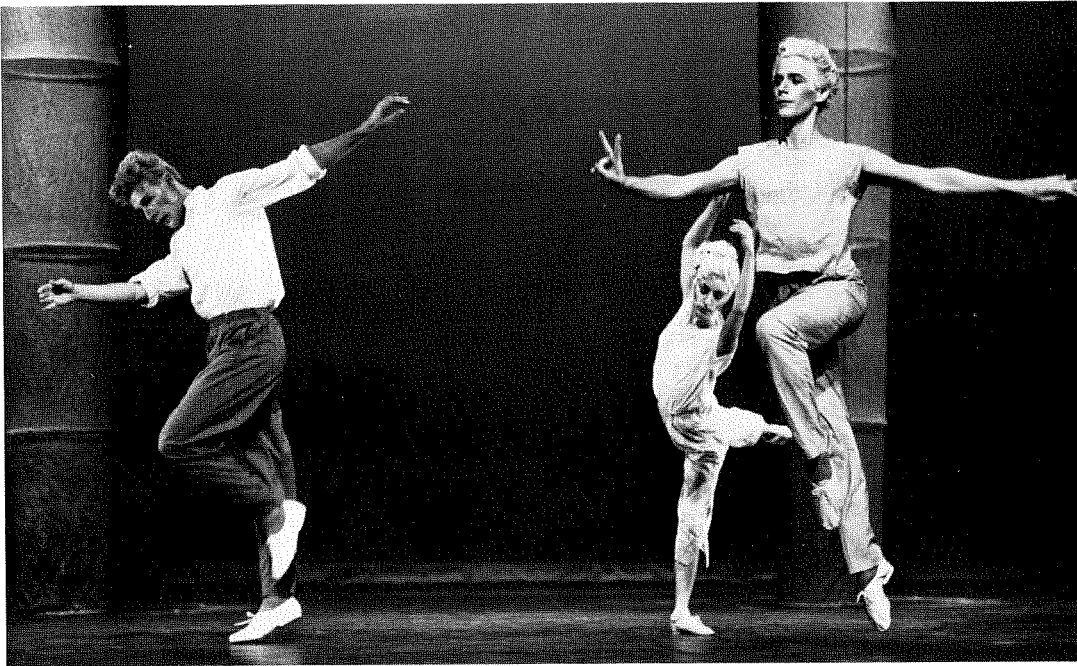
Choreography: Margaret Jenkins
Photographs by Bonnie Kamin,
courtesy of Margaret Jenkins.

4 "Tree Columns for First Figure."

Drawing by Barbara Stauffacher Solomon.
Drawing photograph courtesy Philippe
Bonnafont Gallery, San Francisco, CA.

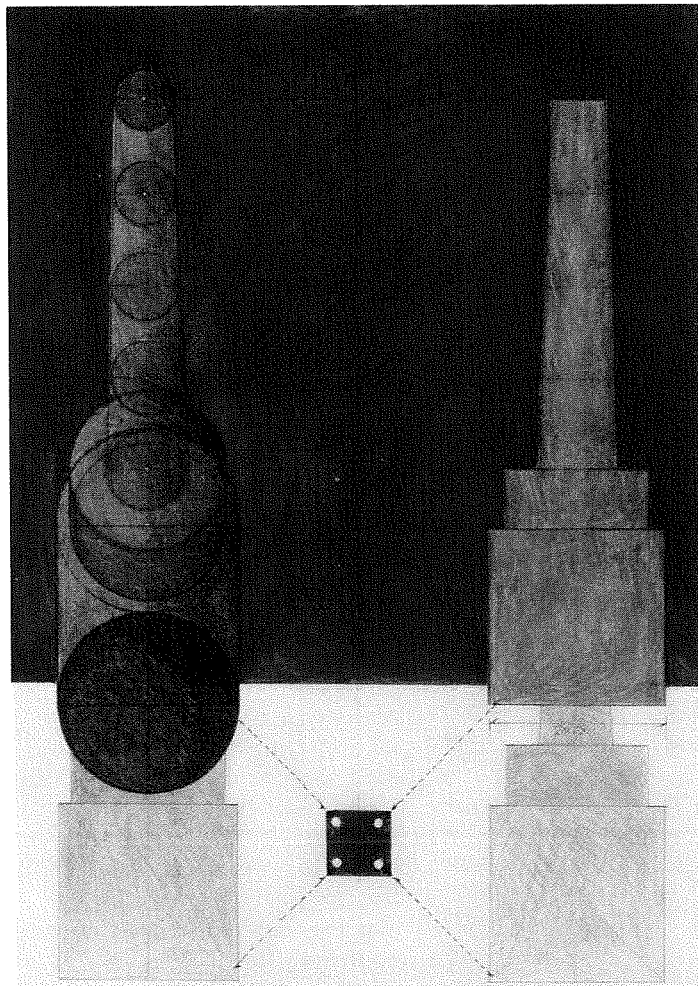
chose several pieces to use as "instructions" for the dancers to proceed by. Within a few weeks of similar exchanges Margy gave us a videotape of the two-thirds completed dance to take into the recording studio. Dino and I would construct the score to this tape and Margy would complete the dance using the information provided by the score. The process was thus designed to emphasize the mutual informing of score and choreography. At different stages each would shape and modify the other. Each would, in effect, emerge from the other.

I asked J. A. Deane to work with us after hearing a score he had made for Colleen Mulvihill in New York. Dino had worked with Rhythm and Blues as well as New Wave bands and was a fluent improviser on several instruments. He had designed sound environments for plays by Sam Shepard and others, and was extremely knowledgeable about multi-track recording techniques. Being at home with complex technology, he would in the end play the larger role in determining the score's spatial configuration.



3

We decided to construct “First Figure” as a sequence of imaginary landscapes, each with a particular atmosphere and spatial configuration. For the “live” version Dino would manipulate one monaural and two stereophonic sets of word-sound information. These would be balanced according to the demands of each performance space. A slightly different version of the score would be heard at each theater, though timings for each section would remain constant. We spent roughly 300 hours in an eight-track studio in the hills of Belmont generating a thirty-minute score. O-Lan Shepard and I recorded the texts. These were then modified with delays, sound traps, tape loops and other devices and situated in the work.



4

Following, from *First Figure* (North Point Press, 1984), are a few of the selections we used:

We welcomed the breeze
could not escape it

* * *

Sound decays
and then there is the story
and then the features are erased
* * *

He told
how gazing at a mountain pool
had once induced a kind of
waking sleep
which led to other things
* * *

All those words we once used for things but have now discarded in order to come to know things. There in the mountains I discovered the last tree or the letter A. What it said to me was brief, "I am surrounded by the uselessness of blue falling away on all sides into fields of bitter wormwood, all-heal and centaury. If you crush one of these herbs between your fingers the scent will cling to your hand but its particles will be quite invisible. This is a language you cannot understand." Dismantling the beams of the letter tree I carried them one by one down the slope to our house and added them to the fire. Later over the coals we grilled red mullets flavored with oil, pepper, salt and wild oregano.

* * *

Once in the park I broke in half
and lost one half
which half I don't remember

* * *

We drank wine, smoked
opium through a glass pipe
and climbed to a place on the ridge
a field of nettles and anise
where the remains of the city
could be seen

In response to the concept of landscapes and their accompanying narrative fragments, Barbara Stauffacher Solomon designed an extraordinarily evocative set consisting of four very tall green fabric columns which tapered toward the base. These would both frame the movement and allow the dancers to disappear and reappear within the dance space itself. They would create a spatial field that lent architectural definition to the piece. The set helped to unify sound and movement by foregrounding the idea of an atemporal narrative space in constant tension with the actual, bounded space of performance. The former represents the territory of imaginary events (realised endlessly in their own time), the latter the theatrical circumscription with its absolute limits. "Boundary" in such a context becomes charged periphery (Heidegger's *peras*), rather than a simple limit to movement. In this respect "First Figure" extended our previous work with field activity and non-hierarchical composition. In response, the viewer must become an active participant in the work, scanning a range of events and making numerous decisions about points of focus.

"First Figure" was given its premiere at the Stanford

Auditorium and was subsequently presented at the Walker Arts Institute in Minneapolis, the Joyce Theater in New York and the Zellerbach Playhouse in Berkeley. At each performance different levels of text emerged in relation to the electronic sound and the movement. Certain performances had an almost apocalyptic feel according to critics and members of the audience, though we had not aimed for such a specific emotional tenor. Other performances were described as more lyrical. We realized that we had in effect set up a polysemous field susceptible of multiple interpretations. On different occasions various "figures" might unexpectedly appear to modify the experience for audience and performers alike.

NOTES

- 1 Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, translated by Richard Howard (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1978), p. 8.

Poems and fragments of poems excerpted from *First Figure*, North Point Press, copyright © 1984 by Michael Palmer.

White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia

Dell Upton

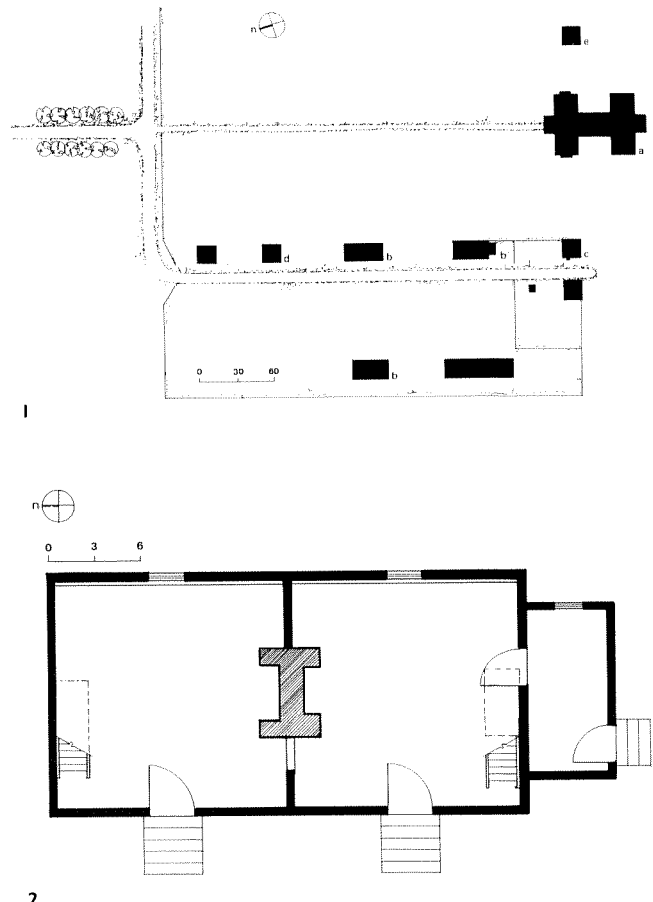
For me, one of the most engaging problems in architectural history is to understand the social experience of architecture.¹ To the extent that such an effort is possible, it requires us to account for the entire range of spatial divisions from the scale of furnishings to that of settlement patterns. An individual's perception of a landscape changes with the experience of moving through it. It is less obvious but equally true that an apparently unified landscape may actually be composed of several fragmentary ones, some sharing common elements of the larger assemblage. Indeed, this may be the only way to make sense of certain historical landscapes such as that of prerevolutionary Virginia, with its racially and socially stratified population.

The twentieth-century obsession with time as experienced by individuals, time as evanescent states of consciousness that are linked by memory, has roots in the eighteenth-century. The modern concept of history is a product of that century, and the attempt to represent and to manipulate time and consciousness in architecture also originated at that time.² Virginians shared in that effort. The elite builders of the great eighteenth-century mansions that are familiar from traditional architectural history worked to create a landscape meant to be experienced dynamically, one that depended on memory and the rapid dissolution

and reformulation of individual experiences to establish its meanings.³ Though similar methods and similar visual forms were used in Europe, Virginia is distinctive for the way in which they were adapted to a particular, already extant, social setting.

Against the plantation houses and their surroundings, we can set the houses of slaves. While a relatively large number of planters' mansions have survived to be studied, and while contemporary descriptions of them are available, slave houses are less well documented. While native whites rarely mentioned slave houses, comments on slave life were an obligatory element in travelers' accounts in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. These comments and the few surviving slave houses suggest a variety of conditions of slave life, which center around readily described norms. Slaves lived in houses of many sizes and equally varied quality. The extant structures misrepresent the norm both in their size and quality, but can serve to illustrate those norms.

A group of four slave houses at Tuckahoe, Goochland County, includes three that were probably built in the second half of the eighteenth century. Each is a one-story frame building with two rooms, each with an exterior door and separated by a central chimney. In the best



1 Site plan, Tuckahoe, Goochland County. The house (a), east and southwest slave houses (b), office (c), south smokehouse (d), and schoolhouse (e), date from the eighteenth century; the rest of the buildings were constructed in the nineteenth century. Drawing by Carol Silverman.

2 Plan, slave house, built eighteenth century, Tuckahoe, Goochland County. Drawing by Carol Silverman.



3

3 Tuckahoe slave house.
(Photograph by Dell Upton)

4 Plan, slave house, mid-nineteenth-century, Howard's Neck, Goochland County, VA.
Drawing by Carol Silverman.

5 Slave house, Howard's Neck.
(Photograph by Dell Upton)

preserved structure, the interior opening between the rooms is a nineteenth-century alteration. Thus, while the building appears relatively large, it really consists of two separate one-room units, one with access to a loft, the other without. A single room and possibly a loft above, which was shared by six to twenty-four people, was the standard slave dwelling in eighteenth-century Virginia, though a favored slave like Landon Carter's Johnny or Joseph Ball's Jo might have a one- or even a two-room dwelling to himself.⁴ The rooms in the Tuckahoe quarter are relatively large by eighteenth-century standards. According to documentary evidence like newspaper advertisements, building contracts, and court records, slave houses might be as small as 12 by 8 feet in size. Dwellings larger than 16 by 20 feet were divided, as the Tuckahoe houses were, into two units.

Quality varied as much as size. Again, the surviving structures are misleading. The houses at Tuckahoe were upgraded in the nineteenth century and are now well-furnished framed buildings with glazed windows, plastered interiors, and painted exteriors. Other eighteenth-century slave houses were built of brick. Most, though, were less well-constructed. From the third quarter of the eighteenth century, the log was the dominant material for the houses of a large proportion of Virginia's slaves. Two of

three nineteenth-century quarters at Howard's Neck, Goochland County, are well-preserved examples of better-quality log slave houses of a sort that were common in the eighteenth-century. None survive from that period. They are V-notched hewn-log structures that stand on brick piers about a foot from the ground at the east and three feet at the west. The central building is the best preserved, though all were originally identical in form and the two log buildings in detail as well. As usual, each room has a front door and an original interior door connects the two rooms of the house. A brick chimney and a log partition that stops a foot from the ceiling separate the two rooms. A ladder stair, its foot almost against the wall, gives access to an unfinished loft from the southwest corner of the western room. The ceiling joists are round logs about seven inches in diameter which pass through the walls and form eaves about a foot deep on the front and the rear. All original windows except on the rear wall of the west room are gone. The opening on the rear wall is a two-foot-square hole set two feet from the floor and closed by a single wooden shutter that slid from side to side in a track. A scar reveals that the door that leads from the east room to the rear lean-to replaces a similar rear window there. If there were any windows on the end walls of the house, they were similar to the surviving opening. There were no

windows in the front wall until the twentieth century.

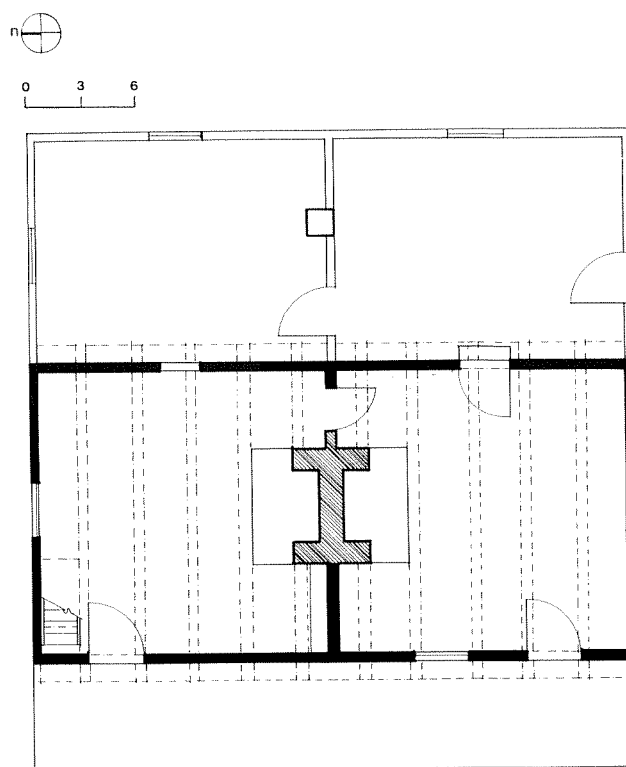
The addition of sheds to the rear of the quarter protects the original exterior treatment, which consisted of whitewash applied directly to the logs. The inside was decorated in the same way with whitewash on log. Other interior treatment includes holes drilled in the front wall between the window and the partition in the west room. These one-inch-diameter piercings were intended to hold sticks that supported shelves or that served as hooks. Alterations that were made after slavery to adapt the houses are telling: the buildings were covered with weatherboards, had kitchen-bedroom sheds added, finished floors and glazed windows were installed, and porches were built along the front.

The Howard's Neck quarters illustrate the lack of built-in furniture and storage space that characterized eighteenth- and nineteenth-century quarters. The slave occupants of the houses probably installed many fittings and furnishings privately. These might include shelves—either fixed in a niche next to the fireplace or of a movable variety supported on round sticks set into holes drilled into the wall—like those at Howard's Neck. Similarly, spikes might be driven into the rafters for drying herbs and other plant materials, a common practice in Virginia's houses of all sizes.

Less evident but probably equally common were cuddy holes and root cellars, which are small holes, about three feet in every direction, similar to one described in Booker T. Washington's nineteenth-century boyhood home in Franklin County, VA: "In the center of the earthen floor [was] a large, deep opening covered with boards, which was used as a place in which to store sweet potatoes during the winter."⁵

The amenity that was mentioned most often was a bed, which might be the only comfort provided. A French visitor to the Shenandoah Valley found a house with "a box-like frame made of boards hardly roughed down, upheld by stakes [and] some wheat straw and cornstalks, on which was spread a very short-napped woolen blanket that was burned in several places."⁶ Aside from these items, few owners provided much beyond an iron pot for cooking. To augment them slaves occasionally appropriated small things from the plantation stock and purchased or made other personal possessions. The most conspicuous of those that were mentioned in travelers' accounts were the musical instruments, particularly fiddles and banjos, that many slaves could play.⁷

One can think of the quarters as standing for the houses of all black and white people who were not great planters, for in many



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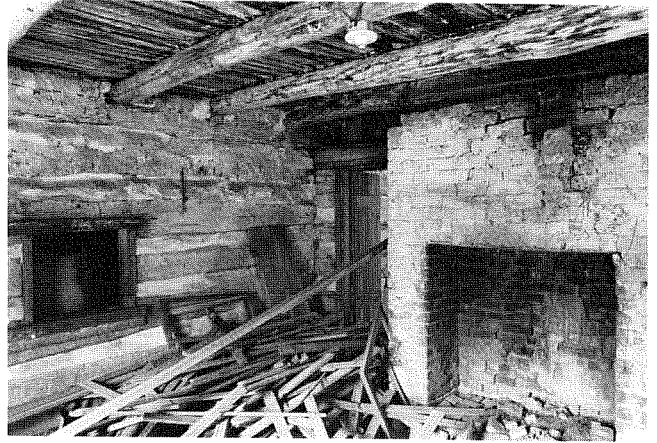


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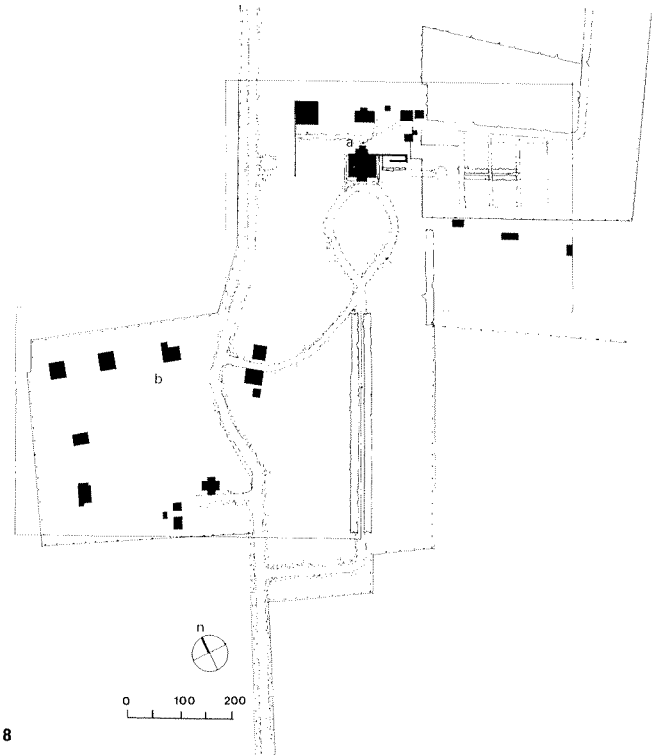
6 Back wall, Howard's Neck slave house, showing log construction and original exterior treatment. (Photograph by Dell Upton)



7

7 Interior, Howard's Neck slave house, showing whitewashed finish, round-log joists, fireplace, and original window opening with shutter track. (Photograph by Dell Upton)

8 Sight plan, Howard's Neck, showing main house area (a) and slave quarter area (b), based on fieldwork by Dell Upton and by the Agricultural Buildings Project, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Drawing by Carol Silverman.



8

respects the physical characteristics of the quarters—small, flimsy, and sparsely furnished—merely reflected the slaves’ character as poor people in Virginia. Their houses were indistinguishable in size, elaboration, and quality from those of white “common planters.” But whereas poor whites’ spartan conditions reflected their own lack of economic success, the poverty of slaves on large plantations was the result of the appropriation of their labor for the enrichment of the planter, and his decision not to return much of that labor to the slaves in the form of material goods or time to produce them.

But what of the landscape?

The quarter extended beyond its walls. The space around the building was as important as the building itself. At Howard’s Neck, for example, the three surviving quarters are set in a line at precisely 100-foot intervals, allowing for ample development of the surroundings. Here slaves socialized. Their chickens and dogs lived here. More important, here were the gardens where slaves grew produce to supplement their diets and to give them something to barter with or to give away in return for services. All eighteenth-century observers agreed on the importance of these “little Spots allow’d them [to] cultivate, at Vacant times.”⁸

Slave quarters were parts of two intersecting landscapes. They fit into a white landscape centered on the main house in one way, and into a black landscape centered on the quarters in another. From the master’s point of view, slave quarters were part of a working landscape that dictated to some degree their siting and location. Quarters for house slaves were often close to the main house on large plantations, and they were carefully ordered in rows or “streets.” If they were visible from the house, they were arranged on the site and treated on their exteriors with an eye to the visual effect from the main house. Other planters hid them from the eye, and in those cases they were usually plainer, but were nevertheless carefully sited and arranged. The Howard’s Neck quarters are part of this sort of arrangement. Howard’s Neck is an elaborate complex on the north side of the James River. The domestic complex, which was occupied in 1825, includes a large brick house, a brick kitchen, an orangery, and several other frame buildings. This group sits on a knoll at the top of a rise that falls away irregularly to the south and west toward the river. Southwest of the house at the edge of the lawn are some frame worksheds and stables, and behind these the quarter complex stretches.⁹

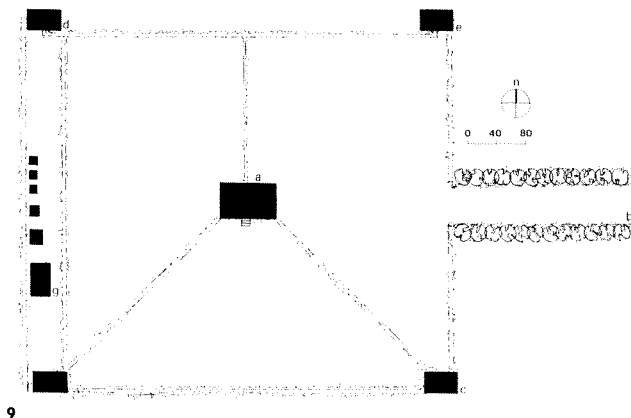
William Hugh Grove saw similar plantation groups as he sailed up the York River

in 1732. Like many other travelers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, he chose to liken them to villages. The river, he wrote, “has pleasant Seats on the Bank which Shew Like little villages, for having Kitchens, Dayry houses, Barns, Stables, Store houses, and some of them 2 or 3 Negro Quarters all Seperate [sic] from Each other but near the mansions houses which make a shew to the river of 7 or 8 distinct Tenements, tho all belong to one family.”¹⁰

The outsider’s image of the village is an important one for understanding the white and black landscapes of the slave society, for it provides a means with which to grasp the different views that the two groups held of it, and the different roles each performed in it. From the first years of settlement, white Virginians expressed concern over the failure to create a city- and village-based society with a hierarchical institutional structure. While some historians have pointed out that the public institutions which towns provided were present in Virginia in dispersed locations before the mid-eighteenth century, it is more useful for our purposes to concentrate on the village metaphor. The private plantation usurped in many respects the functions of the town, and the planter appropriated to himself the prerogatives and the good of the community. In effect, the plantation *was* a village, with the planter’s house

as its town hall. But the economic activities of this village were intended to enrich a single individual, so far as it was in his power to control them, and the economic health of the community was judged by the planter’s profits.¹¹

The plantation complex was a commercial center, where the goods of the common planter were gathered and shipped with those of the great planters to Europe. Here the common planter could purchase imported goods. The plantation was an educational center. The planter often kept a school at which his own and other children were tutored. More important, the plantation was a center of sociability, at which formal entertainments—balls and house parties—were held, friends invited to dine and to stay, and strangers given the benefit of the planter’s hospitality. Most of all, it was a kind of governmental center of the plantations’s residents. In this respect the plantation’s resemblance to a village went beyond mere appearance. On a large holding like those of the Northern Neck planters, Landon and Robert Carter, John Tayloe, or George Washington, where there were many outlying Quarters, the plantation was a kind of county seat, an administrative center that affected the lives even of those slaves farming the Quarters, who might come to the home house very rarely.¹²



9 Sight plan, Nomini Hall, showing main house (a), poplar lane (b), wash-house (c), stable (d), school house (e), coach house (f), and kitchen (g). Drawing by Carol Silverman.

10 Site plan, Mount Airy, Richmond County. Based on fieldwork by Dell Upton and by the Agricultural Buildings Project, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Drawing by Carol Silverman.

11 Mount Airy from the park. (Photograph by Dell Upton)

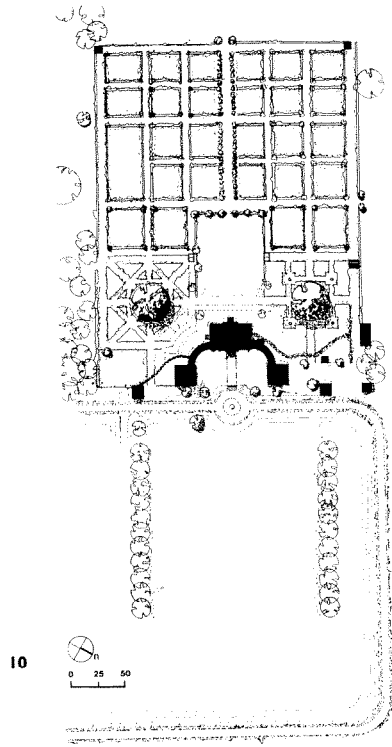
12 Main block, Mount Airy. (Photograph by Dell Upton)

The great planter intended that his landscape would be hierarchical, leading to himself at the center. His house was raised above the other buildings and was often set off from the surrounding countryside by a series of barriers or boundaries—fences and terraces. It was tied to the public landscape by carefully conceived roads and drives. Thomas Anburey, a traveler, noted that planters felt free to alter the public road courses for their own convenience. When the planter was particularly dominant, as Robert “King” Carter of Corotoman in Lancaster County was, his house might be connected to an important public institution like the church by a similar drive. Corotoman and Christ Church stood as equal termini of a two-way drive, with Carter as the leading figure at each end. Similar formal paths at other plantations might link the outbuildings with the main house. The schoolhouse where the tutor John Harrower lived and taught was “a neat little house at the upper end of an Avenue of planting at 500 yds. from the Main house.” Phillip Fithian, a more famous tutor, left an account of Nomini Hall that presents a vivid picture of this formal, hierarchical kind of landscape.

The main house was large, & stands on a high piece of Land [and] it may be seen a considerable

distance; I have seen it at the Distance of six Miles—At equal Distances from each corner of this Building stand four other considerable Houses. . . .

Due East of the Great House are two Rows of tall, flourishing, beautiful, Poplars, beginning on a Line drawn from the School to the Wash-House; these Rows are something wider than the House, & are about 300 yards Long, at the Easternmost end of which is the great Road leading through Westmorland to Richmond [County Court House]. These Rows of Poplars form an extremely pleasant avenue, & at the Road, through them, the House appears most romantic, at the same time that it does truly elegant—The Area of the Triangle made by the Wash-House, Stable, & School-House is perfectly level, & designed for a bowling-Green, laid out in rectangular Walks which are paved with Brick, & covered over with burnt Oyster-Shells—In the other Triangle, made by the Wash-House, Stable, & Coach House is the Kitchen, a well-built House, as large as the School-house, Bake-House; Dairy; Store-House & several other small Houses; all which stand due West, & at a small distance from the great House, & form a handsome Street. These Building[s] stand about a



quarter of a mile from a Fork of the River Nomini, one Branch of which runs on the East of us, on which are two Mills.¹³

The white landscape, or more precisely the great planter's landscape, was both an articulated and a processional one. It was articulated in the sense that it consisted of a network of spaces—rooms in the house, the house itself, the outbuildings, the church with its interior pews and surrounding walled churchyard, the courthouse and its walled yard—that was linked by roads and that functioned as the setting for community interactions that each had their own particular character, but worked together to embody the community as a whole.¹⁴

The formalized layout of a great plantation complex facilitated the operation of this landscape in one form. One set of meanings, that is, was derived from moving through this microlandscape which had the individual planter at its center. At Mount Airy, the Tayloe house in Richmond County, for example, the visitor's route to the house involved passing a series of physical barriers that were also social barriers. One approached along a drive that skirted a sunken park. The informal park contrasts to the formal layout of the house on its terraces, and serves to make the terraces appear even higher than they are. The curved drive shows the

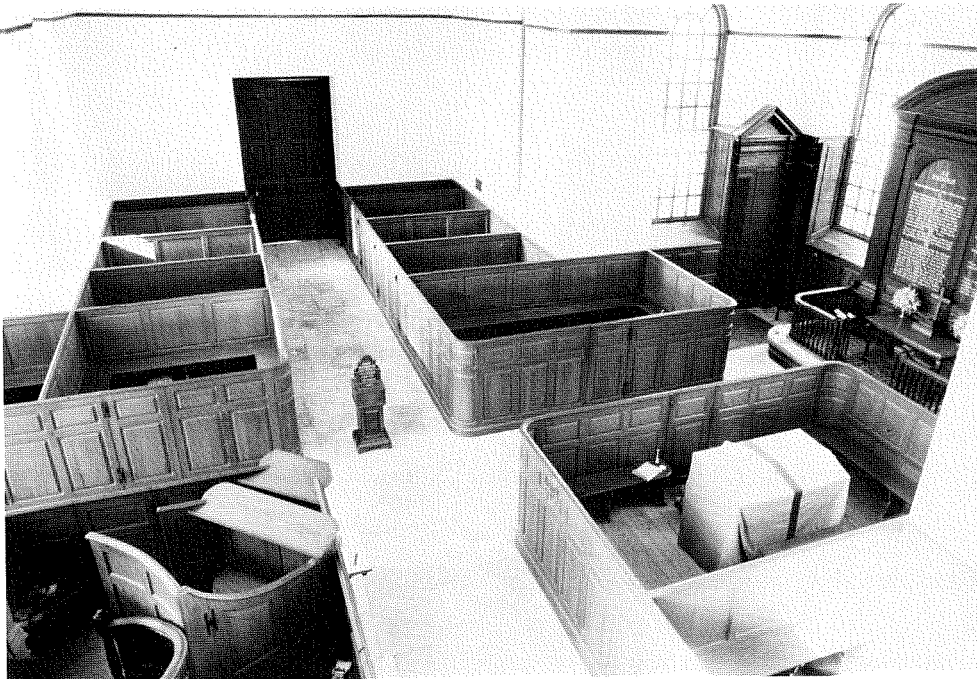
visitor the house from a variety of tantalizing prospects, and ends as he or she arrives on the lower of the two terraces. The upper terrace forms a forecourt that is defined by the two advance buildings. These were originally freestanding, and were connected to the house sometime later in the eighteenth century. The connection served to heighten the constriction of space that accompanied the passing of social barriers and the ascent of terraces and steps. Having ascended a few steps onto a terrace and then crossed it, a much higher flight of steps led one not to the main entry but to a recessed loggia. Then one entered a large living hall through the front door. More exclusive, but still public, rooms opened off this hall. If one came to visit the Tayloes, one would pass through a series of seven barriers before reaching the goal, which might be the dining room table, the ritual center of Virginia hospitality. Each barrier served to reinforce the impression of John Tayloe's centrality, and each, in addition, affirmed the visitor's status as he or she passed through it.

The largest meanings of the articulated processional landscape, however, were perceived in the continual dissolutions and reformulations of social groups that occurred as many planters moved from one place to another within the public landscape of which the great plantation

was a part. Planters moved from being the planter-among-his-family-and-slaves, for instance, to being the planter-among-his-peers doing business in the churchyard before Sunday service. The group dissolved again, and filed into the church, each to find his own pew, and thus regrouped as the planter-in-his-ranked-community. Or planters traveled to the courthouse village, gathered in the yard or the recessed loggia, and then went into court, where some were arrayed on the bench as the planter-among-his-fellow-magistrates. Each social grouping had a specific character and a particular physical manifestation that was integrated within the articulated processional landscape. In the movement from one grouping to another, from one collective pose to another, the white landscape achieved its fullest meaning.¹⁵

While the planter's landscape offered the image of an orderly society that focused on himself and linked him to his peers, the slave's landscape took a different form. There are no accounts by eighteenth-century slaves, and few by other people, that give us a direct statement of their perceptions of their surroundings. Nevertheless it is possible to form a few impressions from the material evidence, and to augment these with hints collected from the documents.

The black landscape, or landscapes, had several aspects. Some were reflexive, that is, they consisted of the slaves' responses as part of the "audience" of the planter's landscape. As an audience slaves shared in some respects the position of the white common planter, but their status as slaves worked in other ways to alter and even to undercut the intended effects of the processional landscape. Within the confines of the plantation, for instance, the common planter would be subject to the full effect of the formal route through it, but it is unlikely that he could progress as far along the route as a Carter or a Tayloe could. The common white planter, that is, was part of the intended audience of the processional landscape, and it served to affirm his *lack* of standing in it. The slaves were not intentionally a part of the audience. Few white planters imagined that slaves were susceptible to the legitimating functions of white society; they recognized that the slave's lack of standing made force the only sure legitimizer. At Mount Airy the slave's route began in the street of outbuildings that lay outside the kitchen door, west of the house. It moved through the kitchen and, originally, from there through a small pedimented doorway on the west end of the house directly into the dining room. After the addition of the connecting quadrants, the route passed through



13



14

13 Christ Church, built circa 1730–1735, Lancaster County, VA. The largest pews, in the chancel, were reserved for the Carters, the dominant gentry family in Lancaster County. In general, the size of the pews and the elaboration of their paneling corresponds to the social standing of the parishioners who are assigned to them. (Photograph by Dell Upton)

14 Hanover County Courthouse, built circa 1740, Hanover County. (Photograph by Dell Upton)



15

15 Family entrance, Mount Airy.
(Photograph by Dell Upton)

them, into the stair hall, and into the dining room. These routes mirrored the private routes that led family intimates from the rooms in the east wing into the secondary passage at the east end of the main block. The family entry was marked by a rusticated three-part opening that was larger and more elaborate than the corresponding slave doorway at the opposite end of the house. Since the meaning of spaces depends as much on how we got to them as it does on our being in them—on the shifting states of awareness as we pass one barrier after another—it is evident that in circumventing the formal barriers of the processional entrance, both the private and the slaves' route undercut the social statement made by the formal approach.

In this kind of landscape, blacks could pass almost at will, while whites from outside had to observe the formalities. The traveler Alexander Macaulay was annoyed to find this so when he visited Christiana Campbell's house in Williamsburg in 1783. The house had a "cold, poverty-struck appearance; a large cold room on the left hand," the parlor, was occupied by several blacks. After inquiring for Mrs. Campbell, Macaulay was not shown into this private room, but left to stand in the entry. "But as I did not approve of waiting for her in the passage, I led Betsey into the cold parlour." This is not to

say that there were no barriers to slaves at all.¹⁶ They generally stood in the passage when waiting on their masters and mistresses in the parlors and dining rooms. Their landscape was less mystified than that which planters created for their peers.¹⁷

The slave also faced an absence of clear barriers in public; he or she had passed the major one—permission to be off the master's property. At church, for instance, there was no definite seating arrangement for those few slaves who chose to attend or who were permitted to do so. The "slave gallery" of the nineteenth century was a rarity in the eighteenth, in which the gallery was usually reserved for private seating or, less often, for "the public"—those whites who did not have their own pews. Slaves might sit in or adjacent to their masters' pews, or they might share a section set aside for them.

If the master's landscape was a network that implied connection and movement, the landscapes of the slave was a static one of discrete places. A comparison of landscape descriptions by elite and black Virginians is instructive. The elements of movement and commanding position that are built into complexes like Mount Airy were objects of explicit admiration among the upper classes. Philip Fithian was able to capture their qualities and to convey the

feelings that they aroused in his diary. He caught sight of ladies riding, their red cloaks streaming, their hair protected by white kerchiefs. His description of his young pupils' dancing was based on the same perceptions of time and evanescent consciousness that the built landscape of the gentry embodied. He found it "beautiful to admiration, to see such a number of young persons, set off by dress to the best Advantage, moving easily, to the sound of well performed Music, and with perfect regularity, tho' apparently in the utmost Disorder." On another occasion, he noted his fondness for walking on the high hills near Nomini Hall, "Where I can have a long View of many Miles & see on the Summits of the Hills Clusters of Savin Trees, through these often a little Farm-House, or Quarter for Negroes."¹⁸ To be above it all, to see and not be seen, were values increasingly cherished by the gentry. In church, they moved from their pews in the chancel, the most conspicuous part of the church, to galleries, private galleries, and hanging pews, above the heads of their fellow parishioners. Where Mount Airy could see and be seen, a decade later Monticello was set to command a view of the landscape for miles around—most visitors noted this—but could not be seen until one was quite close to the house.¹⁹ Both qualities—of movement through the landscape, and of dominating large tracts—



16

16 Slave houses and smokehouse, Tuckahoe.
(Photograph by Dell Upton)

were alien to the conception of the landscape embodied in the slaves' directions.

Benjamin Henry Latrobe twice got directions from slaves who used as landmarks discrete, static barriers to be passed in moving from one point to another. The sense of a larger articulated network was missing. Indeed there was no acknowledgement that the barriers existed in any relation to other features not of current interest. Thus Latrobe found it necessary "to make minute enquiry after all the byeroads and turnings which I am to avoid. By this mode of enquiry I in general astonish my directors by discoveries of difficulties they never thought of before. This was the case with my old negroe." In this kind of landscape, all points are related to one's own customary location, rather than to the current position of the observer. The slaves' landscape was described from the point of view of someone surrounded by other people's power, and its landmarks were plantation houses and fields differentiated by ownership. It was not a way of thinking of the landscape that was necessarily confined to slaves, but perhaps characterized all those who had nowhere to go themselves. Similar directions to those given to Latrobe by slaves in the 1790s were given to Thomas Anburey by white farmers in 1779. The local, Anburey wrote, "tells you to keep the right hand path, then you'll

come to an old field, you are to cross that, and then you'll come to the fence of such a one's plantation, then keep that fence, and you'll come to a road that has three forks . . . then you'll come to a creek, after you cross that creek, you must turn to the left, and then you'll come to a tobacco house . . . and then you'll come to Mr. such a one's ordinary." If similar descriptions have been produced in other times and places, it remains true that the gentry's perception of the landscape stands in striking and illuminating contrast to those of the slave and the common planter. The failure to conceive of the landscape dynamically and systematically was a trait that elite observers found exasperating and characteristic of their social inferiors.²⁰

In addition to the master's world of work and possession that slaves operated in, they had another, private landscape of personal life and prerogative. The slave house was the center of this life, and though many slaves had few possessions, some nevertheless had locks on their doors to lock out their fellow slaves and even their masters. Landon Carter was prevented from punishing his slave William when "he rushed in, bolted his door, and as the people were breaking in to him he broke out of the window and run off."²¹ William's action showed a strong sense of territorial and personal

rights that many visitors noticed in eighteenth-century quarters in Virginia. Isaac Weld, for example, noted that while slaves on large plantations had to work certain hours, they had "ample time to attend to their own concerns," and that this time was devoted to their own gardens and poultry and to furnishing their houses and making them comfortable in minor ways, even if the masters' allocation of labor and materials rarely allowed for significant improvements to the buildings.²²

Slave landscapes went beyond the immediate vicinity of the quarters. They included the woods and fields where some measure of seclusion and secrecy was available. Landon Carter's slaves went to the woods when they wished to quit their master for awhile. By moving back and forth from the woods to the quarter, some of Carter's slaves were able to elude him for weeks or even months without actually leaving Sabine Hall's grounds. Nineteenth-century accounts mention religious meetings that were held in the woods, and Frederick Law Olmsted encountered casual groups of blacks who were gathered in woodland clearings during their leisure time.²³

Slaves and masters shared traditional Anglo-American attitudes about workers' rights in their jobs and workplaces. From this point of view, all work areas other

than the main house were the slaves' domain, a division of space made clear by the frequent juxtaposition of work buildings and slave houses as at Tuckahoe, an eighteenth-century complex in Goochland County. Philip Fithian attended slaves' cockfights at the stables. He clearly thought of the shops and stables as black areas, and recorded with disapproval the preference of his pupil Harry Carter for spending time "either in the Kitchen, or at the Blacksmiths, or Carpenters Shop." The slaves asserted this division of space and work rights. Thus Fithian was obliged to pay a forfeit of seven and one-half pence to the baker for an unspecified trespass on the prerogatives of his trade and another to Natt the plowman for touching the plowlines.

Finally, the slaves' private landscape extended to other Quarters and plantations by means of unofficial ties with friends, relatives, spouses, and lovers. The increase in the size of many Quarters after the mid-eighteenth century helped to stabilize slave life and to promote a distinctive group existence, as larger groups of slaves increasingly lived away from direct white control. Their separation from white control allowed slaves to form communities that were held together by their mastery of the slave landscape of woods, fields, and waterways. Slaves formed neighborhoods, black landscapes that

combined elements of the white landscape and of the quarters in a way that was peculiar to them, and that existed outside the official, articulated processional landscape of the great planter and his lesser neighbors.²⁵

Much of the architectural history of early Virginia revolves around the style of the gentry. Its elements have been cataloged, its sources probed, its dominance assumed. Yet these approaches miss the dynamic quality of the self-presentation of the gentry that was the style's greatest strength and greatest weakness. Elements of movement through the landscape were built into its forms, and architectural details were disposed along it in a carefully planned sequence. When it was experienced as intended, it could be a powerful and intense ideological statement. But the duties and personal experience of slaves circumvented this experience. Blacks were not drawn into the social posturing of gentry society, and whites did not expect them to be. The elements of raw power replaced those of ideological persuasion. With this realization we are spurred on to see the physical landscape in a new light. It must be read as a whole; it was neither uniform nor entirely dominated by the gentry. The meaning of the landscape could be read in more than one way.

NOTES

- 1 This paper draws on continuing work on prerevolutionary Virginia architecture for its data, and, in particular, on Dell Upton, "Slave Housing in Eighteenth-Century Virginia: A Report to the Department of Social Cultural History, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution," Manuscript, Smithsonian Institution, 1982 (contract no. SF2040940000) and *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (Architectural History Foundation, forthcoming). In addition, I am grateful to Karen Kevorkian, John Vlach, and Edward Chappell for assistance with the fieldwork, to Edward Chappell and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation for additional site drawings of Mount Airy and Howard's Neck, and to Carol Silverman for making the drawings for this publication.
- 2 The origins of historical consciousness and its implications for architecture are discussed in Peter Collins, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture* (Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queens University Press, 1967).
- 3 The standard account is Thomas T. Waterman, *The Mansion of Virginia, 1706–1776* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1944).
- 4 Landon Carter, *The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1757–1778*, edited by Jack P. Greene (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1965), p. 291; Joseph Ball Letter Book, Manuscript, Library of Congress, February 8, 1743 (I am indebted to John Vlach for the references to the Ball Letter Book); for the occupancy of slave houses, see Upton, *op. cit.*, pp. 26–28.
- 5 Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead, 1955), pp. 2–3.
- 6 Ferdinand-Marie Bayard, *Travels of a Frenchman in Maryland and Virginia*, translated and edited by Ben C. McCary (Williamsburg, VA: Ben C. McCary, 1950), p. 13.
- 7 Philip Fithian, *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian, 1773–1774: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion*, edited by Hunter Dickinson Farish (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1957), p. 96; John Harrower, *The Journal of John Harrower, An Indentured Servant in the Colony of Virginia, 1773–1776*, edited by Edward Miles Riley (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1963), p. 89.
- 8 Edward Kimber, "Observations in Several Voyages and Travels in America in 1746," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1st ser., 15(1907): 148; Isaac Weld, Jr., *Travels through the United States of North America* (London, England: John Stockdale, 1799), p. 85; Fithian, *op. cit.*, pp. 96, 140.
- 9 Quarter groupings on outlying subsidiary farms appear to have been less formally arranged. Little evidence for their layout remains, but the quarters that are illustrated in the eighteenth-century map of York County, (reproduced by Rhys Isaac) for instance, are not so rigidly arranged as those of Howard's Neck. (Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790* [Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982], pp. 54–55, but see p. 41.) In this paper I have used *quarter* to designate the individual slave house, and *Quarter* to refer to the outlying farm. I am indebted to Robert L. Alexander, Edward Chappell, and Richard Cote for information about the history and site of Howard's Neck that supplements by own field examination.
- 10 William Hugh Grove, "Virginia in 1732: The Travel Journal of William Hugh Grove," edited by Gregory A. Stiverson and Patrick H. Butler III, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 85(1977): 26.
- 11 Dell Upton, "Early Vernacular Architecture in Southeastern Virginia," Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 1980, chapter 1; Dell Upton, "The Origins of Chesapeake Architecture," in *Three Centuries of Maryland Architecture* (Annapolis, MD: Maryland Historical Trust, 1982), pp. 44–57; Dell Upton, "Vernacular Domestic Architecture in Eighteenth-century Virginia," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17(1982): 102; Joseph A. Ernst and H. Roy Merrens, "'Camden's Turrets Pierce the Skies!': The Urban Process in the Southern Colonies During the Eighteenth Century," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 30 (1973): 554, 568–573; John C. Rainbolt, "The Absence of Towns in Seventeenth-Century Virginia," *Journal of Social History* 35(1969): 343–360; Carville Earle and Ronald Hoffman, "Staple Crops and Urban Development in the Eighteenth-Century South," *Perspectives in American History* 10(1976): 7–78.

- 12 Aubrey C. Land, "Economic Base and Social Structure: The Northern Chesapeake in the Eighteenth Century," in *Shaping Southern Society*, edited by T. H. Breen (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 238–240; Edmund S. Morgan, *Virginians at Home: Family Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1952), chapters 1, 4; Harrower, *op. cit.*, p. 83; Isaac, *op. cit.*, pp. 70–79. Decisions about working and transferring slaves on the outlying Quarters were made at the plantation center. In addition, the Quarters frequently served as a kind of colony or service center for the main plantation. Charles Carter's Edge-Wood plantation in Hanover County, for instance, supplied meat to his other properties, including his seat at Shirley, Charles City County. (Richard S. Dunn, "A Tale of Two Plantations: Slave Life at Mesopotamia in Jamaica and Mount Airy in Virginia, 1799 to 1828," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 34[1977]: 44–45; Carter Berkeley, Edge-Wood, Hanover County, to Charles Carter, Shirley, Charles City County, October 19, 1802, Manuscript, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.)
- 13 Thomas Anburey, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of America* (1789; rpt. ed., Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1923), 2: 196; Harrower, *op. cit.*, p. 41; Fithian, *op. cit.*, pp. 80–82. For a conjectural reconstruction drawing of Nomini Hall, which burned in the mid-nineteenth century, see Waterman, *op. cit.*, p. 137.
- 14 For more on the concept of the articulated processional landscape, see Upton, *Holy Things and Profane*, chapter 9.
- 15 Isaac, *op. cit.*, pp. 58–63; Rhys Isaac, "Religion and Authority: Problems of the Anglican Establishment in Virginia in the Era of the Great Awakening and the Parsons' Cause," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 30(1973): 3–36; Upton, *Holy Things and Profane*, chapters 5, 9; A. G. Roeber, "Authority, Law and Custom: The Rituals of Court Day in Tidewater Virginia, 1720–1750," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 37(1980): 29–52.
- 16 "Journal of Alexander Macaulay," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1st ser., 11(1903): 187.
- 17 Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 43.
- 18 Fithian, *op. cit.*, pp. 29, 33, 178.
- 19 See the descriptions of the views from Monticello and Mount Vernon in Luigi Castiglioni, *Luigi Castiglioni's Viaggio: Travels in the United States of North America, 1785–87*, translated and edited by Antonio Pace (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1983), pp. 112, 185–186.
- 20 Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *The Virginia Journals of Benjamin Henry Latrobe, 1795–1798*, edited by Edward C. Carter II and Angeline Polites (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 137–141; Anburey, *op. cit.*, 2: 196–197; Fithian, *op. cit.*, p. 178. For a perceptive discussion of social landscapes, see Isaac, *op. cit.*, pp. 52–57.
- 21 Joseph Ball Letter Book, February 18, 1743, November 4, 1746, April 1754; Carter, *op. cit.*, p. 845.
- 22 Weld, *op. cit.*, p. 85.
- 23 Isaac, *op. cit.*, pp. 328–336; Charles L. Perdue, Thomas E. Barden, and Robert K. Phillips, editors, *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1976), p. 124; Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* (New York, NY: Dix and Edwards, 1856), p. 89.
- 24 Fithian, *op. cit.*, pp. 37, 88, 201.
- 25 Dunn, *op. cit.*, pp. 38–39, 42, 44–45; Allan Kulikoff, "The Origins of Afro-American Society in Tidewater Maryland and Virginia, 1700 to 1790," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 35 (1978): 248; Sarah Shaver Hughes, "Slaves for Hire: The Allocation of Black Labor in Elizabeth City County, Virginia, 1782 to 1810," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser. 35 (1978): 263–273; Kimber, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

Archihorse's Washington Notes

John Wiebenson

Archihorse started out in 1971 as Mailman, a talking mailbox who argued for the preservation of the Old Post Office down on Washington, DC's, Pennsylvania Avenue. It seems that ever since this mighty stone structure was put up in 1897, a bunch of Federal officials—GSA administrators, Fine Arts commissioners, even a President—have wanted to have it taken down. They claimed that Romanesque architecture was not appropriate for this capital city, particularly not at its center right beside the path taken by Presidential parades. These people wanted a more neoclassic set of façades put here in order to make a tidy blend with all the other façades the government has built.

It is not unusual for an institution's members to want to express their territory in this way—through continuity of a particular architectural style. The University of California's regents have favored Spanish tile roofs for Berkeley's buildings, while their counterparts at the University of Maryland have pushed for a sort of Georgian style, the kind modified a bit by financial considerations. In Washington, DC, the force of this idea was vigorous enough to have already converted some 15 blocks between the Mall and Pennsylvania Avenue into neoclassic façades. Only the Old Post Office remained,

standing as a towering monument to all the lost theaters, hotels, shops, and apartments that once brought life to this part of Washington's downtown.

Yet, a style can engage as thoroughly as it can offend. Many local citizens wanted to keep this old building, precisely because they like its bulky presence. They also liked the Old Post Office in territorial terms. They looked at it as a massive, symbolic bulwark that could resist further Federal seizures of the city's territory, and, therefore, acted to save the Old Post Office. They formed organizations. They testified at Senate hearings. They badgered newspapers and television stations for coverage. And, during this time of putting together material for the media, Mailman was born.

Mailman's mission was to translate noble, but ponderous, Senate testimony into a more inviting form that would then be made available to newspapers. There was some precedent for Mailman. The U.S. Army used comic books to persuade G.I.'s to ponder over issues of maintaining trucks and tanks. Martin Luther King, Jr., distributed thousands of comic books throughout the South as one means for explaining how nonviolent protest works. These precedents showed that the informal mixed-media of comics can help readers to learn. And,

because comics can present a variety of visual data, they can be particularly valuable in explaining architectural issues. Mailman could, for example, point to something outside the Old Post Office and, in another frame, let the reader look into the building. He could also pop into the planners' offices to point out their errors, and then move on to explain how people could pitch in and help.

Drawing Mailman turned out to be easier than getting him printed. The editor of a major Washington paper was offended by the suggestion that pictures could help make points clear. "Our readers can read," he explained. But, Sam Smith, editor of *The Progressive Review* (then called the *DC Gazette*), asked to run Mailman in his somewhat less major Washington paper. Copies were then sent to the deans of every architecture school in the United States as part of a package asking for their help in saving the Old Post Office. About 45 percent responded by getting letters out to Senators and Congressmen. The Old Post Office is so thoroughly saved that even the Federal Government celebrates its preservation.

Since then, *The Progressive Review* has helped Mailman (and his current manifestation, Archihorse) to win other battles. Zoning for Washington's Dupont Circle area was often a subject

during the several years it took to get better protection from developers there. Archihorse has also helped get a street-car loop included in planning papers for the city's downtown; it may, of course, take years before any real plans are actually drawn. Further, Archihorse has reviewed books, looked at the Denver skyline, cosponsored a competition that produced improvements to the design of Washington's Western Plaza, talked about saving energy, and discussed a self-help housing scheme proposed by an architecture student from Canada.

Archihorse has talked about Washington, DC's, planning and architecture problems for the most part; there always seems to be some project going on that would promote Federal pomp at the expense of the city's life. For example, the same forces that would have had the Old Post Office taken down recently wanted a colossal memorial arch raised up next to Pennsylvania Avenue in Market Square, despite the resulting damage to the Square's historic scale and focus. A couple of Archihorses helped stop the arch, but similar efforts have failed to stir Pennsylvania Avenue's planners into putting in all the housing around Market Square that is needed to bring back its once vibrant commercial and social life.

Future topics might include showing how a proposed

new building for Johns Hopkins University in Washington, DC, could be redesigned to offer as much space, but without having to damage two small hotels that happen to be special assets in the Dupont Circle area. And, in order to get beyond Washington, DC's, boundaries from time to time, Archihorse might point out how architecture schools could make their curricula more

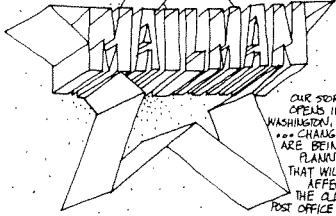
relevant to architecture practice, or how the schools could try to be a community resource again, or how those repairing the Statue of Liberty need not change her torch from an incandescent object to a merely reflective one. Perhaps Archihorse will note ways that St. John's College in Santa Fe, NM, could have been more considerate in dealing with its natural surroundings in

recent years. It seems that as long as there are institutions, governments and developers, Archihorse will always have material for explaining how to do things better. Sometimes the explaining will just lead to another lost battle. But, other times, as has happened in the past, Archihorse's explanations will provide important help for a victory well worth winning.

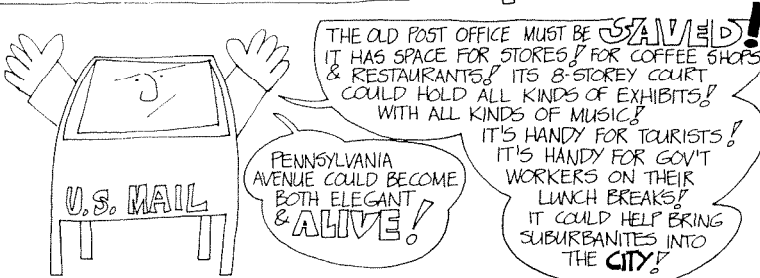
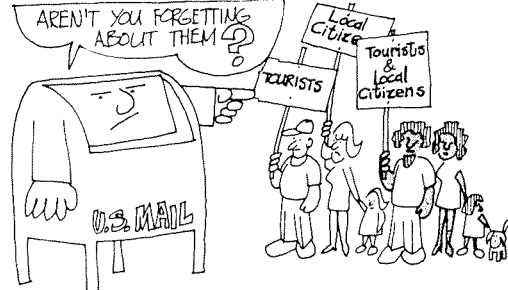
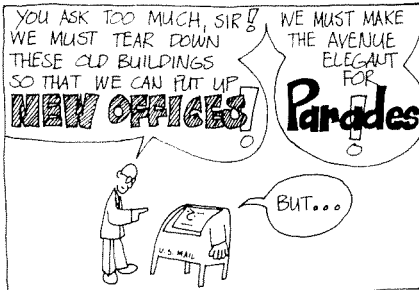
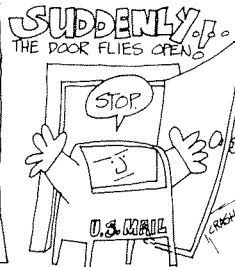
The Archihorse and Mailmen strips have appeared in the *Progressive Review*, their home base. (Formerly the *D.C. Gazette*.)

DEBBIE FEATURES

PRESENTS



OUR STORY
OPENS IN
WASHINGTON, D.C.
... CHANGES
ARE BEING
PLANNED
THAT WILL
AFFECT
THE OLD
POST OFFICE...

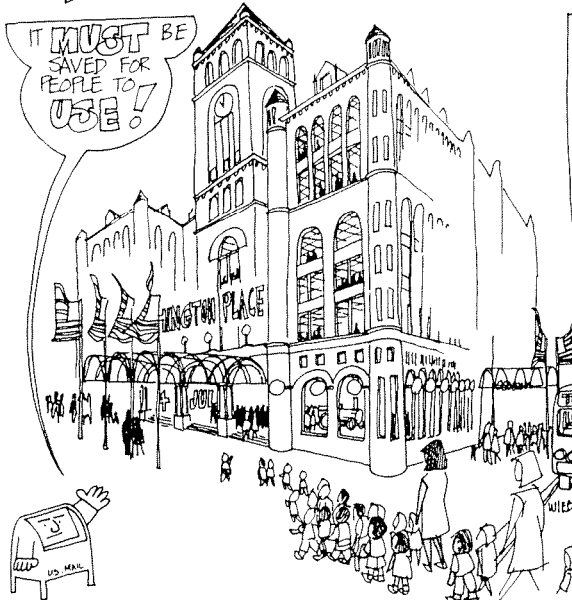
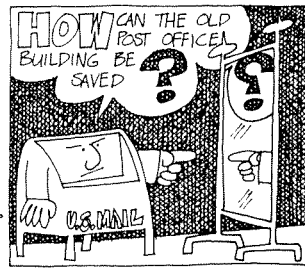


DEBBIE FEATURES

PRESENTS



OUR STORY
CONTINUES
AS MAILMAN
ASKS HIMSELF
QUESTIONS...



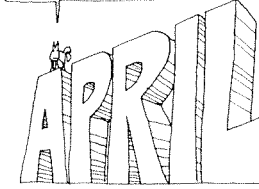
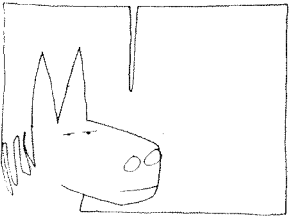
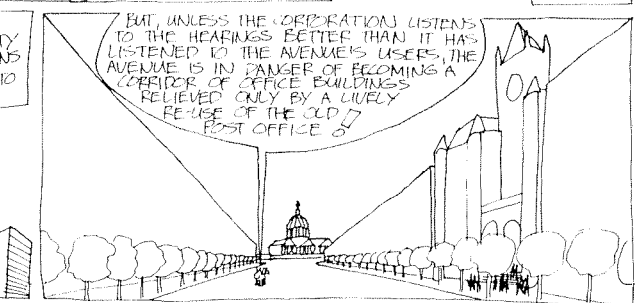


THIS PART OF THE DISTRICT HAS BEEN PLANNED, AND REFINED, SOMETIMES WELL & SOMETIMES POORLY. MENANT, MA MILLAN, MELLON, THE HUB PLAN, THE BIG PLAN...



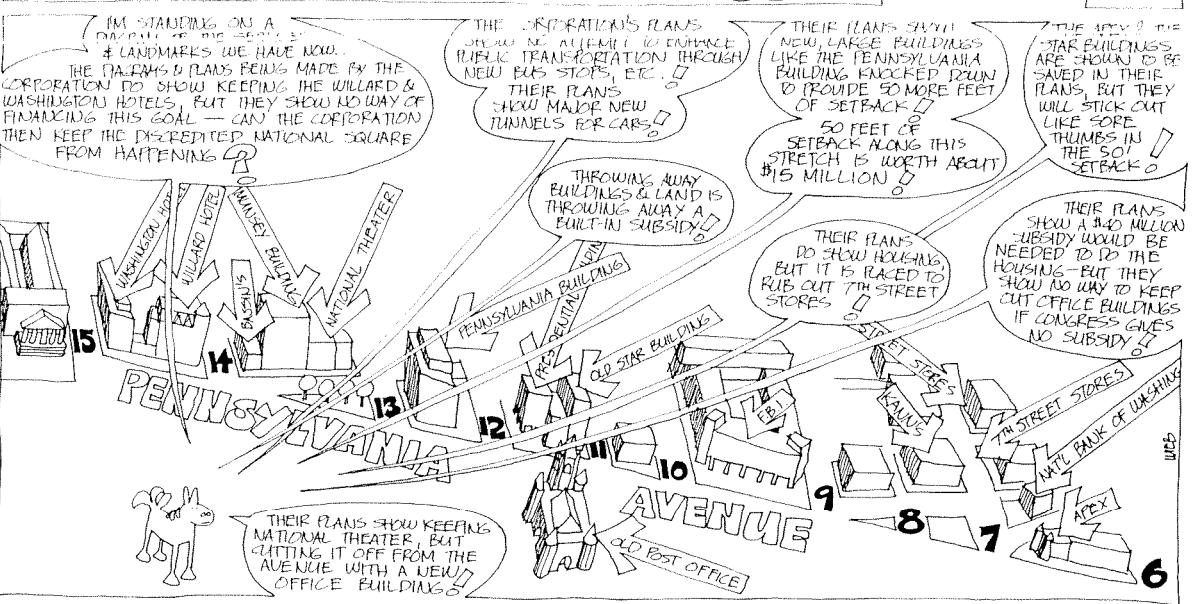
BUT, THE CURRENT PLAN WON'T NEED SUPPORT TO BE BUILT - IT'S BEING DONE BY A "DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION"...

THE LAW SETTING UP THIS CORPORATION LETS THE CITY TALK ABOUT THE NEW PLANS - WITH HEARINGS PROBABLY TO HAPPEN EARLY IN APRIL...



AND, THE OLD POST OFFICE WILL BE LIVELY - INSTEAD OF BEING DEMOLISHED, THIS GREAT OLD COURTYARD BUILDING IS TO HOUSE THE NATIONAL ENHANCEMENT FOR THE ARTS - AND THEIR EXHIBITS, THEIR WORKSHOPS, THEIR DEMONSTRATIONS, & RESTAURANTS AND STOPS!

RIGHT NOW, THE CORPORATION'S PLANS BARELY BEGIN TO HEAD FOR A GREAT PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE...



HOW CAN WE KEEP THE GOOD PORTIONS OF THE CORPORATION'S PLANS, MAKE THEM REALLY WORK, & ADD THE OTHER THINGS NEEDED TO MAKE THE ENTIRE PLAN GOOD FOR THE CITY & ITS VISITORS?

YOU CAN KEEP OUT OF IT & LET THE CORPORATION DO ITS WORK, THAT'S HOW

THAT'S ONE WAY - & IF THE CORPORATION MAKES THE NEEDED IMPROVEMENTS, IT'S A GOOD WAY...

IF THE CORPORATION DOESN'T LISTEN TO THESE, THEN CONGRESS WILL HAVE TO BE LOBBIED - AND



AS A LAST RESORT, THE COURTS CAN HELP MAKE THE PLAN BETTER. WE CAN HAVE A GREAT PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE!



ARCHHURSE

LEARNING FROM G.M.

ONCE EMINENT DOMAIN HELPED CITIES GET LAND FOR REAL PUBLIC NEEDS—LIKE A SCHOOL—WHEN A LANDOWNER WOULDN'T SELL FOR A FAIR PRICE...



BUT IN DETROIT, THEY'RE USING EMINENT DOMAIN TO TEAR DOWN A NEIGHBORHOOD THAT DIDN'T WANT TO SELL OUT TO GENERAL MOTORS...

WELL, WHAT'S GOOD FOR G.M. IS GOOD FOR DETROIT...



G.M. WANTS THE LAND FOR A FACTORY SITE, BUT AN ARCHITECT NAMED RIPLEY SAYS THEY DON'T NEED IT...

THAT'S RIGHT, HORSE...



G.M.'S PLAN WOULD PUSH OUT 3,000 PEOPLE & ALL THE HOUSES, CHURCHES, STORES—EVEN A HOSPITAL—THAT MAKE UP THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD...



BUT RIGHT NEXT DOOR IS AN UNDER-USED FACTORY AREA—G.M. COULD REVISE ITS PLAN, KEEPING ITS POWER PLANT & ALL THE OTHER FACTORY PARTS & KEEPING THE NEIGHBORHOOD, TOO...

HONK!



BUT DETROIT HAS NOTICED THE FACTORY AREA IS ACROSS A CITY LINE, SO A BETTER FACTORY PLAN WOULD THREATEN DETROIT'S TAX DREAMS...

YOU CAN'T EMINENT DOMAIN PEOPLE!

HONK?

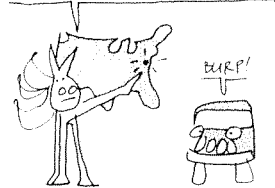


DETROIT IS WRECKING ONE OF ITS OWN NEIGHBORHOODS JUST TO GET G.M.'S TAXES, & G.M. IS HELPING DETROIT SO IT CAN GET A BIG, EMPTY FACTORY SITE AT A GOOD PRICE...

WELL, WHAT'S GOOD FOR G.M. IS GOOD FOR RIPLEY...



THAT'S LIKE CAPITOL GATEWAY A PROJECT IN SOUTHEAST WASHINGTON, D.C. WHERE D.C. IS USING EMINENT DOMAIN TO TAKE LAND...



THEN, IT'LL GIVE THIS LAND TO THE DEVELOPERS AT SUCH A LOW PRICE THAT D.C. WILL BE SPENDING \$55 MILLION TO GET \$150 MILLION IN TAXES...

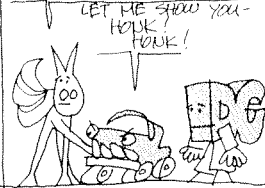
BUT ISN'T WHAT'S GOOD FOR DEVELOPERS GOOD FOR D.C.?

DON'T ABLOGEE—JUST HONK!



SHOULDN'T WE SET LIMITS TO WHAT YOU CAN DO WITH EMINENT DOMAIN? SHOULDN'T WE PROTECT OUR HOUSES & OUR CITIES?

LET ME SHOW YOU—HONK! HONK!



WE **CAN** HAVE BETTER CITIES THROUGH EMINENT DOMAIN—RIGHT, D.C.?

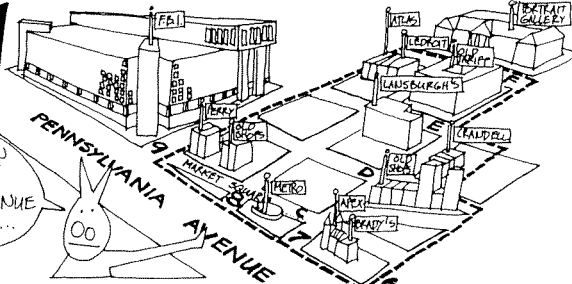
HONK-HONK, G.M.!

THE END



ARCHHURSE

THEY'RE STARTING TO PLAN THE HOUSING PART OF WASHINGTON'S PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE REDEVELOPMENT...



THESE GROUPS INCLUDED:
• METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON PLANNING & HOUSING ASSN
• DON'T TEAR IT DOWN
• COMMITTEE OF 100
• CITIZENS' PLANNING COALITION
• A.N.C. 2C

THEIR IDEAS INCLUDED:



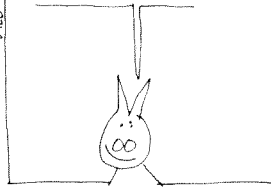
1. MAKE THIS PROJECT A SET OF SMALL PROJECTS THEN SMALL LOCAL BUILDERS & DEVELOPERS CAN GET INVOLVED, HELPING US GET BETTER-SCALED RESULTS THAT COST LESS & THAT SAVE MORE EXISTING BUILDINGS...



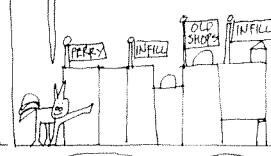
2. PUT IN AS MUCH HOUSING AS POSSIBLE—IF 2,000 OF 2,500 UNITS WILL FIT, THEN DON'T SETTLE FOR 1,500, PARTICULARLY IF WE WANT THIS WHOLE AREA TO COME ALIVE AGAIN...



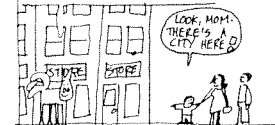
AUD, SO FAR, THEY ARE STARTING RIGHT—PADC (PENN. AVE. DEVELOPMENT CORP.) HAS ASKED COMMUNITY GROUPS FOR IDEAS...



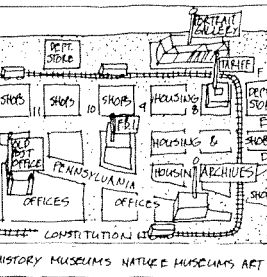
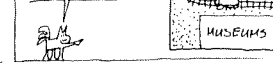
3. START THE HOUSING & SHOPS RIGHT AT C STREET—PUSHING THE STARTING PLACE A LONG WAY NORTH JUST TO MAKE MARKET SQUARE BIGGER WOULD WASTE GOOD BUILDINGS & GOOD LAND...



4. GIVE TOURISTS A WAY TO GET OFF THE MALL & INTO THE CITY—F STREET STORES NEED TOURIST TRAFFIC AND TOURISTS NEED PLACES TO SHOP, TO EAT, TO REST UP FROM ALL THAT CULTURE...



TOURISTS CAN BE INVITED OFF THE MALL & UP TO F STREET WITH AN HISTORIC OLD TROLLEY LOOP—IT COULD OFFER HISTORY, FUN & FUEL EFFICIENCY BY PUTTING OLD TROLLEYS BACK TO WORK AGAIN...



WILL PADC USE THESE IDEAS?

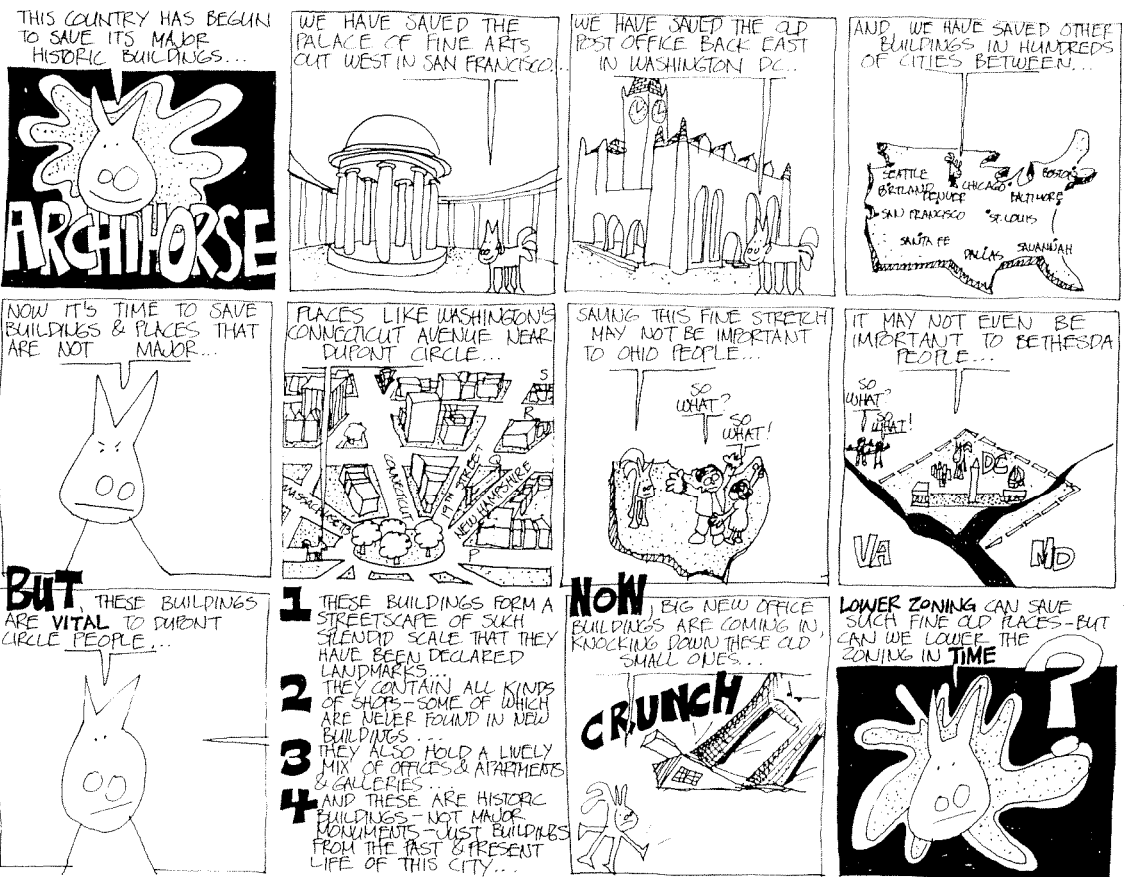
WILL PADC USE ANY IDEAS AT ALL?



WRITE PADC AT 425 15TH ST NW D.C. 20004 & THE WASH POST AT 1150 15TH ST NW D.C. 20007

TELL 'EM WE WANT MORE THAN JUST NEW BUILDINGS

END



ARCHHORSE

MENTIONING MASSIVE MONUMENTS

FDR SAID THAT, WHEN HE DIED, HE WANTED ONLY A SMALL STONE PUT NEAR NATIONAL ARCHIVES FOR HIS MONUMENT...

BUT THE SENATE HAS JUST VOTED TO BUILD AN FDR MONUMENT MADE OF VEEY BIG STONES-LOTS OF THEM.

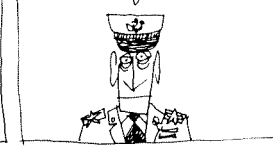
BIG PUMPS WILL MAKE BIG WATER-FALLS ON THE STONES & THERE'LL BE A MOVIE THEATER & AN INTERPRETIVE CENTER & A BOOK STORE & LOCKERS & PARKING, SO THAT

HIS MONUMENT WILL BE A MULTI-MILLION-DOLLAR DISMISSAL OF FDR'S REQUEST. FDR GOT IT ALL WRONG, HORSE...

WE'RE TALKING ABOUT A DEAD PRESIDENT HERE - LIKE THAT WASN'T FDR CHATTING FIRE-SIDE-WISE, THAT WAS OUR COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT.

TOURISTS DON'T COME TO WASHINGTON TO LOOK AT SMALL STONES - THEY WANT BIG-TIME STONES, SO IT'S FDR'S DUTY TO GO MEGALITHIC...

BESIDES, WITH TOURISTS HANGING OUT AT FDR'S INTERPRETIVE CENTER, WE'LL BE ABLE TO CUT RUN-AWAY COSTS BY CLOSING THE SMITHSONIAN EVEN EARLIER THAN WE DO NOW.



LATER ON, WE CAN ADD PARKING LOTS & GIFT SHOPS TO WASHINGTON'S BIG STONES...

& WE CAN ADD WATER-FALLS TO LINCOLN'S BIG STONES, & SERVICE YARDS & THEATERS & LOCKERS & B & B... INTERPRETIVE CENTERS?

& WE'RE DRAWING PLANS FOR INTERPRETIVE CENTERS FOR NIXON, FORD, CARTER & REAGAN... BUT, THEY'RE STILL ALIVE... WELL, SO FAR...

& WON'T THAT TURN THIS CITY INTO JUST ANOTHER THEME PARK? YEAH, & THE THEME IS WHEN A PRESIDENT DIES, YOU DON'T LOSE A LEADER, YOU GAIN A MONUMENT!



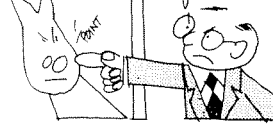
ARCHHORSE

WASHINGTON'S RHODES TAVERN STILL STANDS AT 15TH & F NW... AND NOW IT'S COMING DOWN, NEVER AGAIN TO TARNISH INAUGURAL PARADES...

BUT RHODES HAS BEEN THERE SINCE 1777 WHEN THE DISTRICT WAS ONLY A CAPITAL OF WHAT WE NOW CALL AN "EMERGING NATION"...

THE BRITISH DROPPED BY IN 1814, AS IT WAS A HANDY & PLEASANT SPOT FOR WATCHING THE FLAMES IN THE WHITE HOUSE... THAT'S NOT MUCH OF A FIRE... WELL, IT'S NOT MUCH OF AN EXECUTIVE MANSION... WE SHOULD HAVE WAITED UNTIL THE PRESIDENTS WERE DEAD...

DISTRICT CITIZENS MET HERE ABOUT STARTING PUBLIC SCHOOLS & ABOUT HOMERULE... ALL RIGHT - WHO'S FOR TAXATION WITHOUT REPRESENTATION? NOT ME! NOT ME!

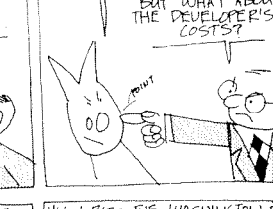
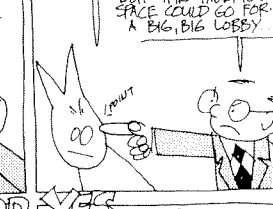
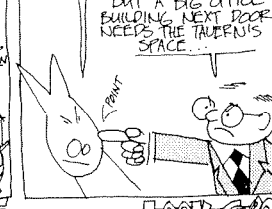
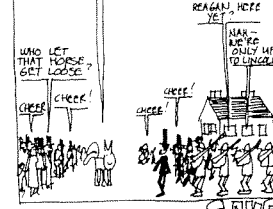


RHODES TAVERN HAS WITNESSED EVERY INAUGURAL PARADE SINCE JEFFERSON'S... WHO LET THAT HORSE GET LOOSE? CHECK! CHECK! CHECK!

THAT'S OUR HISTORY - WE SHOULDN'T ERASE RELICS OF HISTORY JUST TO PRETTY UP PRESIDENTIAL PARADES... BUT A BIG OFFICE BUILDING NEXT DOOR KEEPS THE TAVERN'S SPACE...

NOT SO-LOCAL ZONING KEEPS THE OFFICE BUILDING FROM ADDING ANY MORE SQUARE FOOTAGE TO ITS FLOOR AREA... BUT THE TAVERN'S SPACE COULD GO FOR A BIG, BIG LOBBY...

THAT'S JUST FASHION & FASHIONS CHANGE - BIG BIG LOBBIES MAY YET GIVE WAY TO RESPECT FOR HISTORY AND FOR LOCAL VALUES... BUT WHAT ABOUT THE DEVELOPER'S COSTS?

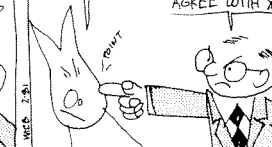
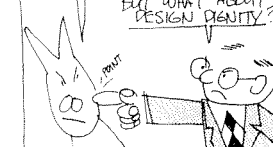


THE DEVELOPER WOULD SAVE MONEY IF RHODES IS SAVED - HE WOULDN'T HAVE TO COOL A BIG, BIG GLAZED LOBBY & HE WOULDN'T HAVE TO BUILD IN 2 DIFFERENT STAGES... BUT WHAT ABOUT DESIGN DENSITY?

RHODES CAN LOOK GOOD - WE FIXED UP THE WHITE HOUSE AFTER THE FIRE & WE CAN FIX UP RHODES - THEN IT & THE OLD EBBETT GRILL COULD ADD HANDSOME SMALL SCALE TO DC'S DOWNTOWN. DOES ANYONE AGREE WITH YOU?

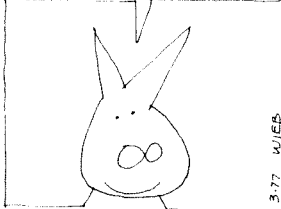
YES - THE DC GAZETTE, THE WASHINGTON STAR, AMERICAN HERITAGE, THE WASHINGTON TRIBUNE, JOE GRANT, A BUNCH OF ARCHITECTS & HISTORIANS & CITIZENS, & MAYOR BARRY, TOO! (BEFORE HE GOT ELECTED) WANT TO KEEP RHODES WHERE IT IS... WELL, GOLLY...

I'LL WRITE THE WASHINGTON POST (AT 1150 15TH ST. NW, D.C. 20071) & OLIVER CARR - THE DEVELOPER - (AT 1700 PENN AVE. NW, DC 20006) & TELL THEM TO KEEP RHODES & THE OLD EBBETT GRILL! GOOD POINT!



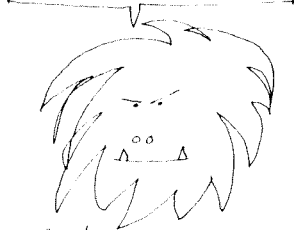


PEOPLE ARE ASKING ME
WHAT TO DO ABOUT SPRING.
I TELL THEM TO BECOME
GOKILLA GARDENERS!

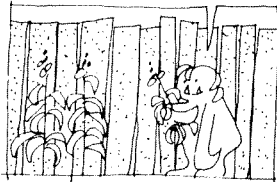


3/77 WJES

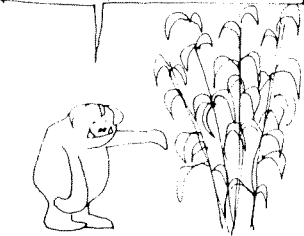
ARCHHORSE IS RIGHT!
I WAS ONCE A METER
MANN, BUT NOW I'M A
GOKILLA GARDENER...



NOW I SNEAK PLANTS
INTO GRUBBY PLACES -
I PLANT BULBS,
FERNS, TREES -
ALL KINDS OF
PLANTS.



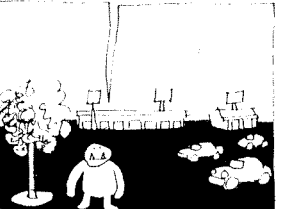
I TRANSPLANTED THIS OLD
BAMBOO TO A NEIGHBORING
ALLEY...



I'M PLANTING HOLLYHOCK SEEDS
IN THOSE DREARY HIGHWAY
DIVIDERS IN MARYLAND...



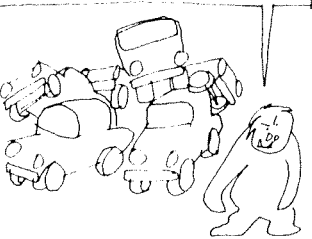
& I'M STARTING TO
PUT TREES INTO THOSE
BLEAK SHOPPING CENTER
PARKING LOTS...



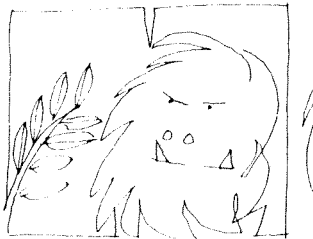
THEY LOOSE A FEW PARKING
PLACES BUT IT'S WORTH
IT, DON'T IT?



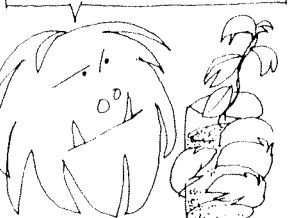
HERE ARE MORE CARS OUT ON
THE FRONT LAWN OF INDIA'S
EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON DC.



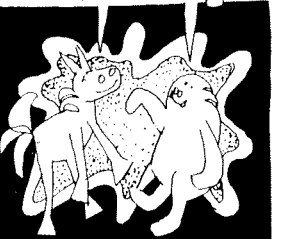
I'M GOING TO COVER THEM
IN RICH POTTING SOIL &
PLANT HONEYSUCKLE...



OR MAYBE IVY- I CAN
ROOT SOME IVY STRIPS
IN WATER TO KEEP MY
COSTS DOWN...



THE CITY CAN LOOK BETTER
- IF WE ALL GET
SNEAKY ENOUGH !!



Nothing Should Stand for Something That Never Existed

Joseph S. Wood

Few Midwestern cities have anything resembling such unique or historically important cultural resources as Faneuil Hall Market Place, Independence Square, Vieux Carré, or the Palace of the Governors. Common to Midwestern cities, however, are clusters of old buildings that have been converted into entertainment places. As Robert Riley recently commented, one can flag a taxi in any substantial city and ask to be taken to the local renewed-warehouse entertainment district.¹

Such districts, which often still house wholesaling or light manufacturing, provide key ingredients for Jane Jacobs' recipe for urban renewal.² In contrast to the depersonalized, disassociated, megascale structures in central business districts (CBDs), clusters of older buildings near CBDs provide cultural memory, antique texture, human scale, environmental diversity, and, the potential for economic gain through adaptive reuse—the elements that Peirce Lewis has identified for functional historic preservation.³ As a result, investment has spurred preservation or, more correctly, metamorphosis of these districts. Unfortunately, the transformation process has too often produced pseudoplaces—places made over to be something they never were. In large part this product reflects the historicist expectations of owners, developers, and

members of preservation review commissions. But does it need to? The Old Market in Omaha, NE, illustrates how in consciously avoiding contrivance, in not trying to create something that never existed, the act of preservation can still produce an attractive and successful converted warehouse district.

Converted Warehouse Districts

Plain old buildings hold special attraction for aesthetic as well as economic reasons due to “self-context,” i.e., a clustering of similar buildings creating a coherent but not monotonous landscape. Entire block faces contain structures related in texture and scale which maintain their individuality in their remaining original detailing and in their long and well-used appearance. These districts are not, of course, “old towns” or main streets characterized by “shoppes.” They are not gateways or sites of particularly historic events. What identifies or characterizes these converted clusters is not the past but their modern manifestation. They are not old some-things. They have been metamorphosed. They are warehouse districts that have been converted into new entertainment places.

Because of their current popularity, such places form or may yet form a new symbolic landscape that is analogous to the highway

strip.⁴ Converted warehouse districts are not as pervasive as the strip, of course, but certainly they reflect an appeal that is notably symbolic. Donald Meinig argues that symbolic landscapes “arise out of deep cultural processes as a society adapts to new environments, technologies, and opportunities, and as it reformulates its basic concepts relating to family, community, and the good life.”⁵ In this sense, the popularity of converted warehouse districts may be in part a response to the pervasiveness of the strip. Both the highway strip and the warehouse district provide entertainment in its broad connotation. They offer opportunity for mingling with others, for shopping, for dining and drinking, or for just hanging out. In this regard they complement one another, and each attempts to build on its own popular conception. The strip plays on its convenience, its comfort, its cleanliness, and even its newness. When Severance Center was built in Cleveland, OH, 20 years ago, it was noted for its radical departure from shopping-center design. Now it is being renovated to make the complex look “just built.”⁶ The warehouse district, in contrast, plays on its nostalgic character, even though it is also a new place.

Old things are attractive because of the prevalence in our society, increasingly

manifest in the landscape, of an implied notion of retrogression—the concept that our predecessors led a life superior to ours. The notion hardly needs elaboration. And, of course, it is ridiculous. But landscapes of nostalgia whether in Disneyland or downtown, can provide solace to anyone who wishes to be fooled. Thus, Robert Riley worries that our fondness for landscapes of nostalgia illustrates how unsatisfactory our relation with contemporary landscapes (including shopping centers and strips) is and how willing we are to fantasize.⁷ Thus, converted warehouse districts generally share a sense of being what Grady Clay has called an “epitome district”—a place that “stands for other things,” that “generates metaphors.”⁸

Such contrivance takes the form of preservation polychromy: controlled preservation in which colors, signage, and other ornamentation representing historic motifs are manipulated according to a preconceived system for specific aesthetic ends. Wherever preservation polychromy is emblematic of the past, subtly as in Larimer Square in Denver, or more blatantly as in Iowa Falls, IA, it creates a pseudoplace that never existed before but which alludes to historicism by conscious mimicry or imitation. Historicism means the fostering or adoption



1

1 Larimer Square Larimer Square in Denver illustrates the use of preservation polychromy. (Photograph by Joseph Wood)



2

2 Iowa Falls, Iowa Preservation polychromy in Iowa Falls, IA. (Photograph by Joseph Wood)

of undue reliance upon historical forms and styles to the point of fabricating antique ornamentation, or producing conceit. Producing conceit not only precludes easy adaptation but also precludes reworking a design to allow balance of permanence and novelty in response to changing opportunities for use of a structure or a place. Unfortunately, the present practice of historic preservation, especially in pursuit of tax incentives, too often encourages such conceit by invoking preconceived ideas of aesthetic and functional purity. When preservation commissions carry out architectural-design review, for instance, predetermined universal standards of preservation are necessarily imposed.⁹ The result of contrivance, whether it is a consequence of design review or simply of historicist notions, is a pseudoplace, a place that stands for something that never existed.

Omaha's Old Market Historic District

In contrast to places experiencing preservation

polychromy is the rejuvenation of Omaha's Old Market Historic District.¹⁰ The name suggests that the Market is similar to Denver's Larimer Square, but that is not the case. In Omaha's Market old structures are being successfully reused and renewed, not restored or preserved; they are complemented by innovative and attractive modern design.

Omaha's Market is located in the eastern section of downtown Omaha about five blocks from the Missouri River. The five and one-half blocks of the present National Register District are characterized by wholesale jobbing houses which were developed from the 1870s to the early 1900s as part of a distribution center for goods that were shipped on the Union Pacific Railroad and its branch lines. Omaha took advantage of its location as the eastern terminus of the transcontinental railroad to develop itself as a major distribution center when Nebraska experienced an unparalleled boom during the 1880s. Warehouses and

associated structures to house this wholesaling activity replaced an existing residential neighborhood.

Firms in the Market specialized in dry goods, hardware, agricultural implements, liquor, and produce. Commission merchants who handled mainly fruits and vegetables were especially concentrated along Howard Street from 10th to 11th Streets and north and south from 11th and Howard, where some still operate. These produce dealers were next to the Public Market, from which the area derives its current name. A few wholesalers were also manufacturers. Retail and service activities were relatively scarce, but several hotels, small restaurants, and a number of saloons served the workers in the Market. Some buildings have been adapted to modern transportation requirements, but, as would be expected, wholesaling and its related activities have been declining for many years in the Market, and the nature of the place has been considerably altered in the last generation.

Bird's Eye View of Wholesale District,
Omaha, Neb.



3

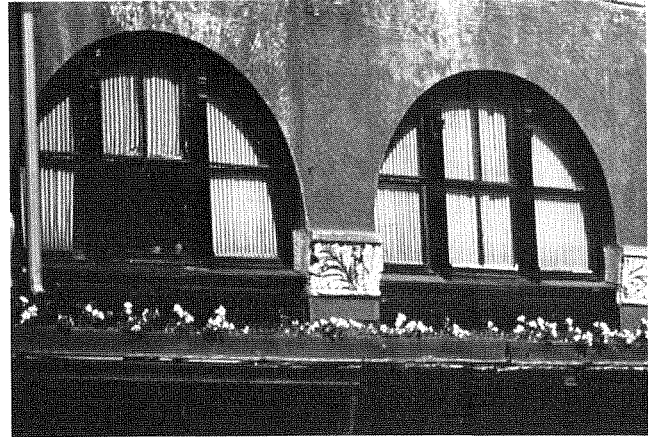
The Market's remaining buildings exist as substantial and representative structures of the late nineteenth century. The utilitarian nature of these buildings dictated their form: Variations on masonry bearing walls and wooden-floor joist-construction—often with interior columns of wood or cast iron in place of masonry walls to allow more open loft space. Architects turned to historicism (ironically, for the lesson here!) to create distinctive street façades, using familiar styles, especially those then prevalent in Chicago.

Although the vast majority of the building exteriors in the Market are made of brick, cast-iron fronts, metal cornices, stone trim, and metal sidewalk canopies (attached to several buildings where produce was marketed) also contribute to the Market's architectural character. Today the structures retain their integrity, and the number of intrusions is small. Alterations have been limited mostly to first floors, and several buildings have full façades that are essentially intact.

Although the Market was a wholesale jobbing district, it has become a fashionable and prosperous retail shopping and entertainment place. In the mid-1960s after the decline of food wholesaling the Mercer family, which had owned a number of buildings in the Market since the 1880s, sought new enterprises. First the Market attracted "head" shops, then it drew art galleries, theaters, restaurants, bars, boutiques, bookstores, import shops, and apartments. Commercial rejuvenation and residential development in the Market have spread beyond the original four blocks as the Market has become a significant local attraction. The Market is vital and capable of expanding further; it has become one of the most attractive of many such districts in cities across the country.

The Old Market Concept

A good part of the success of the Market is due to its character and to the philosophy behind its redevelopment. The Market was not contrived or



4

fabricated. Although a National Register District, little explicit historical reference is invoked and contemporary design has been widely incorporated in renovation. Nevertheless, continuity with the past is important and has been maintained by remnants of the past, by the structures themselves, of course, and also by the presence of light manufacturing, petty wholesalers, and commission merchants. Remnant graphics also establish a continuity with the past. New graphics in historical styles are discouraged.

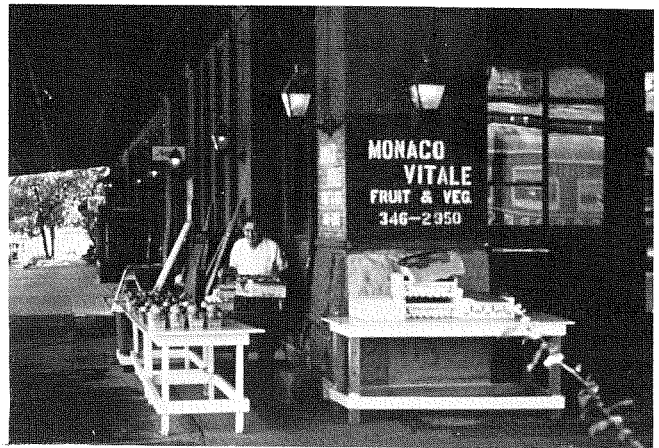
The center of the market can be identified, but no single structure takes attention away from the contribution that each structure makes to the overall sense of place. No particular structure epitomizes the Market, although certain complexes, such as those structures near the center of the Market interconnected by the metal canopies, and certain interiors, such as an enclosed passageway that blends modern touches with old brick, elicit recognition. Effect counts. Buildings are

3 Bird's Eye View Omaha's Old Market about 1910.
(Postcard courtesy of Mrs. John Farr, Omaha, NE)

4 Character The Market's nineteenth-century warehouses were utilitarian in function, and historicism served to create distinction. The metal canopy was a functional addition.
(Photograph courtesy of the Omaha City Planning Department)



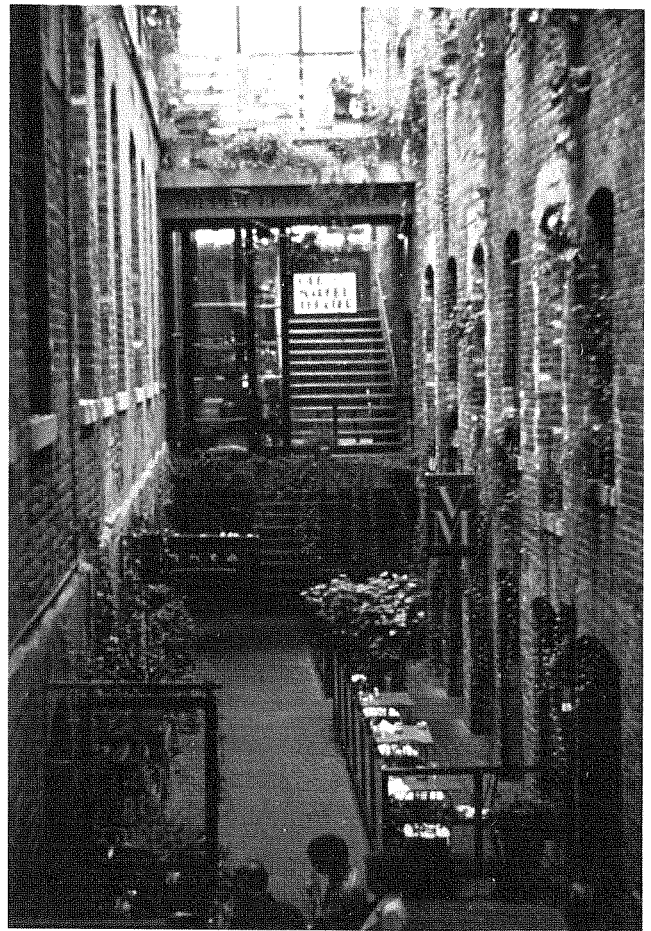
5



7



6



8

5 Howard Street This view west along Howard Street on a weekday morning illustrates the liveliness, character, and essential charm of the Market.
(Photograph by Joseph Wood)

6 Interconnection Metal canopies provide inter-connection from bay to bay, but no attempt is made to hide function or to make over a structure into something it never was.
(Photograph by Joseph Wood)

7 Monaco Vitale Historical connection in the Market is manifested by the continued presence of produce merchants, here at the corner of 11th and Howard Streets, the geographical center of the Market.
(Photograph by Joseph Wood)

8 Passageway The Market's enclosed passageway houses a number of restaurants and shops and serves as a distinctively identifiable element within the Market that harmoniously blends new and old.
(Photograph by Joseph Wood)

associated with one another, and the entire district is used. Texture, human scale, and interrelated commercial and residential activities provide a universalizing coherence to the Market.

The Market's effect is further enhanced by attempts to avoid a sharp boundary or edge. For instance, cars have complete access to the Market around the clock. Streets are not set aside or cut off from the rest of the downtown area for pedestrian use. The presence of cars gives a sense of activity and access and security, just as a full parking lot at a suburban shopping mall invites use. To close off streets would create a false environment.

Finally, the Market is not kept especially clean. Dirt, grime, and the personality (and personalities) of its location near the CBD redeem the Market and make it a real place. Conspicuous and unrealistic standards of upkeep, as in a museum, hardly reflect an environment meant to be used.

The philosophical underpinning of the Market's conversion reflects this lack of contrivance in the landscape: Nothing should stand for something that never existed. The head of the Mercer Management Company, the major property owner and the prime force in conversion, articulates this philosophy. To a variable degree

neighbors have adopted the philosophy. Mark Mercer believes that preconceived ideas should not be imposed on buildings. He prefers "to use the building to suggest solutions—to enter into a conversation with the building and to draw responses from it." He strives to retain the basic style of buildings, to establish harmony with the original design. He also recognizes that the use of modern touches can conform quite well to his principles as the buildings and the spaces within and around them are converted to new commercial and residential uses.

Time has allowed and continues to allow for such innovation in design. The Market is a concept, to be sure, but its design was never conceived as a whole package, the market was never cut from whole cloth. The material manifestation of the concept is constantly being reworked as structures are adapted and converted. The concept, in Mercer's words, is simple:

The Old Market depends for its success on having a different character from suburban communities or shopping centers, from commercial strips and from today's downtown sections, different even from too quaint restorations. The character we see in it and would like to enhance is that of a residential and commercial community

which is also a cultural center. It should, for example, be a focal point for such civilized activities as the arts, fashion, cuisine, etc. The atmosphere we wish is one of creativity, simplicity and style.

Consequently, Mercer Management imposes its own design review on lessees:

Each individual business adds to or detracts from the whole effect and feeling of the area. For this reason, in addition to seeking businesses of a nature which contributes to our goal, we find it essential, in order to preserve and improve in the character of the Old Market, to restrict our tenants in the matter of decoration.

Restrictions apply largely to principal façade changes, garish signs, flashing lights, and other "undesirable elements" which might otherwise appear. The code is largely subjective. Too objective a code would stifle imagination.

Meaning of the Market

Ironically, the success of the Mercers and the relative success at redevelopment of the adjacent CBD has encouraged imitation—the worst form of flattery. Mercer says that recent historicist decoration of a hotel in the Market trivializes the building by

forcing associations, much as advertisers appeal to consumers with a positive image that has nothing to do with a product. On the other hand, while Mercer does not approve the use of a pagoda canopy for a new oriental restaurant in an original structure in the Market, at least it is frank. In addition, the current zeal for redevelopment in downtown Omaha, which was spurred by the apparent success of Omaha's new Central Park Mall and related adaptive reuse projects a few blocks away, has had a bittersweet effect on the Market. Pedestrian traffic to the Market has increased as mall-goers search out entertainment. However, the expansion of office-building construction and provision for parking threatens the stock of older buildings available between the Market and the Mall and within the designated National Register District.

As a result of such varied but wholly expectable intrusions and assaults in and about the Market, for the first time since the passage of Omaha's preservation ordinance in 1977 Market owners have expressed very real interest for local designation of the Market as a historic district. The owners wish to impose design review on the alteration of any more structures, to preserve the contemporary character of the Market as a converted warehouse district, not to certify history. This design-



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review process had previously been the impediment to owner concurrence for local designation. It will become the vehicle for imposing guidelines to protect the Market from preservation polychromy, pagoda canopies, demolition, and historic preservation.

Because the Market is unique, universal standards—no matter how flexible in intent—are inappropriate. Again, too objective a code would stifle imaginative design. Thus, the Omaha Preservation Commission has worked closely with Market owners to produce a set of guidelines that enhance conversion, not necessarily preservation, by requiring public hearing and commission and city council approval for demolition. The guidelines suggest appropriate and inappropriate ways to convert structures and place strict limits only on signage. The guidelines, in effect, reflect what Mercer Management has long practiced: Nothing should stand for something that never existed.

Conclusion

The experience of Omaha's Old Market raises serious questions about the practice of historic preservation. People are clearly attracted to converted warehouse districts. That will not change. What causes the attraction? Authenticity, antiquarianism, historicism,

or the feel of a place? Need design of converted warehouse districts, or for that matter any historic districts, be contrived to ensure authenticity or antiquarianism or historicism? Need standards for preservation be so explicit and be applied so rigorously that they produce conceit?

It is one thing to outlaw sandblasting of brick exteriors and to require that mullions conform to original plans. It is quite another to deny imaginative design that maintains a structure's integrity while harmoniously employing modern design touches that may alter appearance and create something new and bold that avoids contrivance. Avoiding contrivance, as Omaha's Old Market does, encourages the integration and association of structures and elements within structures that transcend historical period or architectural style. Avoiding contrivance allows for rethinking and reworking designs, for continued conversion. Avoiding contrivance means not invoking a history that never was and does not create pseudoplaces.

- 9 **Frankness** The addition of a pagoda canopy to the front of a Market warehouse on Howard Street is at least frank. (Photograph by Joseph Wood)

NOTES

- 1 Robert B. Riley, "Speculations on the New American Landscapes," 24 *Landscape* 3(1980), p. 6.
- 2 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York, NY: Random House, 1961), p. 187.
- 3 Peirce F. Lewis, "The Future of the Past: Our Clouded Vision of Historic Preservation," 7 *Pioneer America* 2(July, 1975), pp. 1–20.
- 4 John Fraser Hart, "The Bypass Strip as an Ideal Landscape," 72 *Geographical Review* 2(April, 1982), pp. 218–223.
- 5 Donald W. Meinig, "Symbolic Landscapes," *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, edited by D. W. Meinig (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 184.
- 6 Press release on Severence Center, July, 1984.
- 7 Riley, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
- 8 Grady Clay, *Close-up: How to Read the American City* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1973), p. 38.
- 9 See W. Brown Morton and Gary L. Hume, *The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation Projects* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1980), which are not intended to be so inflexibly applied.
- 10 National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Old Market Historic District (Lincoln, NE: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1979).