

Places

\$5.00

A Quarterly Journal
Of Environmental Design

Published by The MIT Press
for the College of
Environmental Design,
University of California,
Berkeley
and the
School of Architecture
and Planning,
Massachusetts Institute
of Technology

**Chester, England: Urban Design
Ideas from an Ancient Source**
Warren Boeschstein

**New Design Parameters for Healthy
Places**
Roslyn Lindheim

**Beyond the Last Resort: The Case of
Public Housing in Houston**
Dana Cuff

Thoughts on Visualizing Thoughts
Jan Digerud and Jon Lundberg

**Landscape Architecture: Making a
Place for Art**
Catherine M. Howett

Shadows in Ruskin's Lamp of Power
Kent Bloomer

River Candles
Joyce Earley Lyndon

**The Poetry of Place: Chapman's
Homer, *The Iliad***
David Sofield

Square to the Road, Hogs to the East
Robert B. Riley

ISSN 0731-0455

Volume 2, Number 4

Places

A Quarterly Journal Of Environmental Design

Editor

Donlyn Lyndon

Consulting Editor

William L. Porter

Founding Editor

Donald Appleyard

Sponsors

Richard Bender

John de Monchaux

Assistant Editors

Alice Wingwall

Design

Marc Treib

Production Editor

Jean LeGwin

Editorial Assistants

Regina Davis

Charlotte Sproul

Contributing Board

Stanford Anderson

Clare Cooper Marcus

Lois Craig

John Habraken

Gary Hack

Randolph Hester

Allan Jacobs

Spiro Kostof

Ray Lifchez

Roger Montgomery

John R. Myer

Lisa Peattie

Marc Treib

**Chester, England: Urban Design
Ideas from an Ancient Source** 3
Warren Boeschstein

**New Design Parameters for Healthy
Places** 17
Roslyn Lindheim

**Beyond the Last Resort: The Case of
Public Housing in Houston** 28
Dana Cuff

**Thoughts on Visualizing
Thoughts** 44
Jan Digerud and Jon Lundberg

**Landscape Architecture: Making a
Place for Art** 52
Catherine M. Howett

**Shadows in Ruskin's Lamp of
Power** 61
Kent Bloomer

River Candles 67
Joyce Earley Lyndon

**The Poetry of Place: Chapman's
Homer, *The Iliad*** 70
David Sofield

**Square to the Road, Hogs to the
East** 72
Robert B. Riley

Caring about Places: Levels of Involvement

Last year PLACES asked one of its authors to write about an artist's proposal for some gardens in New York City. In a subsequent discussion, he indicated that the project we described was politics, not a garden; a garden was plantings, with vistas and paths. We countered that no garden could be apolitical.

Certainly the placement and availability of land, for either public or private use and enjoyment, stems from basic political conditions that determine the types of investment that will be protected and supported. What is the nature of the spaces that a community produces and how can their users share them? Are spaces allowed for nonowners who live nearby or for visitors who pass through a place? What are open or covert controls on the actual use or passage through a place or on the views allowed to those who do not physically enter the space? How does a community provide for its citizens to develop a sense of well-being, of belonging? In what ways can citizens take part in the landscape around them, in gardens of the public realm as well as in secretive backyards?

As the urban political and economic landscape becomes more complex, enclaves develop, where citizens seek to protect their own investments. Some citizens wish to exclude, as in Dearborn, Michigan, where residents would like to close its parks to nonresidents. Some citizens simply wish to stay put, to resist eviction by city housing authorities that have been caught up in the Monopoly game of the city,

where speculative land prices have turned social housing projects into potentially profitable land holdings. Balanced against the rising costs of maintenance, decreases in federal funding, and the prospect of selling out, the emotional investments that residents have made in a place count for little with authorities until they are politicized and made evident.

Designers can make the possibilities evident by exploring the potentials of not only specific places but the vistas and paths of the imagination. Designers also need to be able to recognize opportunities for investment that are appropriate for each situation.

It might follow that shared spaces, public places, would be the result of a set of agreements about what such spaces might be like and how they might be used. In the cases of extreme poverty or great affluence, however, such places will more likely be the result of bitter disagreement.

Our common places may develop from long-range views, formal invention of urban vistas and preserves, or the close-grained tenacity of inch-by-inch maintenance of a few plants and the placement of a few stone steps by the front door. Detailed investments of care become platforms for new views of self and place in a long struggle for some rooted sense of dignity, that is, for power of place.

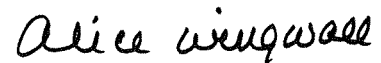
Public places result from the continual jockeying of formal design and evolving patterns of use and

power. The middle ground consists of perceptive understanding, analysis and reuse of neglected places within established towns, and inventive new patterns using already existing formal devices to touch the imagination. A river may become a festive floating trail, a poem may wrap the most primal places in a coverlet of suggestive landscape, the keen eye may find liveliness in shadows.

Our most engaging places are formed of three kinds of investment that show up only indirectly on the balance sheets: formal invention, tenacious maintenance, and evocative mediation.



Donlyn Lyndon



Alice Wingwall

Chester, England: Urban Design Ideas from an Ancient Source

Warren Boeschstein

The elevated walkway system of Chester, England, is a remarkable urban design achievement, remarkable because what began in an unplanned and casual manner resulted in a cohesively organized town of extraordinary character. Successive generations recognized, sustained, and marvelously elaborated on the advantages of the system. The walkway network today encompasses the Rows, which are pedestrian galleries recessed from and parallel to the streets one level below; a promenade on the old town wall that encircles the city center; an elegant Victorian arcade; and a modern enclosed shopping precinct. Consequently, today one can walk through a convenient and gracious network of elevated paths and feel intimately involved with the activities of the city.

Origins and History

The Romans established Chester in 76 A.D. as a military base to subdue Wales and northern England. They strategically located the remote outpost at the crossing of a major overland route and the River Dee, which was navigable to this point.¹ The site on a land rise of more than sixty feet was further protected by the river, which wrapped around two sides. The geometric layout of the typical Roman colonial plan remains today and provides orientation for the elevated walkway as it branches out from the town's center at the Cross, the intersection of the Roman roads.

After Roman military control collapsed in the fourth century



1 Stores are located at both levels of the Rows. Eastgate Row (background) is more popular, since it is wider and more continuous than Northgate Row (foreground). Most of the "medieval" buildings actually date from the late nineteenth century. Photographs by Warren Boeschstein, 1982.



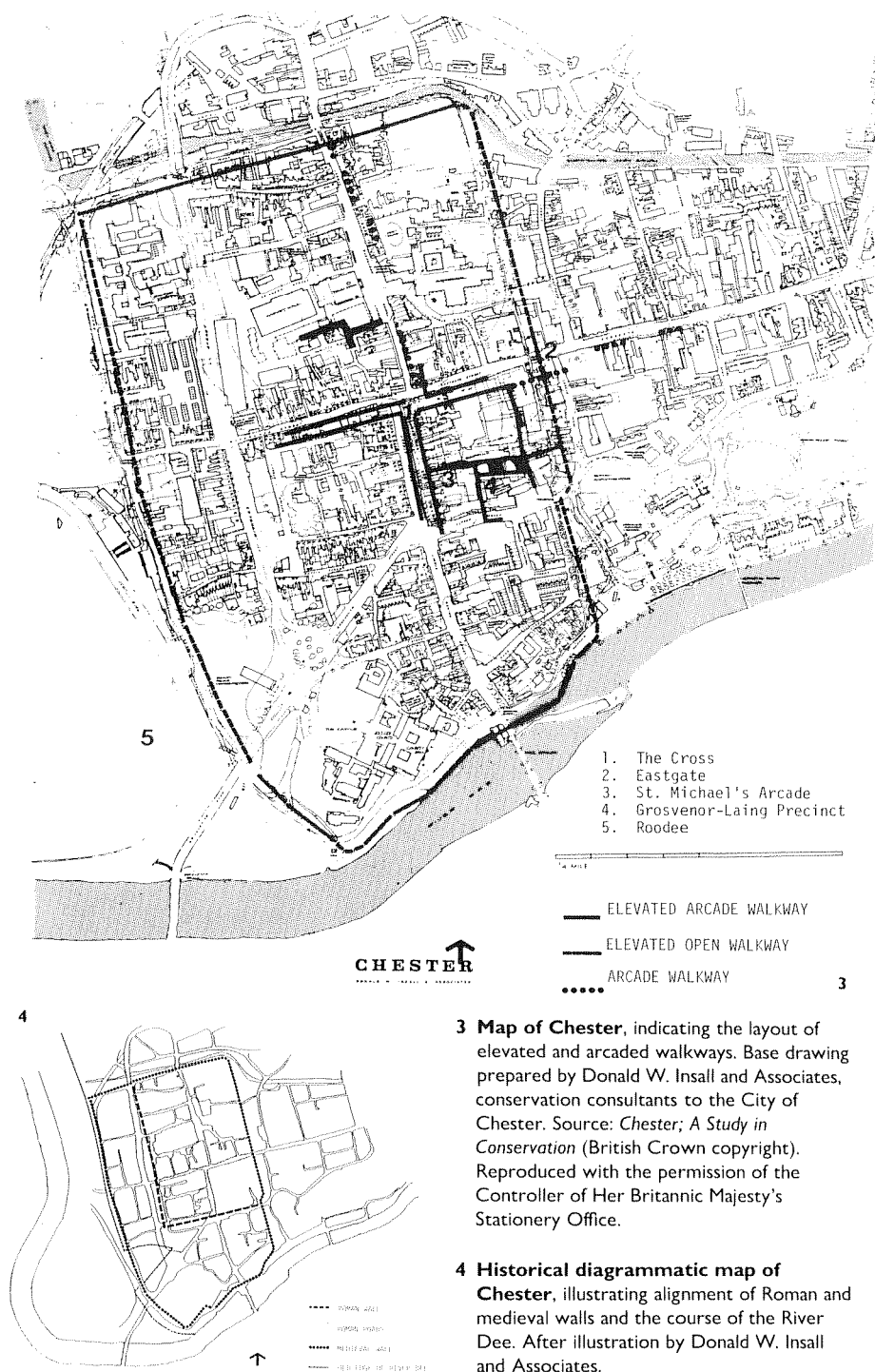
2

2 The Rows are galleries at the second level. These public right-of-ways have been retained even as the buildings enclosing them were replaced.

A.D., the town's population dwindled and Roman buildings fell into ruin. During the Middle Ages, the Saxons re-established political stability and in the tenth century rebuilt the town wall, using the Roman wall foundations on the north and east but enlarging the town's perimeter on the south and west to enclose an area three times that of the original Roman camp. Chester flourished as a trading center in the following years. This period of growth culminated in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when Chester was considered one of England's most important cities.²

There are documented references to the existence of the Rows dating from the thirteenth century;³ however, the specific origins are disputed.⁴ Currently, there are two theories considered most plausible. Advocates of the first argue that as Cestrians (citizens of Chester) rebuilt their town during the Middle Ages, they found it easier to construct over and in front of old Roman ruins rather than to remove debris. On new, filled in, and elevated ground, they erected arcades with upper floors overhanging passageways below. As the town prospered, they excavated down, exposed the lower level, and eventually used it. The fact that the upper level of Rows shops generally coincides with the old Roman building line substantiates this development theory.

Advocates of the second theory offer a simpler explanation. They believe the Rows began as ground surface arcades on the high topography where the town was originally



3 Map of Chester, indicating the layout of elevated and arcaded walkways. Base drawing prepared by Donald W. Insall and Associates, conservation consultants to the City of Chester. Source: *Chester; A Study in Conservation* (British Crown copyright). Reproduced with the permission of the Controller of Her Britannic Majesty's Stationery Office.

4 Historical diagrammatic map of Chester, illustrating alignment of Roman and medieval walls and the course of the River Dee. After illustration by Donald W. Insall and Associates.



5

settled. As the town expanded down the hill slope, the Rows remained more or less level, becoming ever higher above street level and eventually occurring at the upper floor level. Remnants today of ground level arcades at the highest levels of the old settlement as well as evidence that the Rows extended further south support this theory.⁵ In either case, the lower level was initially used for storage and occasionally for shops. Gradually the shops became more numerous. Residences were primarily at the Rows level and above, which permitted neighbors to communicate easily with each other. Only in the last 150 years has retail activity expanded significantly into the Rows level.

While the architectural character of Chester, with its densely packed

buildings, gable ends facing the street, variegated skyline, and intimate details derives from the Middle Ages, most of the buildings remaining today actually date from the eighteenth and particularly the later nineteenth century. During the later Middle Ages, Chester entered a period of decline prompted by the river silting and exacerbated by plagues, civil war, and serious fire, the latter two of which wrought considerable physical damage to the town.⁶ By the Georgian period, as Chester's economy revived, substantial rebuilding was required. The medieval town wall was no longer needed for defense, but rather than demolish it, Cestrians restored the wall (1701–1708) as an amenity, turning it into a promenade. They also replaced the four medieval gates, which were part of the wall, with arches

5 A panoramic view of the southern half of Chester circa 1855 by John McGahey. The Rows at the Cross on the far right and the perimeter promenade along the wall are evident.

(1769–1808), thus spanning the entry streets and further facilitating movement at wall as well as street levels.⁷

During the Georgian period many of the houses in the central area were rebuilt or refaced with brick, the popular building material of the time. As rebuilding occurred in the four main streets, the passageways of the Rows, which were long established as public right-of-ways, were reincorporated into new construction. Consequently, in the early nineteenth century the center of Chester was a combination of deteriorated medieval timber frame and Georgian brick buildings tied together by the Rows. Many of the older buildings in the Rows, however, were not restored.

The Victorian period saw even more vigorous rebuilding. The Victorians adopted the Tudor timber frame style to replace many of Chester's medieval and even recent Georgian buildings, confusing visitors to this day as to the authenticity of "medieval" buildings. The timber frame revival reflected Cestrians' reawakened pride in their traditions.⁸

During the Victorian period, the upper classes increasingly found the suburbs of Chester more appealing than the city center as places to live, and the working classes followed as employment opportunities emerged in surrounding areas.⁹ This shift coincided with a growth of trade based not on Chester's previous shipping economy or on industry as in the Merseyside region to

the north but on commercial, administrative, and tourist activities the city was attracting. Retail activity then expanded from street level to Rows level. Fortunately, this commercial growth was gradual and compatible with Chester's building heritage.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the local Grosvenor family, with extensive property holdings in central London, rose to national prominence as the Dukes of Westminster.¹⁰ Because of their wealth, property knowledge, and paternal interest in Chester, they became progressively more influential in the town's development. As well as being politically active, they acquired land, constructed new buildings, gave property to the city, and were instrumental in sponsoring the Victorian timber frame revival.¹¹

Over the years, the Grosvenors acquired considerable property in the southeast quadrant of the town center. In 1910 they oversaw the construction of the St. Michael's Arcade, an internal glass-covered pedestrian area. More recently and ambitiously they created the Grosvenor-Laing Precinct of 1965, which includes underground parking and servicing and involved closing a retail street. The Grosvenors and other patrons employed local architects who were knowledgeable of and sympathetic to the town's traditions. Consequently, while there may not be a building by a famous architect or one of outstanding significance, today the buildings as a whole constitute a

remarkably compatible environment.¹²

The automobile impacted Chester less than it did the majority of English towns. An inner ring road, part of which was built within the boundaries of the medieval walls, did make the center more accessible. Because the physical quality of the town was well recognized and respected, the automobile remained subordinate to it. Also, the elevated walkway system facilitated pedestrian movement above vehicular traffic. Recently, the town center at the Cross was partially closed to automobiles to control the erosive influence of vehicles in this area.

Chester has also recently benefited from concerted planning. In 1966 it was selected as one of four historic towns in England to be carefully studied to reconcile conservation efforts with contemporary requirements. Since then, Donald Insall and Associates have been acting as conservation consultants.¹³ Potent design controls facilitate the maintenance and improvement of the area. These controls, exercised through the issuance or denial of Planning Consent, govern significant details such as materials and fenestration for new and renovated buildings. Historic buildings must have Listed Building Consent for alterations that affect the character of those buildings. Both of these consents are statutory requirements emanating from national legislation. However, it has been the specific Conservation Program undertaken locally by the City of Chester, aided by



6

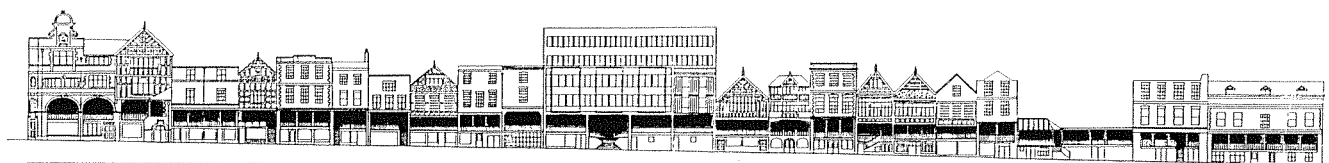
6 St. Michael's Arcade, built in 1910, is part of a larger precinct owned by the Grosvenor family. It also connects to the adjacent Rows.

consultants and the national government, that has coordinated so much positive effort over the last decade.

Characteristics of the Rows

The Rows are public right-of-ways through private property. The individual owners are required to maintain the passageways, and if they fail to do so, the city is empowered to intercede and seek compensation for repairs. Ownership parcels range from that of a small shop on one level to the sizable holdings of the Grosvenor family. Some owners have acquired property at one level across several buildings; others have assembled space vertically. The organization of the Rows has facilitated this complex ownership pattern, which in turn has contributed to the area's intimate scale. From building to building, there are frequent changes in surface materials, slight shifts in floor levels, and different displays that cumulatively contribute to the district's individuality and character.

The access points to the Rows are generally gracious and clearly announced architecturally by protruding bays and rhythm changes in column spacing. Several strategic entrances are at corners, even though at such locations they occupy potentially the most valuable retail space. The Rows, however, are not always continuous. Pedestrians are forced to move down and then up again after traversing short stretches. Since the Rows are approximately seven feet above street grade, the height



7

differential is not as serious an obstacle as more recent American skywalks, which may be thirty feet above the ground. The city, however, recognizes this inconvenience and plans to unify more of the Rows by bridging across short streets.

Commercial Aspects

The retail district of Chester clustered around the Rows is commercially very successful, enjoying the highest volume of trade for any city in Great Britain with

a population under 100,000.¹⁴ There are approximately 90,000 people living in Chester, but its commercial catchment extends far beyond and into North Wales. Clearly, Chester's commercial success is attributable in part to its unique circulation system and architectural setting. The tiered shops contribute an intensity and intimacy to one's shopping experience. One can easily compare objects, sometimes by standing at Rows level and viewing displays in the two levels of shops opposite. The sequential variety of spaces,

7 The individual character of separate buildings threaded by the public gallery of the Rows is particularly evident in these elevations. Drawings prepared by Donald W. Insall and Associates, conservation consultants to the City of Chester.



8 An access to the Rows is prominently located and announced architecturally at the Cross. Source: *Chester: A Study in Conservation* (British Crown copyright). Reproduced with the permission of the Controller of Her Britannic Majesty's Stationery Office.

levels, and outlooks are enjoyable experiences, encouraging one to explore further. With the exception of the Grosvenor Precinct, the Rows are public space, and there are spatial and architectural clues to remind one of this. For example, churches are located throughout the central area, which is virtually unheard of in American shopping centers and, indeed, rare in many American downtown retail districts.

The two pedestrian levels are complementary rather than redundant. Obviously, the lower level is most accessible. Since it is open to the sky, it is most enjoyable in sunny weather. The Rows, being more enclosed and protected, offer convenient shelter from intermittent rain and wind. There is a variety of retail space, from small shops to department stores.¹⁵ Some of the larger stores extend through several floors with access from both circulation levels. Food stores have gravitated to the lower level, and specialty retail such as jewelry, clothing, and leather goods stores have generally collected along the Rows galleries. Speciality retail, in fact, is proving to be the district's most successful commercial activity. Chester has long had a reputation for the high quality of its shops. The craftsmanship, scale, and refinement exhibited in the architecture of the city is an appropriate environment in which to display high quality goods.

Commercial rents traditionally have been highest in the Eastgate section and Grosvenor Precinct, where the Rows are more continuous, generously sized, and pedestrian-

use intensive. The Eastgate itself has been the main entrance to the town center since the Roman period, as this was the road to London and York. Beyond Eastgate, outside the walls, in the area occupied appropriately by the old Roman markets, new development for consumer retail has recently been built in floor area sizes that can no longer be conveniently accommodated within the walls. The actual rents range from a high of £45/square foot/year in the Eastgate section to a low of £5 in the Watergate section, the west end of the same street.¹⁶ The rent differential between Rows level and street level of a particular building is negligible, reflecting the balanced though dissimilar amenities of the two commercial levels.

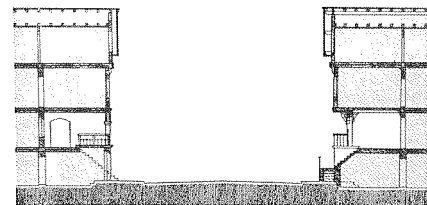


9

The Rows solve a recurring problem of retail arcades: how to display merchandise adequately when stores are recessed from the building front. In the Rows there is a three-foot wide band of space along the edge of the balcony between the walkway and street space. It is raised approximately one foot to permit entry height clearance to the stores underneath. Historically, merchants displayed goods in these bands of space. Over the years the casual displays became formalized as glass show cases. Today, they occupy only a part of this strip, allowing natural light into the walkway and views out to the street. In addition to informing shoppers of available merchandise, they also modulate the space of the passageway and provide illumination for the walkway at night.

Urban Design Qualities

Chester's elevated walkway system is a thread that elegantly sews the town together. It has an elaborate weave, permitting one to move graciously along the seams and around the fringe of the central city. It interlaces the town in a way that is informative but not intrusive. As one walks through the galleries and around the walls, one sees the activities, social groups, and historical and geographical imperatives that shaped this city. For example, from the southern walls one may view the hinterland, sense the region's geography, and begin to understand the compulsions of the original settlers who located their camp on a hill wrapped by a river. Further to the northeast, one may glimpse office buildings and the town clock, the



10

9 A band of show cases within the Rows edges one side, and views of the city beyond are framed architecturally.

10 The intimate scale of the Rows is derived from the section as well as elevation of the streets.



11

“Roman Garden” archaeological display, the cathedral in its parklike setting, and boating activities on the Union Canal. To the north one may view workers’ housing and industrial installations and to the west the Roodee, which is a racecourse and playing field.

The walkway system is also versatile. It bridges streets, provides overlooks, connects to parking garages, and at the Roodee tiers down into a stadium. That commercial activities are connected to these other experiences in a graceful and artful way enhances one’s shopping obligations and elevates them into cultural occasions.

With this variety there is also overall structure and clarity to

the elevated walkway system, largely attributable to the Roman cruciform plan, which the Rows follow, and to the encircling town wall that it incorporated. Moreover, there are sequential themes developed as one moves from the peripheral town wall to the Cross at the center. One has the clear sense of moving from open, exposed positions along the wall to protected space at the center. Since the wall promenade is at a higher elevation than the Rows, one descends from the wall down to the Rows, further contributing to a sense of protection. At the center one is enclosed within the shelter of the Rows, the confines of the street space, the height of the town wall, and the barrier of encircling waterways. There are also similarities and contrasts between

11 Distant views of the River Dee and surrounding countryside can be enjoyed from the southern section of the town wall promenade.

the types of views one experiences within the Rows and from the town wall. In the Rows there are immediate, intimate views contained by the continuous line of shops on one side. On the other side there are more open views to the street beyond. From the promenade along the town wall views to the townside are generally more confined, while outlooks to the country on the other side are expansive.

Within the Rows there is a rich hierarchical rhythm resulting from periodic entry stairs between street and Rows level, expression of buildings as units, column spacings, display cases, and store signs. The Rows offer wonderful vantage points to view the street scene below, appreciate the well-crafted buildings opposite and the overall street silhouette, usually terminated by a church tower and the town wall bridging the street. When viewed from below or across the street, the bays of the Rows provide appropriate frames in which clusters of people may gather. Moreover, because of the richness and delicacy of detail in railings, building facades, and ceilings, the Rows appear active even at times when there are few people in them.

Chester, with its enviable qualities, is not without problems. Early in the nineteenth century, Cestrians began a residential exodus to the outlying areas that has not been reversed. The result is a large amount of unoccupied upper floor space in the city center that is proving to be an intractable

problem.¹⁷ Approximately 25 percent of the floors above Rows level are partially or completely unoccupied.¹⁸ It is difficult to gain access to the upper floors of some buildings because of awkward interior organization, and it is also difficult to assemble large uninterrupted quantities of space for contemporary uses such as offices. Because of the extensive vacancies, too many of the buildings are slowly deteriorating through neglect, which is exacerbated by water damage caused by leakage through water troughs located over party walls.¹⁹ With few people living in the central area, the downtown is inactive at night. It is also difficult to service, although the Grosvenor Precinct has succeeded in overcoming this problem by installing an underground delivery area. Additional opportunities for service access are from the rear of other buildings.

Conclusion

The development of Chester's elevated walkway system represents the cumulative refinement of an eloquent urban design language. The walkway system has responded to a variety of historical issues and continues to address contemporary problems. It is safe, comfortable, and usually convenient. It possesses an overall structure that allows it to be easily understood, and, at the same time, it is intricate and intriguing to explore. It is a path of revelation through the city, educating users about the customs of the people and the nature of the place. It is as beautiful to look out

from as it is to look at and is coordinated with the architecture of the city to a degree not yet realized in our contemporary developments. Moreover, the civic nature of these public thoroughfares are maintained and even celebrated. These clearly are qualities for other cities to pursue in new developments.

In the last twenty-five years elevated walkways have been built as joint public/private ventures in the centers of American cities such as Minneapolis, St. Paul, Baltimore, Cincinnati, and Houston. Generally, they have been viewed as successful. In some cases, these walkways have been credited with significantly stabilizing and reviving faltering downtown economies. Elevated walkways, however, are appropriate only under certain conditions. They should be considered for central areas that cannot grow laterally because they are already too extended or because there are physical, historical, or land use boundaries that restrict expansion. Elevated walkways are also particularly appropriate for areas in which through traffic severs major pedestrian paths and for cities with uncomfortable climates.

When linked with parking garages and mass transit stops, provided with clear entrances, arranged in the direction of pedestrian traffic flow, sited to take advantage of sloping topography and weather conditioned, elevated walkways have been enthusiastically adopted by downtown workers, shoppers, and visitors. Relative to Chester,



12

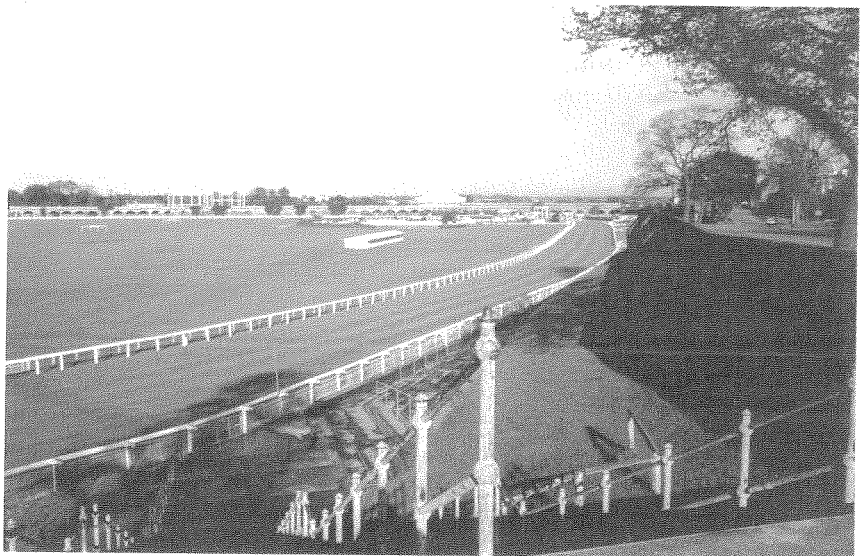


13

12 View along town wall at Eastgate of offices, upper level shop windows, and town clock.

13 The "Roman Garden," an archaeological repository of Chester's past, is adjacent to the town wall.

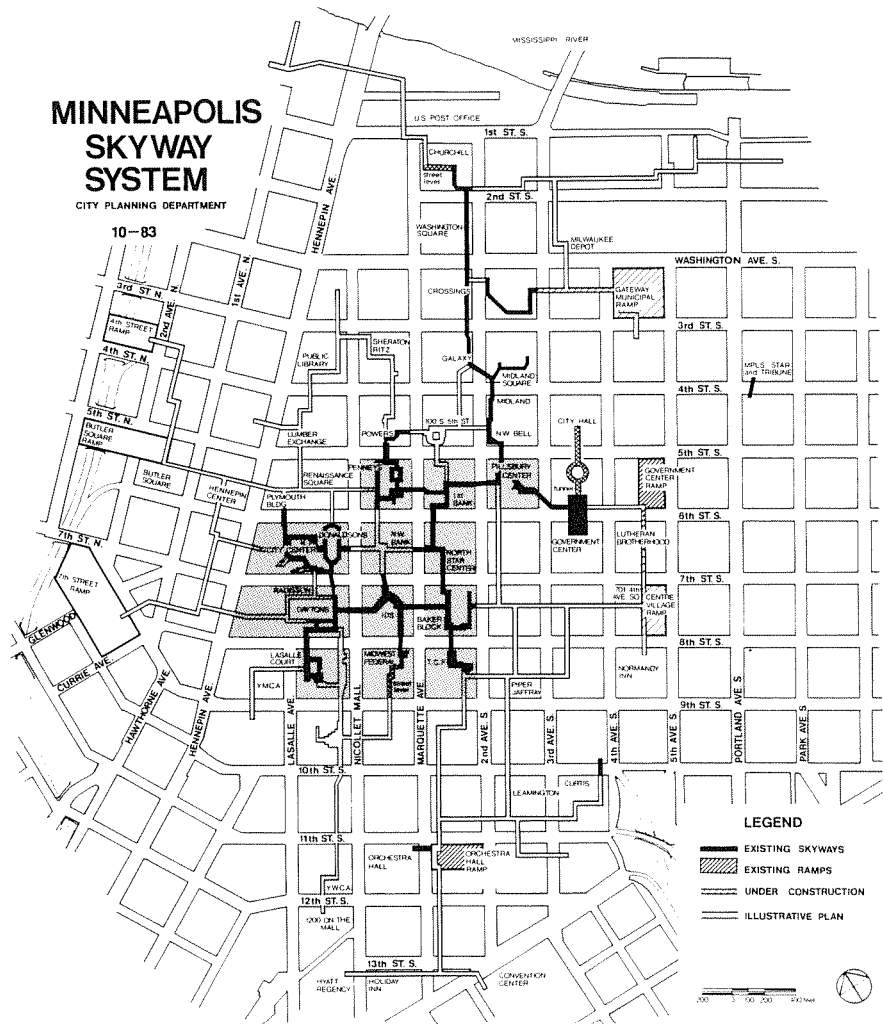
14 A racecourse, bounded on one side by the town wall promenade, fills a plain where the River Dee meandered before it changed course.



14

these systems have been adapted to larger scales of activity, different and often more difficult cultural, economic, and technical problems, and in the case of northern cities, more severe climates. Moreover, these recent networks have largely been retrofitted onto existing buildings that were not originally designed to accommodate upper level walkways. The design options have thus been severely restricted.

Because of the different conditions underlying contemporary systems and that of Chester, it is, in a sense, unfair to press comparisons too insistently, but by making comparisons, we may gain insights into the use of elevated walkways. The skywalks of Minneapolis and St. Paul represent one prevalent type of recent development. These pedestrian routes bridge streets at midblock locations and penetrate into privately owned buildings rather than paralleling the public streets and sidewalks below. Understandably, by doing so they reduce exposure of the walkway to the harsh winter climates and maximize both walkway edges for commercial use. Yet, pedestrians on these skywalks are, compared to those of Chester, deprived of orientation to and perception of the city through which they move. Moreover, the skywalks are also privately policed, which tends to exclude certain otherwise acceptable types of public behavior. The skywalks have extensive but controlled hours of operation, which again reminds people that they are passing through private property.



15

15 Downtown Minneapolis skywalks bridge streets at midblock locations and penetrate through buildings rather than edge the streets, as they do in Chester.

The elevated walkways in downtown Baltimore demonstrate another approach. These walkways are generally detached from buildings and are treated more as architectural elements to shape space. They generally are not edged with activities or developed as social space but rather serve as channels through which people move from one point to another. The elevated walkways do not complement street activity, often being far from the street or high above it.

Even recent American shopping centers have similarities in form with the Rows of Chester. Many have two layers of circulation and stores, but, unlike the Rows of Chester, they are invariably disconnected from surrounding activity by extensive parking lots. The newer shopping centers being built in city and even suburban centers offer greater promise. Since these complexes are usually controlled by a single developer, they could approach Chester's integration between circulation and buildings patterns and sympathetically connect a complex to surrounding areas. Possibly, through the provision of long-term leases or buyout options for shopkeepers, the spontaneity and individualization demonstrated at Chester could be incorporated.

The systematic yet eccentric pedestrian network of Chester provides a rich and rewarding historical vantage point from which to view contemporary efforts. By following its example in future development, we can build elevated

walkways that not only function as channels of movement but inform us as to the extent and character of a city's activities and thus orient us to the overall public realm.

NOTES

- 1 Nikolaus Pevsner and Edward Hubbard, *Cheshire*, The Buildings of England Series (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 133.
- 2 David Lloyd, "A Legacy of Roman Planning, Chester I," *Country Life* (January 3, 1963), p. 6.
- 3 Ibid., p. 7.
- 4 For a discussion of theories on the origins of the Rows, see Brian Harris, *Chester*, Bartholomew City Guides, (Edinburgh and London: John Bartholomew and Son, 1979), pp. 20–21; P. H. Lawson and J. T. Smith, "The Rows of Chester: Two Interpretations," *Journal of the Chester and North Wales Architectural, Archaeological and Historical Society* 45 (Chester: G. R. Griffith, 1958), pp. 1–42; and Donald W. Insall, *Conservation in Action: Chester's Bridgegate* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1982), p. 23.
- 5 Letter to the author, September 26, 1983, from S. R. Williams, Chester County Planning Department.
- 6 Harris, *Chester*, p. 17.
- 7 David Lloyd, "An English Carcassonne, Chester II," *Country Life* (January 10, 1963), pp. 68–69.
- 8 Ibid., p. 71.
- 9 Harris, pp. 30–31.
- 10 Ibid., pp. 23, 31.
- 11 Ibid., p. 35.
- 12 Conversation between author and Oliver Bott, Chester County Conservation Group, September 29, 1982.
- 13 Donald W. Insall, *Chester, A Study in Conservation* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1968), p. 17a.
- 14 Conversation between author and G. Cross, Chester City Council Office, September 29, 1982.
- 15 There are 1,140,000 net square feet of commercial space in central Chester. Letter to the author from G. Cross,

Chester City Council office, October 14, 1983.

16 Ibid.

17 There are currently 500,000 square feet of vacant, grossly underused floor space in the upper floors. Ibid.

18 Insall, *Conservation in Action*, p. 122.

19 Ibid.

New Design Parameters for Healthy Places

Roslyn Lindheim

Introduction

Ideas about health and disease have influenced the design and location of cities, communities, and buildings since early times. The Greek physician Hippocrates described in "Air Water and Places" the appropriate locations for a healthy city based on the terrain and the winds. It was only in the mid-nineteenth century, however, that ideas about health and the environment took legislative form and achieved major importance in the policies elaborated by city planning, housing, and health departments. Conditions in the new industrialized towns of the nineteenth century were deplorable. Masses of people lived in savagely deteriorated and debased environments. Diseases such as typhus, cholera, yellow fever, and tuberculosis all took heavy tolls.

The prime objective of early nineteenth-century reformers and sanitarians was to bring into the city fresh air, pure water, adequate disposal for waste, green open space, and sunlight. City planning was greatly influenced by this sanitary movement, which was seen as an antidote to the evils of industrialization.

While these issues are still very important, there are new factors relating health and disease in the twentieth century that must be given serious consideration.

First, the infectious diseases that previously decimated populations are no longer the main causes of morbidity and mortality in the industrialized nations of the world.

The main causes of death today are coronary heart disease, strokes, cancer, mental illness, accidents, and suicide.

Second, a number of epidemiological studies indicate that the new diseases occur most frequently among those with few social contacts, lower hierarchical positions, and those disconnected from their biological and cultural heritage. The primary factors affecting these diseases seem social rather than sanitary. Leonard Syme, an epidemiologist, and I have been looking at this new evidence over the past ten years in a class called "Health, Stress, and the Environment."¹ With each successive class, it has become more evident that the health issues impacting the environment in the late twentieth century can no longer be governed by nineteenth-century standards. This article explores some of the implications for environmental design based on these new findings.

The Built Environment, Health, and Disease

It is generally believed that diseases are caused by a disease agent (for example, a bacterium, a virus, a carcinogen) and the breakdown of a person's—that is, the host's—ability to resist disease. The key role of resistance is only now being understood, and one theory suggests that some disease agents may be present all the time in one's system or in the environment and one "gets" the disease when the resistance of the host breaks down. This breakdown can occur when a

person is under emotional or physical stress, which can derive from reactions to the social and physical environment.

Not everyone gets sick, and some groups of people get sicker than others. Stated another way, certain groups of people are "high risk"; that is, they belong to groups that have a high risk of getting sicknesses of all kinds. Some will get rheumatism, some heart disease, some cancer, some ulcers, some asthma.

Studies of people who get sick most often and most seriously indicate that the people in these groups are in some way "out of connection" and lack meaningful social and natural connectedness. These are the lonely ones, people disconnected from family, friends, society, and other types of social supports. These are the people at the lowest ends of hierarchies, disconnected from a sense of pride and control over their lives. These are the people disconnected from their natural environment and the rhythms and cycles of life. While none of these studies are conclusive, the cumulative evidence is impressive and based on the work of a wide variety of investigators using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The evidence is certainly strong enough to warrant serious study of the implications for environmental design.

The environment is a way of enabling connections to occur. The location and proximity between buildings and spaces enhance or impede the interaction of people.



The availability of spaces both inside and outside buildings provides the opportunities for various activities to occur easily. The connections between inside and outside also permit an awareness of and contact to the natural environment. The symbolic interpretation given to buildings and places affects the emotional response of groups as well as individuals. The size of organizations and their corresponding space have an effect on the level of participation.

Because the same environment means different things to different people depending on background, age, culture, and conditions of life, there can be no easy environmental recipes. The relationship between the environment and health is certainly not simple or linear, and a "healthy environment" may not necessarily be one that fits an idealized architectural or planners' image but, rather, one that provides a range of opportunities for its inhabitants to shape the conditions that affect their lives.

Focusing on the factors in the environment that engender emotional or physical stress in no way implies that disease agents are not important. The first premise of any healthy environment is that it must "do no harm." It must not contain agents detrimental to one's health, agents that can cause diseases, such as carcinogenic building materials and air conditioning systems that have caused Legionnaire's Disease. Nor should buildings do harm by destroying the natural environment.

Actions that disturb the water table or raze mountains that affect the ability of the ecosystem to regenerate and renew itself must be curbed. Destroying nature in the building of places jeopardizes the very basis of human sustenance.

A Word About the "Environment"

The third edition of the *Oxford Universal Dictionary* refers to an 1827 definition of the environment as "the condition or influences under which any person or thing lives or is developed." This broad concept has been used to describe everything from the air we breathe, to the skyline, social relationships, temperature, and disease-carrying organisms.

In writing this paper I first tried to define the environment by distinguishing between the man-made environment, the social environment, the natural environment, and the symbolic environment. I was forced to recognize that the environment is none of these things independently. Rather, the environment is a result of the constant interaction between natural and man-made spatial forms, social processes, and relationships between individuals and groups.

Social Connectedness

Numerous studies now indicate that people with social supports get less sick than those without. Married people get less sick than single people; people who belong to groups and organizations get less sick than loners. It is not just the connections to people that are

important, however, but the connection to what is social in one's culture and in one's past.

The social epidemiologist John Cassel noted that lack of "meaningful social contacts" resulted in higher rates of tuberculosis, schizophrenia, alcoholism, accidents, and suicide. Additional evidence supporting this view has been accumulated since Cassel's paper.² In a study done in Alameda County, California, Lisa Berkman observed increased mortality among a large group of persons identified as having fewer friends and social relationships. In that study, social ties were assessed in terms of marital status, contact with friends and relatives, church membership, and affiliations with organizations. Those with few social ties had mortality rates two to five times higher than those with more ties.³ Similar statistics have been observed repeatedly in studies of bereaved persons.

Several years ago, a study was made of the increase in coronary heart disease. In the San Francisco Bay Area, it was found that the Japanese who had become "Westernized" had fewer friends and social relationships than those who retained traditional Japanese cultural patterns and that they correspondingly had coronary heart disease rates two to five times higher.⁴ Other research findings are consistent with this theme. In studies of complications during pregnancy and delivery, 90 percent of women who had both fewer supportive social relationships and many life changes before and

during pregnancy, had one or more complications during pregnancy and delivery.⁵

There also exists a substantial body of literature showing that people who have experienced changes in job, place of residence, social status, and marital status have higher rates of many diseases, including heart disease, lung cancer, sarcoidosis, and schizophrenia. These life changes may be seen as additional examples of the effect on disease rates of the interruption of interpersonal ties.

Given this evidence, it is very difficult to justify the urban renewal and slum clearance policies that have destroyed and are continuing to destroy the social connectedness of people. A number of studies document the effect on people of the destruction of their communities. A classic study was made by the urban sociologist Herb Gans in the West End of Boston, Massachusetts. This community of 20,000 comprised persons largely of Italian ancestry. In 1953 the West End was declared a slum, and by that label it was implied that the physical condition of the neighborhood was so bad that it could adversely affect the health of the residents as well as contribute to crime, vice, and other evils.⁶

A later study of the reactions of families moved from the West End yielded an explicit comparison between feelings of bereavement and feelings of residents about the destruction of their neighborhood. This study concluded that



2

for the majority it seems quite precise to speak of their reactions as expressions of grief. These are manifested in feelings of painful loss, continued longing, general depressive tone, frequent symptoms of psychological, social or somatic distress, active work required to adapt to the alternate situation, sense of helplessness, occasional expressions of both direct and displaced anger, and tendencies to idealize the lost place. At the most extreme, these reactions of grief are intense, deeply felt, and, at times, overwhelming—similar in many ways to the grief experienced at the death of a loved one.

The result of these massive dislocations has been extensively described and documented by other investigators, including Jacobs, Marris, and Young & Willmott.

Although there are no in-depth studies of the increase in mortality or morbidity of those who have undergone massive dislocations, it seems reasonable to identify this group as high risk because of the obvious break in social ties.

Today the same dislocation is taking

place in San Francisco's Tenderloin and in the downtown areas of other major U.S. cities where people who have managed (in spite of loneliness, poverty, and stigmatization) to fashion lives for themselves suddenly are losing their neighborhoods and hotels as part of a nationwide gentrification and urban renewal policy. In the process old buildings are bought either to be renovated and turned into private homes or condominiums or they are bought to be torn down and replaced by office buildings or hotels requiring prime downtown locations. In some cases old neighborhoods were replaced by public housing. The demolition of housing is justified on the grounds that it is substandard and therefore detrimental to health, yet the destruction may lead to greater ill health through the severance of social ties, homelessness, grief, and despair. What is ironic in all of these instances is that measures intended to better the health situation of people and their places have in fact ignored the basic human need for connectedness. In the name of health and sanitation, we are in fact breaking connectedness, thus rendering places less healthful than before.

A very positive example of using the environment as a means of sustaining social connectedness is On Lok, located in San Francisco, California. On Lok operates congregate housing and day health centers for the frail elderly. They very consciously placed their three centers in the heart of the urban community they served so that elderly people would be in an environment where they had spent most of their lives. A busy central location enables greater contact with friends and relatives from the neighborhood.

Hierarchy, Self-Esteem, and Meaning

Those lowest in the pecking order always get sickest in any hierarchy. A recent study by Michael Marmot shows that people in the lowest echelon in the Civil Service in Britain get more of all diseases—heart disease, lung cancer, arthritis, and mental illness—than those higher in the system. "Throughout history the poor have gotten more of all illnesses. We have attributed the higher disease rates of the poor to their unsanitary living conditions, inadequate food, increased exposure to hazards of all



3

kinds. But this does not explain the higher disease rates in the lower ranks of other hierarchies that include people earning relatively substantial incomes. Why do junior executives have higher rates of disease than senior executives; workers get sicker than managers; managers get sicker than bosses? We are beginning to understand that there seems to be something else about being at the lower rung of any ladder that erodes our resistance to disease, that there are, as termed by Sennett and Cobb, "hidden injuries of class." One hypothesis given to explain the above suggests that being at the lowest rung of any hierarchy is perceived in this culture as failure, and it is failure and low self-esteem that is personalized and internalized and somehow compromises a person's resistance to disease.

The design of the built environment constantly reminds us of our position in every hierarchy. The size and quality of space have always been indicators of social status, whether it is the size of a house, the exclusiveness of a neighborhood, or the proximity to a window in an office building. Housing projects in the United States for the very poor

cry out with every status symbol available in the architectural language of our culture that those living there are not worth much. Offices and factories carry their own system for identifying status through allocation of parking, availability of lunch facilities, the location of desks. The location of the secretarial office is routinely predictable: the boss occupies the outer office with the windows and views; the support staff is clustered in the interior.

Culturally we give people few mechanisms for gaining satisfaction and self-esteem outside of climbing up the hierarchial ladder. Yet a sense of meaning can be achieved with so little. In a study of residents in a nursing home it was found that residents who had a plant to take care of lived much longer than those who did not. People gain satisfaction and self-esteem from many diverse activities: gardening, caring for others, participating in the community, building and altering homes.

The San Francisco, California, Tenderloin offers an example of how people, in what is apparently the most minimal living circumstances,

2, 3 A busy central location enables greater contact with friends and relatives from the neighborhood. Photographs courtesy of On Lok.

have found meaning in their ability to collectively change the environment. In one of the old single resident occupancy hotels, the tenants cooperated in the renovation. Every floor now has a shared, beautifully equipped kitchen and living room. The toilet and shower areas were redone. The natural wood of the hallways was sanded and refinished by the residents until it gleamed. The roof was transformed by two tenants into a beautiful garden.

An elderly resident of the Alexander Hotel, Freda de Costa, decorated the wall of the laundryroom with a mural depicting what life was like when she was a child. In another hotel several blocks away she recruited other residents to help paint another mural.

Groups of people working with The Tenderloin Senior Outreach Program are planning roof gardens, operating minimarkets within the hotels so that elderly residents can get fresh vegetables, and campaigning for safer streets. It is in this process of working together and changing the environment that people find meaning in their lives and achieve greater well-being.

Participation and Control

Control means that one has options and choices. People are diverse and complex; thus not everyone wants to control things in the same way and for the same reasons. Yet we live in a culture that tends to standardize everything, and the architecture follows suit with its own norms about standardization.

The trend today is toward more and more technically complex environments with fewer and fewer options for individual control. The operation and control of large mechanized office buildings and factories are out of the ken of most people. The same is true of high-rise apartments and housing projects. The larger any building or institution, the less it fosters democratic participation or provides a sense of control to people who work and reside in it, and the more dangerous it is to people's health.

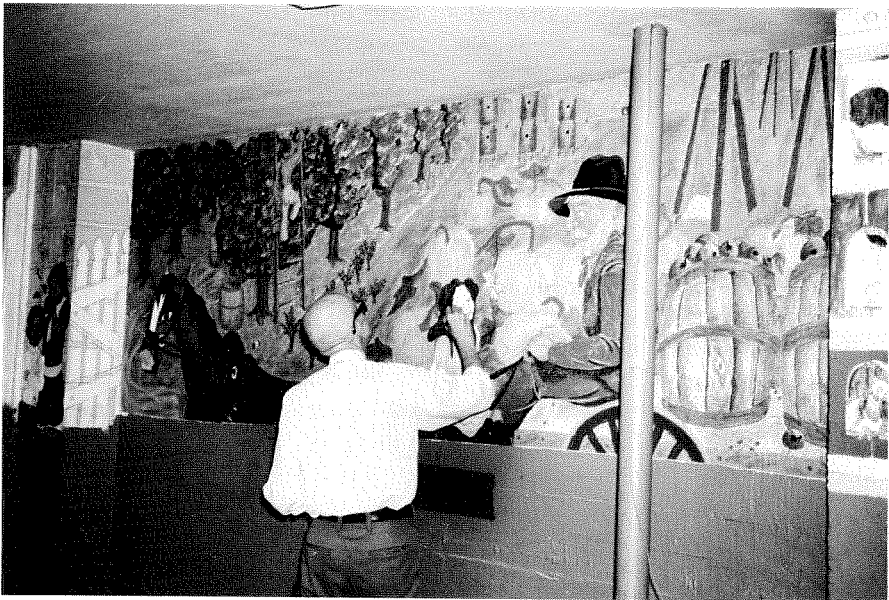
When people are able to participate in the design and management of their lives, they exhibit lower rates of disease. Four major studies in Sweden show higher rates of coronary heart disease in workers not only when their job demands are high but when they do not have the freedom or autonomy to deal with these demands.⁹ In Sweden the relationship between participation and health is regarded as so important that new legislation has been instituted. In the past, prudent owners and architects have consulted their employees about their design requirements, but today Swedish employees have the right under law and under the labor agreements to have a legal voice in the decisions affecting their own working environments. Already social epidemiologist Bertil Gardell and architect Jan Herikssons are participating with the workers on the design of a new factory to see if it can be designed in such a way that the work will include more human content and become more meaningful for the workers. Instead

of building shells around existing work processes, every aspect about the quality of the work environment is being re-examined.

At the Volvo plant in Sweden the workers and managers reorganized the production form using teams instead of assembly lines. The change in the nature of the production process drastically affects the physical form of the building.

This shift in approach to the design of factories has an economic foundation. Many of the firms in Sweden are worried about the cost of absenteeism from sickness. They realize that those who participate and are involved in the design, building, and management of the workplace perceive their status more positively than those excluded from the participatory process.

Another example demonstrating that when people feel they are in control they are less likely to get sick and if sick they are more likely to get better is the case of Norman Cousins. In *The Anatomy of an Illness* he describes how he conquered a life-threatening illness by researching his disease, prescribing his own regimen of treatments, which included what he termed laughter therapy. For several hours a day, he showed himself Marx Brothers and other slapstick movies, which took his mind off his illness. Cousins was able to control his physical environment by leaving the hospital and taking a room in a hotel; and he controlled his social environment by only allowing people in who were supportive of



4



5

4 Hotel residents were recruited to help work on a mural. Photograph courtesy of Tenderloin Neighborhood Outreach Program.

5 Other residents work on gardens.

his activities, including his doctor. Through his ability to exercise this control, he was able to heal himself. This is an important story about the role of the sense of control in both resisting and succumbing to disease.

At Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco an important new experiment is taking place influenced by the experience of Norman Cousins. Planetree, an organization dedicated to humanize health care, is restructuring a hospital nursing unit physically, socially, and organizationally to increase the control patients have over their own health and to reduce the traditional hierarchical attitudes of staff. To reinforce these changes the physical form of the nursing station was altered. The nurses are no longer separated from patients and families by a high counter. Instead the workspace is opened up, making charts available to patients and families as well as to physicians and nurses. To motivate patients to greater mobility and personal control, a lounge has been located directly adjacent to patients' beds. To personalize and deinstitutionalize the environment and create a more familiar and relaxed atmosphere, careful attention has been given to the quality of light, the use of natural woods, and the selection of paintings, plants, and fabrics. Families will be encouraged to participate in patient care. There is a place for them to stay overnight, and even a small kitchen has been constructed so that patients can have their own favorite foods on their own schedules.

Our participation in and control of the significant events that shape our lives may be even more important than the circumstances in which we find ourselves. For years, many people have looked askance at residents of inner city housing projects who vandalize and tear out flowers planted around their buildings. What is not understood is that even flowers, no matter how beautiful and valuable, when imposed are viewed neither as beautiful nor welcome. Architect John Turner has written, "when dwellers control the major decisions and are free to raise their contribution to the design, construction and management of their housing, both the process and the environment produced stimulate individual and social well being."¹⁰

Connection to the Natural Order

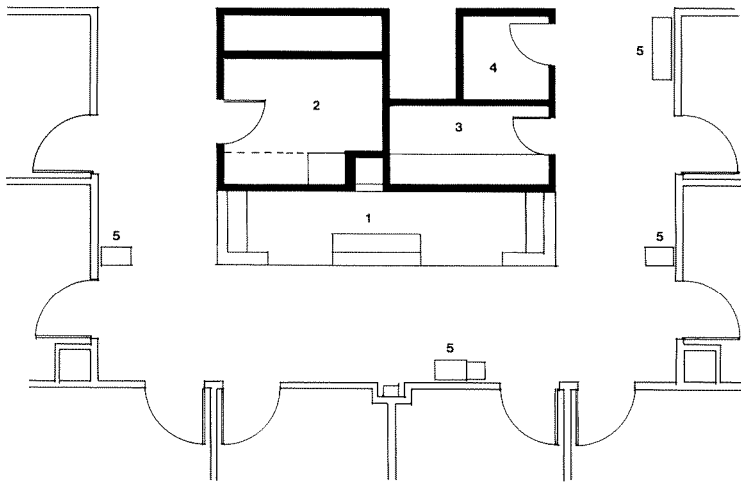
Human beings are part of nature. The human animal has been conditioned by a millennium of development, which has determined the ways we act, think, and respond. The environment that we have created in the past hundred years is at odds with the physical and psychological nature of people. Human beings developed in conjunction with the moon and the stars and the sea and the rhythms and cycles of nature. Now with the technological ability to turn night into day and otherwise artificially control and distort environments, we are finding that we have built places that are bad for our health. For example, lack of adequate exposure to ultraviolet radiation impairs the body's utilization of

calcium even when there is an adequate supply in the diet, and the type of light source can drastically alter at least one plasma level (bilirubin). Recent evidence also indicates that exposure to fluorescent light at work may be associated with a doubling of risk to melanoma.

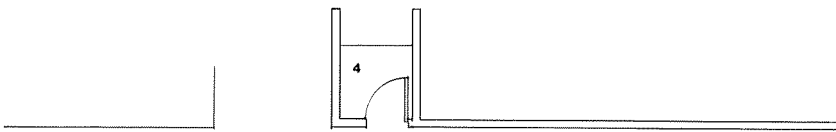
Despite this evidence, children have been placed in windowless schools, workers in windowless factories, and secretaries in windowless offices. By so doing, people have been subjected to possibly harmful exposures and have been deprived of awareness of the time of day, the weather, the seasons of the year, and colors and motion of the natural landscape.

Further studies have shown that surgical patients in postoperative units with no windows to the outside developed twice as many cases of postoperative delirium during a 72-hour period as those with windows, and patients in units without windows developed more symptoms of depression.

Artificial ventilation also causes health problems. Since World War II, more and more buildings have been cooled and heated mechanically. These mechanical systems require controlled air intakes, necessitating the provision of windows that are sealed to prevent them from being opened and "unbalancing" the system. In the past few years, buildings have been sealed even tighter in order to save energy; new chemicals and synthetics also have been used for building materials, finishes,



6



7

6, 7 The conversion of a medical-surgical nursing unit at Pacific Medical Center, San Francisco, California. Architect, Roslyn Lindheim. Line drawings by Carol Silverman.

- 1 Nursing unit opened to patient and families.
- 2 Clean utility converted to a lounge.
- 3 Dirty utility changed to kitchen.
- 4 Wheelchair showers relocated, space converted to dirty utility.
- 5 Dirty linen carts and medication units reconverted out of sight.

carpets, and furniture. This recent combination has resulted in a new condition known as “indoor pollution,” which is causing respiratory and other forms of illness.

Contact with Nature

People make continuing efforts to “connect” to a natural environment. Thus, within cities, parks with fountains are built, trees are planted along the streets, flowers and plants are brought into houses, pets are cared for, and, on weekends, people drive to the country or beach. Workers located in windowless spaces try to achieve a sense of the outside by hanging pictures or murals of mountains or trees. In the natural world no two things are alike. Every blade of grass, every tree, has responded in a slightly different way to sun, light, and wind. A failing in our recent design endeavors, however, has been to ignore variety as a key characteristic of systems. Complexity within order characterizes all natural systems, and its denial may lead to the impoverishment of life in our man-made environment.

The tall, glass-faced, sealed commercial building found in cities in the United States and in many parts of the world, avoids rather than exploits individualization of the building’s use, site, and orientation. Virtually identical buildings of this type can be found in New York and Chicago, San Francisco and Boston, Tel Aviv, and the outskirts of Paris, Manila, and Beirut.

The issue is not to imitate nature. As J. B. Jackson points out, a well designed city can give “. . . us archways and pools of daylight, and flights of steps and views; the splash of water in fountains, echoes and music; the breath of damp cool air, the harmony of colors and the unpolluted sun. . . .”¹¹

Connection to the Life Cycle

It is not only contact with the natural elements that affects one’s inner equilibrium, however, but the understanding that we are part of nature, that we are born, grow old, and die. Humans have a deep need to be connected to, to live in natural ways with, the cycles of life and nature. Nature’s cycles are incorporated into and celebrated by all cultures, in feasts of harvest, rites of spring, the winter solstice, the birth of a child, coming of age, marriage, and death.

The cycles of life have been hidden from us in contemporary culture, and so we find ourselves unable to understand who we are. We have produced and live in age-segregated environments—nursing homes for the frail elderly, senior residences for the healthy elderly, “Yuppie” neighborhoods for young adults, suburbs for middle-aged couples with children. Even families who want aged parents to live with them find it socially, economically, and spatially difficult. Government lending agencies such as the FHA give no mortgages for dwellings that include “in-law” or “parent” facilities.

We have so institutionalized the process of birth and death that most of us never see a baby born or an old person die. The life cycle itself has become something “abnormal,” requiring medical treatments and institutional solutions. One could postulate that the high rate of mental illness in highly technological societies such as the United States (one out of three Americans suffers some form of mental illness) is one manifestation of living divorced from the barnyard realities of life.

Connection to Place

We seem to have a need to make connections to places of our past. According to the architectural historian Joseph Rykwert, “The return to origins is a constant of human development. . . . the return to origins always implies rethinking of what you do customarily, an attempt to renew the validity of your everyday actions or simply a recall of the natural. . . .”¹²

People travel the world to see the sights of early civilizations, to visit birth places and scenes of battles, to walk in medieval streets and through ancient ruins. Time takes on a new dimension with the realization that a man or woman some forty thousand years before Christ painted pictures on rock, which can be seen today in the Lascaux Cave of France.

The architectural preservation movement reflects an increased concern to maintain the records of our historical past. The old parts of

cities often are the most coveted, whether in Copenhagen, Paris, Athens, or Belgrade. Cities such as Warsaw, destroyed during World War II, have been rebuilt using traditional building and city forms in an effort to maintain a link to their heritage.

We referred before to the sense of grief akin to the loss of a loved one that occurs when people are forced to move from their neighborhood.

Attachment to place is so strong that when we move to a foreign territory we take our “places” with us. We build structures in new territories much like those in “the old country.” Spatial identity is fundamental to human functioning, and many people have emphasized this in writings on the importance of spatial memories, images, and ideas.¹³

A Call for Discussion

As a conclusion, I would like to propose the following policies as topics for discussing the design of healthy places:

The environment should “do no harm” either by using materials detrimental to health or by mutilating the ecosystem.

In the design and redesign of neighborhoods and communities supportive social networks should be maintained.

Places should be designed so that people can exercise greater

personal control at all levels of the environment, macro and micro.

Places should be designed to enhance the awareness of and connection to the natural order.

Methods should be developed whereby people can participate in the design and construction and management of the environment.

The environment must be designed to accommodate the needs of all stages of the life cycle, from infancy to old age.

NOTES

- 1 Full references available from Roslyn Lindheim and S. Leonard Syme, “Environments, People, and Health,” *Annual Review of Public Health* (1983), pp. 335–359.
- 2 J. Cassel, “The Contribution of the Social Environment to Host Resistance,” *American Journal of Epidemiology* 104 (1976), pp. 107–123.
- 3 L. F. Berkman and S. L. Syme, “Social Networks, Host Resistance, and Mortality: A Nine-Year Follow-up Study of Alameda County Residents,” *American Journal of Epidemiology* 109 (1979), pp. 186–204.
- 4 M. G. Marmot and S. L. Syme, “Acculturation and Coronary Heart Disease in Japanese Americans,” *American Journal of Epidemiology* 104 (1976), pp. 225–247.
- 5 K. B. Nuckolls, J. Cassel, and B. H. Kaplan, “Psychosocial Assets, Life Crises, and the Prognosis of Pregnancy,” *American Journal of Epidemiology* 95 (1972), pp. 431–441.
- 6 H. J. Gans, *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans* (New York: Free Press, 1962).
- 7 M. Fried, “Grieving for a Lost Home,” in *The Urban Condition*, L. Duhl, ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), pp. 151–171.

- 8 M. G. Marmot, “Affluence, Urbanization and Coronary Heart Disease,” in *Disease and Urbanization*, E. J. Clegg and J. P. Garlick, eds. (London: Taylor and Francis, 1980), pp. 127–143.
- 9 R. Karasek, D. Baker, F. Marxer, A. Ahlbom, and T. Theorell, “Job Decision Latitude, Job Demands, and Cardiovascular Disease: A Prospective Study of Swedish Men,” *American Journal of Public Health* 71 (1981), pp. 694–705.
- 10 J. F. C. Turner, *Housing by People: Toward Autonomy in Building Environments* (New York: Pantheon, 1976), p. xxxiii.
- 11 E. H. Zube, ed. *Landscapes: Selected Writings of J. B. Jackson* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press), p. 87.
- 12 J. Rykwert, *On Adam’s House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1972), p. 192.
- 13 M. Fried, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

Beyond the Last Resort: The Case of Public Housing in Houston

Dana Cuff

Driving through Houston for the first time can be an eerie experience; the city appears uninhabited. Air conditioning, an extraordinary dependence on the automobile, and the underground pedestrian tunnel system downtown have swept life off the city's streets. However, there remains one neighborhood, sitting right next to the central business district, that is a vital and visible community. Here there are people on porches, cars driving slowly—their drivers stopping to talk to friends on the street corners—grandparents watching over toddlers, and teenagers hanging out. On Sunday, the singing from one church competes with that from the next, and people pour in from other parts of Houston to “come home” for the day. The setting for this activity is some ninety square blocks of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century shotgun houses, Victorian cottages, and bungalows. Along with small business establishments and twenty churches, these properties comprise an area called Freedman's Town. Recently listed in the National Register of Historic Places, it is the oldest black neighborhood in Houston, and the poorest.

Across an arterial street is the other half of the area known as the Fourth Ward. Long rows of apartments, recalling the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, are laid out along parallel strips of open

space. Here you can find the best basketball game in town, an active soccer contingent, a wild crew of Big Wheel riders, and a large congregation of Indochinese, who hold religious services under the band shell. In the spring and summer, the open greens are ringed by an urban farming system of small vegetable plots and flower gardens. This is Allen Parkway Village, the largest public housing project in Houston, and one of the oldest.

Enter the wrecking ball. This neighborhood will be a victim of urban renewal Texas-style if the City of Houston has its way. Although the Fourth Ward has many positive qualities, it should not be romanticized. The people who live here are almost entirely renters, and very poor ones at that.¹ The area has deteriorated physically, a condition exacerbated by the city's refusal to maintain an adequate level of municipal services. The Housing Authority of the City of Houston (HACH) has boarded up over half the thousand units at Allen Parkway Village, while private landowners are reluctant to invest in maintaining property in Freedman's Town. In an area as poor as this one, feasible strategies for revitalization are difficult to envision.

The city instead has chosen the path of redevelopment, a euphemism for displacement

of residents, demolition of present structures, elimination of the existing patterns of streets and blocks, and construction of high-rise office buildings and upper-middle-income housing. Municipal instigation of redevelopment at this scale is unprecedented in Houston, a city with no zoning, no legacy of public-sector involvement in planning the environment, and with a strong conviction that private interests (not the government) should define the composition of the urban fabric. In the case of the Fourth Ward, the city has changed its mind. The Planning and Development Department of the City of Houston and the local housing authority have orchestrated a coalition of private and public property owners in a concerted effort to sell the 150 acres of land. In addition, the city will offer a prospective single developer new infrastructure improvements (streets, utilities, water and sewage, systems that developers themselves have always had to provide in Houston) if only the developer will buy the 150 acres at the right price and build something more to the city's liking.² The 7,000–9,000³ current residents of Allen Parkway Village and Freedman's Town have had virtually no voice in the process.

For the time being, Houston's extremely soft real estate market has dulled local developers' interest in the

1 **Freedman's Town**, children's parade. Photograph by Phyllis Moore.

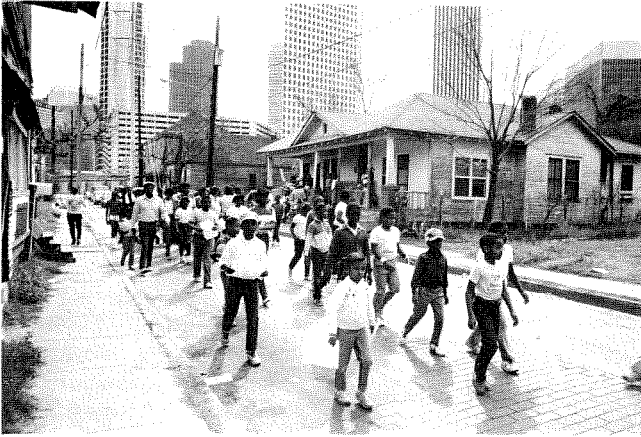
2 **Freedman's Town**. Photograph by Phyllis Moore.

3 **Freedman's Town bungalows**. Photograph by Phyllis Moore.

4 **Allen Parkway Village**, long rows to downtown. Photograph by Phyllis Moore.

5 **Allen Parkway Village**, Big Wheel boy. Photograph by Phyllis Moore.

6 **Allen Parkway Village**, Indochinese religious ceremony. Photograph by Phyllis Moore.



1



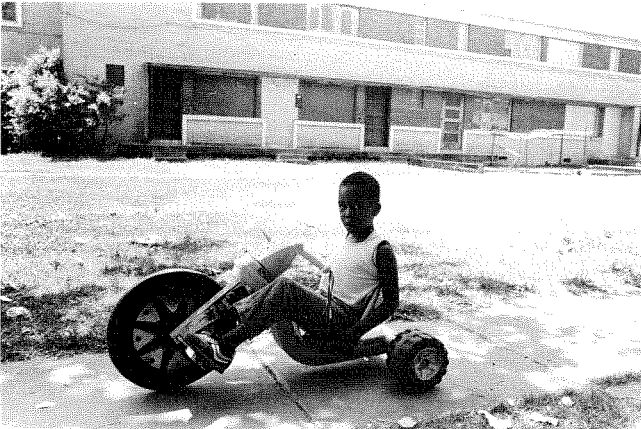
4



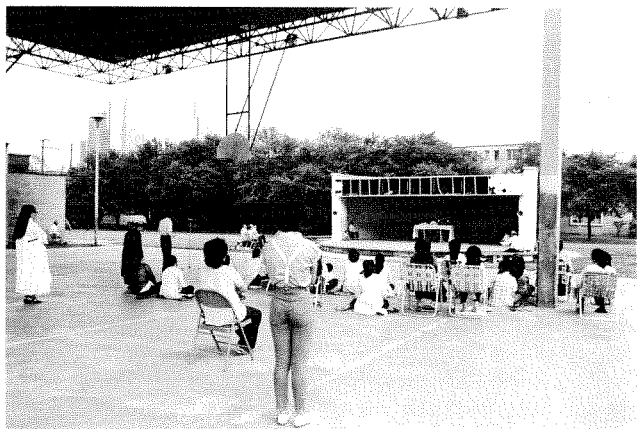
2



5



3



6

Fourth Ward. This is the single most significant factor in the community's favor. If alternatives to full redevelopment are to be considered, and if residents are to maintain their essential social and economic networks,⁴ a deceleration of this process is necessary. Since no developer has stepped forward, the community and its advocates have an opportunity to voice their opinions about the future of the neighborhood. With enough time, it is hoped that the present inimical differences might mellow enough for reasonable discussion to take place.

Although the plight of Freedman's Town and Allen Parkway Village might at first appear to be a uniquely Texas phenomenon, there are enough warnings to indicate that it is only one example of a fresh wave of urban renewal in the United States. Conceived as the housing of "last resort," public housing across the nation is a new target for redevelopment, particularly the oldest of the existing stock. Of the current 1.3 million units of public housing, about 13 percent is forty years old, and a full 41 percent was built in the 1950s or before. Since virtually no new construction has occurred for over a decade, deterioration of extant public housing is a key issue for all parties. In addition, the 1986 federal budget proposes a dramatic reduction in

funding for public housing modernization (Department of Housing and Urban Development, or HUD, terms for rehabilitation). This new budget is ludicrous in light of already inadequate expenditures for modernization.⁵

In 1983, HUD revealed part of its answer to the problems of public housing: sell or demolish 100,000 units (8 percent of the inventory) within the next five years.⁶ Although few developments have actually been demolished thus far, the pronouncement opens doors to an alternative previously considered only when all else had failed. The dynamiting of Pruitt-Iggoe is forever etched in the nation's memory largely because it was such a radical step.

Under severe economic pressure, local housing authorities are now looking for ways to cut costs. Some authorities have saved tremendously by establishing more efficient management and maintenance practices.⁷ Many authorities, however, are more likely to view demolition and redevelopment as the most expedient means of generating additional revenue.

If demolition is going to become more commonplace, as this analysis suggests, we can also predict the most likely targets. Older public housing developments were usually located in poor neighborhoods as a slum

clearance strategy. These now comprise some of the largest parcels of inner city real estate. A local authority can eliminate a portion of its operating costs by demolishing housing units, and it can add to its funds by selling the land. This is what Houston's housing authority has in mind.

This strategy goes against the fundamental mandate to provide decent housing to the poor and produces a less obvious yet further reaching effect. In big cities, public housing is typically located in poor black neighborhoods.⁸ These public housing projects helped to ensure that so-called "highest and best uses" occurred in other parts of town, leaving relatively stable albeit poor communities surrounding public housing. Under such circumstances, demolishing public housing unleashes market demand on poor black neighborhoods. With this comes further displacement and loss of low-cost housing. Housing expert Chester Hartman estimates that 500,000 low-cost units are lost each year from the American building stock, creating higher demand (and monthly rent) for what remains.⁹

In public housing, it appears that ethnic minorities, particularly blacks and Hispanics, will be more likely to be displaced through demolition than their Anglo counterparts. A massive investigation by

Dallas news reporters uncovered discrimination in federally subsidized housing in all forty-seven cities studied. Ethnic minorities are living in far more inferior housing than whites.¹⁰ In terms of public housing, these are the developments most likely to be located in poor neighborhoods and most likely to be selected for demolition. This is triple endemity: first minorities are assigned the worst housing; then insufficient modernization funds hasten deterioration; finally, demolition threatens. The removal of such housing and the redevelopment of adjacent neighborhoods will only amplify the fact that involuntary displacement, in general, is most common for low-income, minority, and female-headed households.¹¹ It is a terrible irony that the public housing program created to provide for those most in need may be the key to an entrepreneurial revolution: the displacement of poor people both within public housing and in the surrounding neighborhoods to make way for profitable, fashionable, new development. Thus cities may find that the demolition of public housing diffuses the obstinate and perplexing problems of poverty, removing the poor from view. However, losing both public and private low-rent housing can only aggravate those very problems.

The demolition or sale of public housing, regardless of

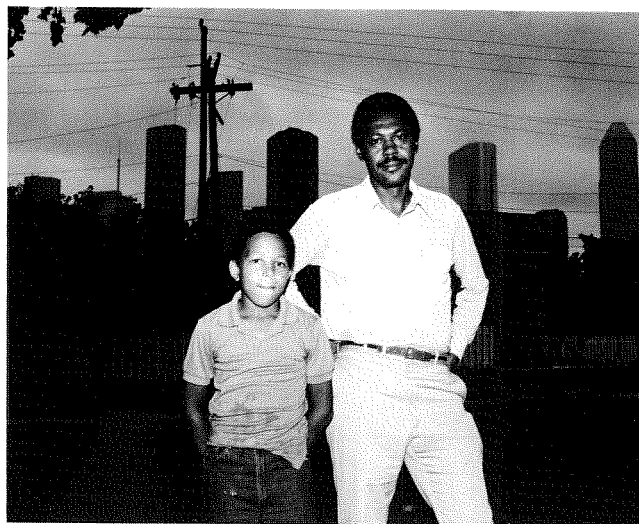
its impact on adjacent neighborhoods, can be debated on its own merits. Since public housing remains in the hands of the public, rather than private interests, it is also a vehicle for civic involvement in broader issues. A federal housing program is subject to national scrutiny and, like historic districts, can become a means for the public to have some voice in determining the character and composition of the urban environment. As such, positions taken on the physical environment have a direct impact on the city's social makeup. It is here that planners, architects, and urban designers can play an important role in neighborhood conservation and revitalization.

This is the understanding we bring to the debate about the future of the Fourth Ward. The story of Allen Parkway Village is recounted here for several purposes. First, it displays a sequence of events that interested citizens in other cities should learn to recognize if they want to have some say in such issues before it is too late (as we have been told may be the case in Houston). Second, it demonstrates that public policy which is superficially acceptable to liberals and conservatives alike can have dramatic regressive consequences for the social and architectural makeup of our cities. Third, it demonstrates how redevelopment proposals

besiege the residents who stand in the way. Their carefully constructed social and economic networks, their attachment over generations to a place, their dignity and basic rights are all ravaged in the process. Finally, it describes the ways in which design professionals can assist the community's activities. The last message is not a new one, but it needs reconsideration in this particular context.

The Houston Case

On Friday, April, 6, 1984, some fifty students and ten faculty members from three Texas architecture schools convened at Houston's Allen Parkway Village. At the residents' invitation, they came from Rice, Texas A&M, and the University of Houston to participate in a weekend design competition to explore the possibilities of rehabilitation and to propose alternatives to the housing authority's plan for demolishing Allen Parkway Village. On the site, the students' first impressions of boarded-up apartments were challenged by a convincing demonstration of community life and a sound, if no longer maintained, building stock. With help from faculty members and community advisors, the students spent all day Saturday developing proposals to rehabilitate Allen Parkway Village. That evening, their drawings were displayed at a meeting held in the community center, attended by more than 250



7

7 Lenwood Johnson and son,
Len. Photograph by Paul Hester.



8



9

residents and concerned citizens. The event, called the Allen Parkway Village Design Competition, was organized by Lenwood Johnson, president of the Resident Council, and myself.¹²

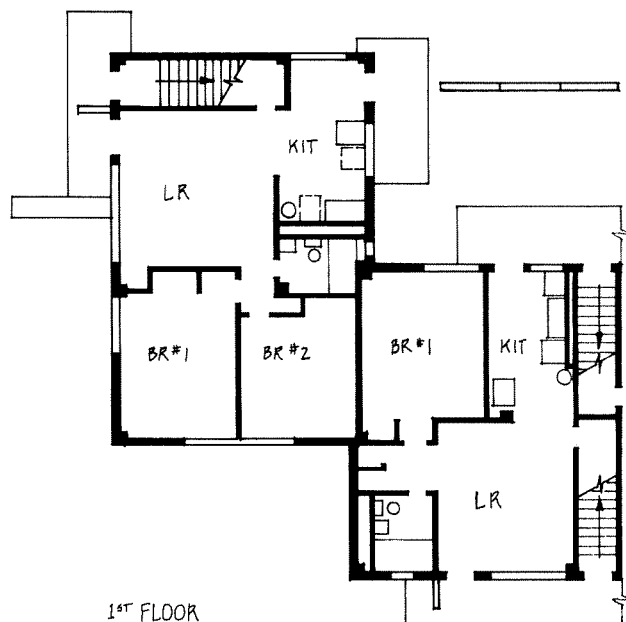
Lenwood Johnson is the primary individual organizing tenant opposition to demolition. A single parent with a health problem caused by exposure to toxic chemicals in his former workplace, Johnson has led the two-and-a-half year effort to prevent the destruction of Allen Parkway Village. When asked why he is so committed, Johnson states, "This may not look like the best place to live to a lot of people, but it could easily be improved, and it's an extremely important resource. It was here for me when I needed it, and I want to be sure it's still here for others after I'm gone."

Allen Parkway Village, originally called San Felipe Courts, sits on 37 acres just west of Houston's central business district. At present, it contains one-third of all low-income-family public housing in Houston. Built in 1942 and 1944 as defense housing for white war-industry workers and their families, the 80 buildings contain 1,000 apartments. These two- and three-story structures are organized in long rows along traffic-free green spaces. The design, by a consortium of Houston architects, was published in April 1942 in *Architectural*

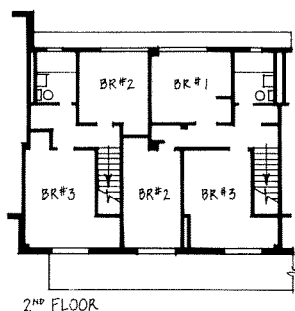
Record as model wartime housing.¹³

The buildings are of reinforced concrete frame construction, infilled with hollow tile. Interior walls are faced with plaster and exterior walls with brick and concrete. The apartments are small by current standards, but the building structure is extraordinarily sound, with virtually no signs of age even after forty years of neglect. According to a director of maintenance at the housing authority, the development is so well constructed that it is impossible to conceive of rebuilding to that same quality, regardless of the amount earned from selling the land.¹⁴ Karl Kamrath, one of the original architects, argues that both the construction and the architectural design are exceptional. "The only thing that place needs is to be cleaned up and maintained, but the housing authority has never done that."

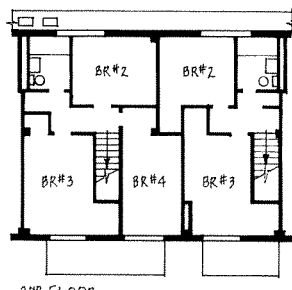
Some 470 apartments are still occupied in Allen Parkway Village, leaving more than 500 units vacant. Over the years, the resident population has changed dramatically, from originally all white occupancy, to primarily black, to a population that is currently 58 percent Indochinese, 33 percent black, and 9 percent white and Hispanic. (An explanation for the current racial makeup and for the vacancies is given later.) About 27 percent of the



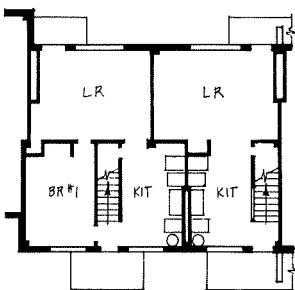
10



2ND FLOOR

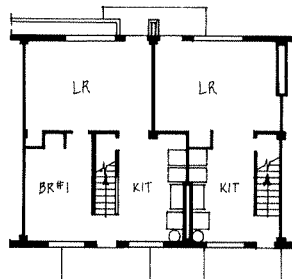


2ND FLOOR



1ST FLOOR

11



1ST FLOOR

8 Area map.

9 Site plan, Allen Parkway Village.

10 One-story apartments, one and two bedrooms.

11 Two-story apartments, three and four bedrooms.

residents are elderly and live in a specially designated section of the project. The other dominant group is female-headed households, which make up a full 51 percent of the households. Some 21 percent of the residents are reportedly employed, but the actual figure is probably somewhat higher.¹⁵

Since 1976, at least, the Housing Authority of the City of Houston (HACH) has been deciding what to do with Allen Parkway Village. During the same time, the city government has debated the future of Freedman's Town. Community development and local government funds have been directed away from the Fourth Ward, allowing deterioration to progress at an accelerated rate. Likewise, the uncertain future of the housing project has led HUD to restrict funds for the development's repair and maintenance. In addition, financial mismanagement at HACH caused further reductions in federal funding. In 1982, when Earl Phillips, the present executive director, was brought in to remedy HACH's financial problems, he stated that improving the authority's existing housing stock would be a top priority. HACH's subsequent actions tell a different story.

The cost of rehabilitating Allen Parkway Village has become a numbers game in the argument for demolition.

In 1978, HUD allocated \$10 million to improve conditions at the project of which at least \$7.5 million was never spent.¹⁶ The reason these monies have not been spent is unclear. In any case, the \$10 million in 1978 HUD funds translates to a rehabilitation cost of \$10,000 per unit. In 1982, HACH asked HUD for just \$5,700 per unit to restore safe and sanitary conditions. Only one year later, in 1983, HACH appointed a citizen's committee to study whether Allen Parkway Village should be renovated or razed. They produced the "Technical Report," which recommended demolishing the housing project and redeveloping the adjacent neighborhood, partly on the basis of rehabilitation costs of a whopping \$36,200 per unit.¹⁷ Although the last study is more comprehensive than its predecessors, the figures are suspect in their dramatic inflation of previous estimates as well as estimates for comparable public housing modernization. For example, rehabilitation of similar public housing developments in Texas during the same year (1983) cost \$15,000–18,000 per unit. A specialist in rehabilitating distressed properties has recently completed an independent estimate for Allen Parkway Village's renovation, and, according to his calculations, the HACH figures are vastly inflated, perhaps triple the actual costs. Instead of \$36 million, he estimates

\$12–15 million for full rehabilitation.¹⁸

Clearly, an agenda has been set for Allen Parkway Village, and this is to profit from the sale of its 37 acres regardless of the cost of rehabilitation. Estimates of probable land costs per square foot have ranged from \$10 to over \$100, but at present these numbers are meaningless. As Tom Forrester Lord, lawyer and expert in low-cost housing and Houston real estate development, states, "In this case, we have a seller but no buyer." The housing authority claims that the money earned from this sale will be used to repair other housing developments in Houston. At the same time, HACH is divesting itself of its most costly development and a third of its inventory of family housing.

In order to dispose of property, the housing authority must relocate all residents who live on the site. This population decreases daily in part because residents seek housing elsewhere but primarily because of the housing authority's use of "constructive eviction," that is, harassment. This is one resident's experience:

First, if your family grows, they won't let you transfer to another apartment. There are five of us in two bedrooms now. Then you get a gas bill for \$91 for one month. That's how much my bill was last

month, and I don't use any gas except maybe hot water and the stove. There's no way I could use more than the allotment we get for free each month. I've got the pilot out on my heater, but I wish they'd just disconnect my gas line. I bet I'd still get a \$91 gas bill. So, if you can't pay the bill, you get an eviction notice. Then you go to court. And then you get kicked out. Yesterday, the manager gave these people next door one hour to be out of their apartment, and an hour later she came back with the police. Now their furniture is all over the sidewalk. One day you have a neighbor, the next day you don't. It's not like people want to move, but if you hold out, when they get through with you, you don't have anything to move with.

The housing authority prohibits moving within the development, so growing families are forced either to move or live in overcrowded conditions. A large number of residents report inexplicable increases in their utility bills. Cars are towed away more often without warning. Another resident says that fines are assessed for previously tolerated practices, such as keeping a pet. In addition to fines, the housing management can then require such residents to pass a housecleaning course.

Then they send you to this housekeeping school they're so proud of. You have to get bus fare, get someone to sit with your kids, take time off if you're working, and take the bus to the school. If you miss maybe 2–3 meetings, you flunk the class. Then they give you an eviction notice.

If residents want to contest any of these practices, they must file a grievance with the housing authority management.

But they told my neighbor she had to have a lawyer to file a grievance, which isn't true. I filed a grievance last month about my utility bill, and I still got an eviction notice. They can't evict me if I've filed a grievance until I've had a hearing. But I got an eviction notice a week ago, and yesterday I got this [Termination of Lease]. And it says I should file a grievance. Now you know, at this hearing, they'll just say they got their records mixed up [and drop eviction proceedings]. I've been through this before.

Effectively, the housing authority saves itself from greater political resistance and from the logistics of relocation when present tenants leave or transfer to another housing project in Houston. HACH then boards up the apartments rather than accept new tenants, yet there are at least

5,000 families on the waiting list for subsidized housing. Some of these people have specifically requested residence at Allen Parkway Village. As Lenwood Johnson says, "The war of attrition is probably HACH's most effective strategy."

The housing authority has used one additional tactic to prepare the way for demolition. The "Technical Report" came to the embarrassing conclusion that the placement of large numbers of Indochinese in a predominantly black neighborhood was no accident. "It is unlikely that this demographic change in tenant population was due to random assignment from the HACH waiting list; . . . [it] appears to have been an attempt to isolate the [black] community and to defuse the issue [of possible demolition] as a political concern."¹⁹ Most Indochinese residents do not speak English, most cannot vote because they are not yet citizens, and they have little knowledge of their political rights in this country. These Indochinese tenants are unknowing tools of the housing authority's plans. Although residents say that initially there was racial tension between the blacks and Indochinese, this has dissipated as the two groups work together to fight demolition. Over the last two years, the Indochinese have become extremely active in efforts to save Allen Parkway Village.

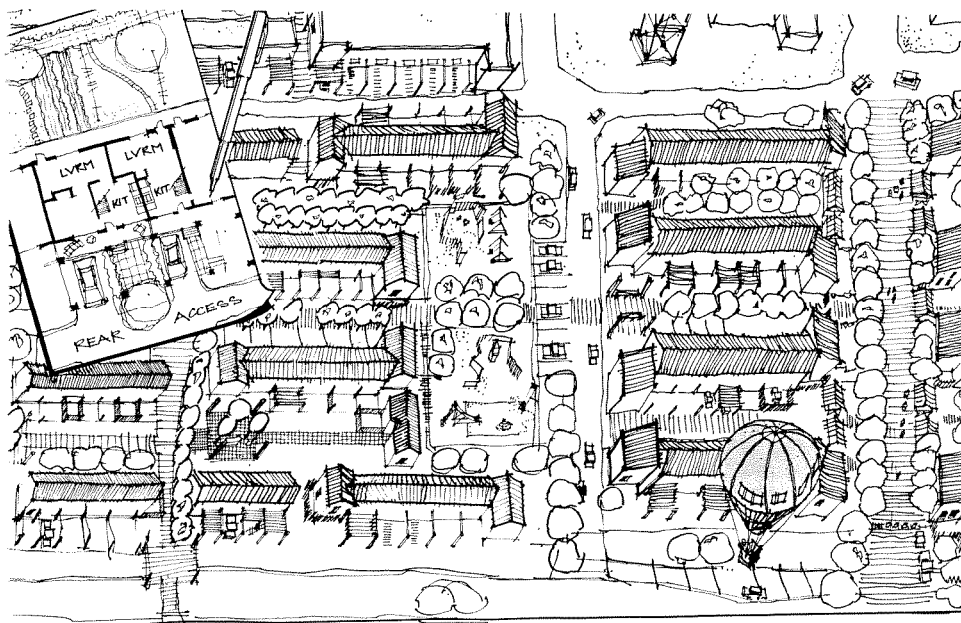
The Designers' Contributions

In a situation as complicated as this one, physical design appears to be relatively insignificant. Economic and political conditions seem to have defined both the problems and the solutions under consideration.

Nevertheless, the physical condition of both the public housing and the adjacent neighborhood has been a significant issue in the debate. In the "Technical Report," the study team justified razing the buildings partially on the basis of Allen Parkway Village's design. For example, the report states that full rehabilitation "does not resolve basic site design flaws that make livability poor. These include: high densities, security concerns, lack of open space, poor traffic flow, and shortage of parking."²⁰ These are not, however, immutable obstacles but opinions based on interpretations of present conditions, which have been refuted by a team of architects who visited the site, students' design competition proposals, and rehabilitation projects for similar housing developments. At 27 dwelling units per acre, this is a medium-density, low-rise development. In her extensive study of residential satisfaction in multifamily housing, Clare Cooper states that residential quality can be achieved with high density when other physical conditions are present, such

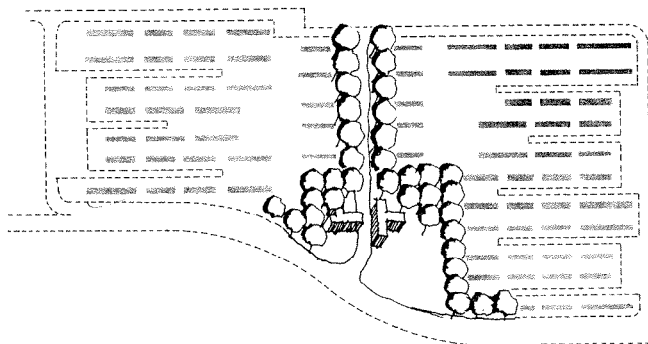
as visual and functional access to open space from the dwelling, protection of privacy, division into small clusters, variety in facade design, and variety in layout.²¹ The Allen Parkway Village Design Competition demonstrated that all of these conditions could be achieved with minimal effort. Traffic flow and parking can be improved. There is by no means a lack of open space when only one-fifth of the site is built and the remainder is open. If all the present two- and three-story buildings were spread out as a one-story building (maintaining the current square footage), it would cover less than half of the entire site (floor area ratio of building to site is .45).

A related disadvantage that the committee adduced in its report, that full rehabilitation "requires a large expenditure of funds for little enhancement in livability," is equally questionable. The study team appears to be unaware that the housing project already meets many of the guidelines for family housing established by research on residency patterns and preferences. For example, all ground-floor units have both front and back entries; all units have at least two exposures for light and ventilation; all units are entered at the first- or second-floor level; children's play areas are easily surveyed from the apartments and are safe from auto traffic.



12

There is another important way in which the development's physical condition has become a factor in the argument for demolition. Three major thoroughfares leading from Houston's most affluent residential neighborhood into the central business district cut through the Fourth Ward, displaying physical decay and neglect to passersby. One sees the deterioration with no explanation of the causal forces and is tacitly persuaded that the area is beyond improvement. Some tenants have accused the housing authority of capitalizing on this situation by first boarding up apartments along the main street so that the worst of Allen Parkway Village is most visible.



13

12 Winning scheme of Allen Parkway Village Design Competition by M. Murray, B. Stern, J. Tannehill, and T. Thurston, Rice University.

13 Charrette solutions recommended creating a "main street" and marking the entry to Allen Parkway Village.

Finally, it is difficult for most people to *imagine* the kinds of changes that might enhance livability in the housing development. Even housing officials and architects who may have extensive knowledge of low-cost housing feel far more comfortable with new construction than with rehabilitation. Acknowledging this, John Morris Dixon, editor of *Progressive Architecture*, writes, "A relatively new factor in the national housing situation is the need to rehabilitate large numbers of aging public housing units."²² A set of rehabilitation strategies intended to improve the

quality of life is only now being developed. At this point, very few individuals can envision the positive transformation of such neighborhoods.

The Allen Parkway Village Design Competition was organized to explore the alternatives for rehabilitation, alternatives more difficult to imagine than razing the place. The twelve modest schemes presented by the student teams stand in stark contrast to the housing authority's vision. All solutions substantially increased on-site parking, and all but one altered the traffic circulation to improve traffic flow. All teams found ways to better integrate the public housing with adjacent Freedman's Town. In addition, clearly marked pedestrian paths through the site created better connections to both the surrounding neighborhood and the parklands to the north. In each solution, the elderly who are currently located in three-story buildings (requiring that some elderly walk up two flights of stairs to their bath and bedrooms) were relocated to other buildings. Since public funds were still available for the construction of elderly housing, several teams proposed new construction of medium-rise elderly units on the site.

Few teams felt that alteration of the existing buildings was necessary beyond the

addition of elements intended to create a less institutional image and to support existing neighboring patterns (for example, hipped roofs, porches, better defined entries, variety in facade treatment). All the proposals emphasized improvements to the open space, adding such garden elements as low walls and landscaping to help define outdoor spaces within the larger community and to give residents a greater sense of proprietorship of the land directly adjacent to their units. Problems considered endemic to the site plan were transformed into positive resources in the design proposals. The probable costs of the student proposals have been calculated and sent to HUD to counter the housing authority's arguments. These estimates indicate that relatively minor expenditures could make tremendous improvements to quality of life at Allen Parkway Village.²³

In a related effort, over twenty upper-division students and three faculty members at Rice University's School of Architecture participated in a study of Freedman's Town, including the area declared a national historic district.²⁴ Students conducted extensive interviews with two dozen residents to better understand their attitudes, perceptions, neighboring patterns, and residential histories. The findings

describe a remarkably stable and cohesive community. The residents interviewed have lived in their rented homes for about sixteen years on average, and for thirty-three years in the neighborhood. A majority live in multigenerational households, and over half have relatives living elsewhere in Freedman's Town. All know some of their neighbors; over half say they regularly help care for elderly neighbors or for their neighbors' children. Students also studied and mapped land use, building and block types, physical conditions, and land ownership. With this background, the students developed urban design proposals that reflected the values of residents as well as land prices established by the property owners. The students' work was periodically critiqued by community members. Their concerns about revitalizing the old elementary school, the street of most historical significance, and businesses in the area were incorporated in the urban design schemes.

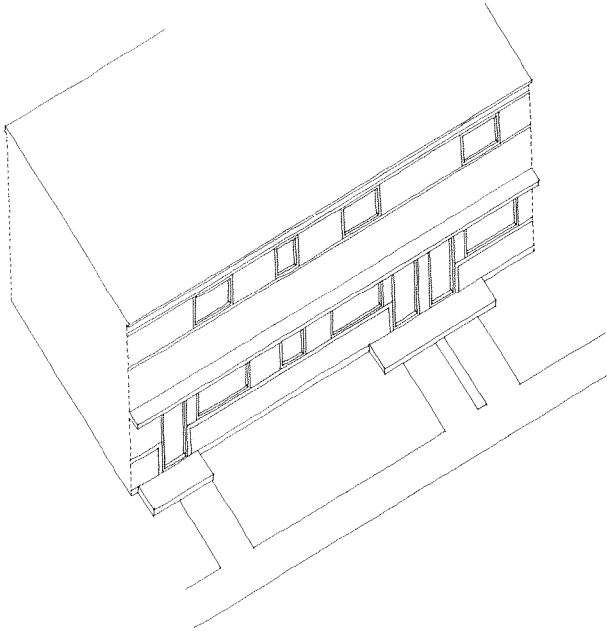
Incremental solutions were proposed, to be implemented in phases by a variety of actors, often including a self-help component. Architectural prototypes were based on existing neighborhood patterns, aimed at tripling the overall population density. The resulting schemes might be called "tethered ideals," since the pragmatics of

available funding, skills, and costs were significant concerns. The study, however, did not delve into these matters in detail, which is the next necessary phase in developing feasible revitalization proposals.

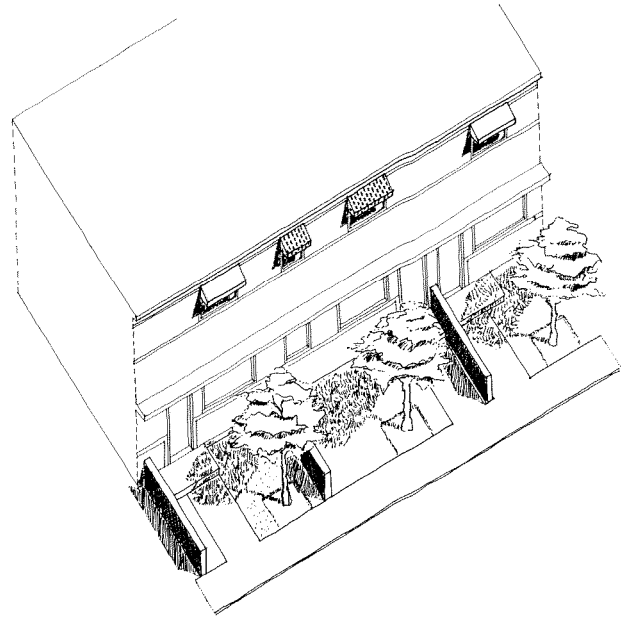
As with proposals for rehabilitating Allen Parkway Village, the urban revitalization schemes for Freedman's Town have provided visions of a previously unimaginable future. The solutions have been presented to an employee of the city planning office and to the Urban Design Committee of the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, at their request. A downtown gallery, organizing an exhibition on the neighborhood, plans to display the students' work to show possible alternatives to city plans. By no means can design activities alone save this neighborhood, but they can make a substantial contribution to the community's efforts to save itself.

Alternatives to Demolition

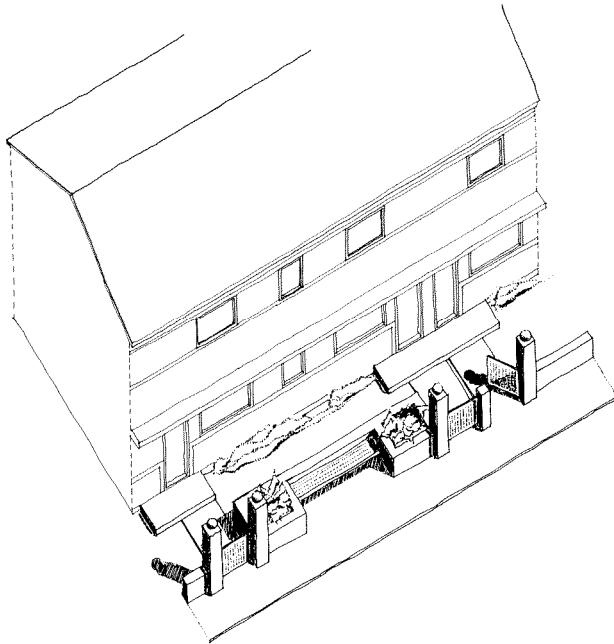
Under the present federal administration, one can easily define public housing as a nonrenewable national resource. The preservation of public housing necessarily entails a rehabilitation strategy. Many local authorities that wanted to preserve public housing struggled to modernize a large part of their housing



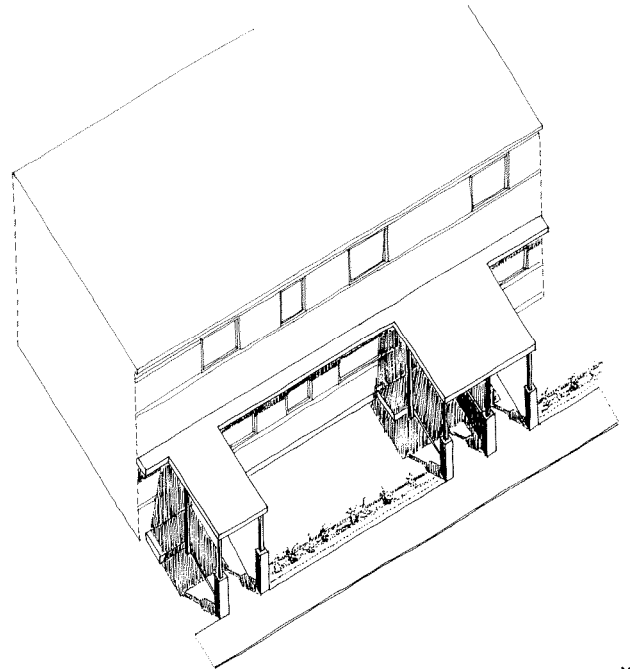
14



15



16



17

stock before the predicted budget cuts.²⁵ There are a few examples of innovative rehabilitation strategies, developed to augment federal programs. In most cases, creative solutions stemmed from tenant disgruntlement that turned into collective action. Rent strikes in St. Louis and Newark public housing, for example, precipitated tenant takeover of management. Under tenant management, maintenance and social service programs were organized as training and employment opportunities for residents.²⁶ Such programs, and others that involve self-help activities, can improve housing services, slightly reduce costs (or keep them constant), and give tenants a role not only in consumption but production of housing.

Changes in forms of management can be extended to changes in forms of tenure. Public housing can be converted into condominiums, home ownership in fee simple, or cooperative housing. Nearly 3,000 units of public housing have been approved for conversion to some form of home ownership, and about 550 have already been sold to tenants.²⁷ This solution can solve problems for both housing officials and residents. Recognizing this, HUD is selecting sites for a demonstration project to convert subsidized housing to tenant ownership. There is one significant limitation to a

conversion program: it is only a feasible strategy for residents who have incomes between 50–80 percent of the median income. Therefore, the very poor, including those receiving some kind of welfare, will not be served by this program.

Besides conversions to home ownership, other strategies for public housing combine changes in tenure with alternatives to federal funding, particularly by attracting private monies. Houston is engaged in relatively small-scale efforts to attract private interests to public housing.²⁸ These efforts are dwarfed by the kind of work the Dallas Housing Authority plans for the 3,500-unit Lake West, the largest low-rise public housing development in the United States. Lake West will surely serve as a test for the employment of creative techniques at a significant qualitative and quantitative scale. With the help of Peterson, Littenberg Architects and other consultants, a complex plan has been proposed.²⁹ Rather than remove any units from the site, current density will be maintained, and commercial, industrial, and institutional uses will be added to the area. Through numerous meetings with residents and the help of many consultants, a set of mixed strategies will be employed, including all forms of ownership and rental of units. When asked

about the cost of the plan, Peterson says,

The housing authority agreed that it would be a big mistake to hinge the proposal on costs. There are many alternatives, including private and commercial sources, that will be aggressively pursued. In the end, the cost to the public will be much less than the total cost to implement the plan.

According to the Dallas Housing Authority, total modernization funding requested for the project is \$62 million; they have received \$18 million, and work has begun on the site.

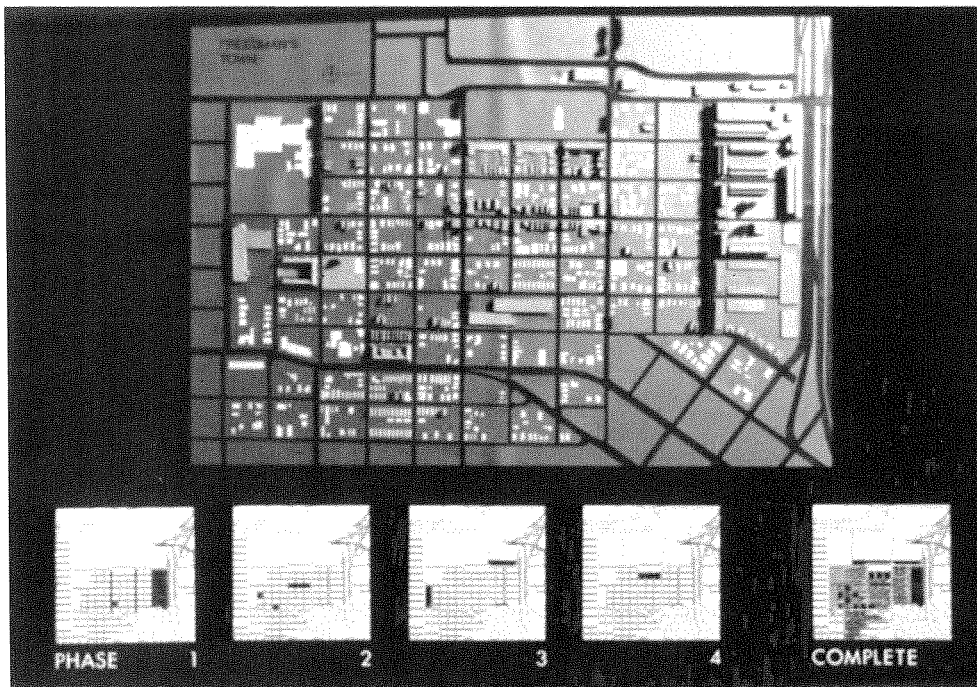
Fundamental to the preservation-demolition issue is the determination of the degree to which public housing has succeeded. The conventional public housing program, although widely criticized, has actually contributed substantially to alleviating housing problems of the poor. In spite of Pruitt-Igoe's powerful image, it was not representative of public housing's evils or the ill effects of public housing design. As analysts have demonstrated, a soft real estate market and racist policy and management practices were more significant than poor design.³⁰ The problems of high-rise family housing are well documented, but only 10 percent of the public housing in the United States fits this category.³¹ In

14 Allen Parkway Village. typical existing facade.

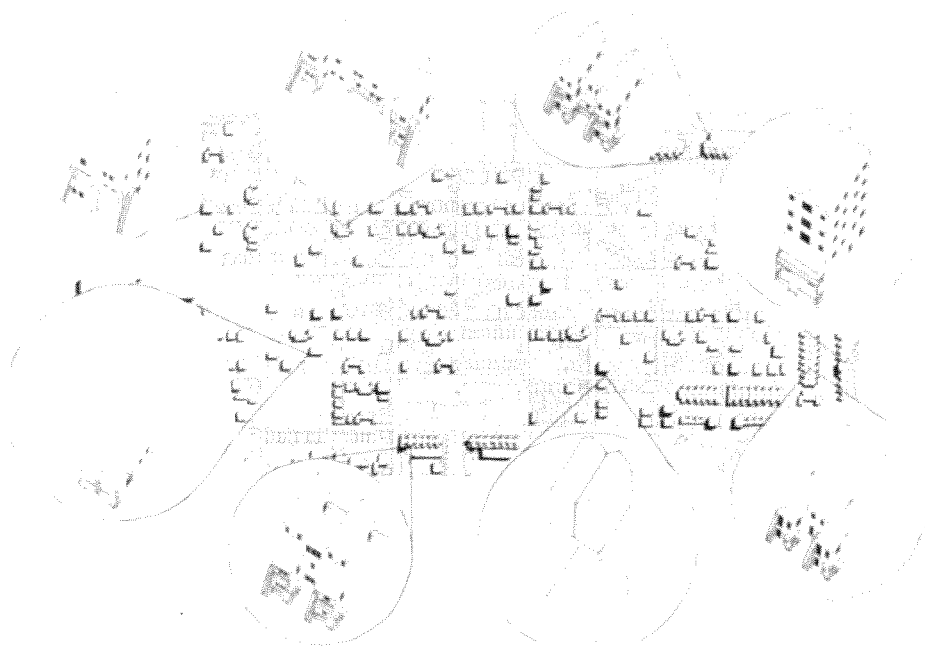
15 Free-standing brick wall to be built by residents creates entries, places to sit, planters.

16 Garden walls and landscaping help define "turf." Colored awnings identify individual apartments.

17 Covered paths define entries and yards.



18



19

addition, the maintenance and operation costs of public housing have always been underfunded by the federal government. The nation commits far more money through tax deductions to home owners than it does to housing lower income people. For example, housing-related tax expenditures (such as home owner deductions) for 1980 alone exceeded *all* expenditures for housing subsidies over the last forty years.³² Nevertheless, public housing has provided approximately 1.3 million units, sheltering about 4.5 million people. In an unpublished survey conducted in 1979, Joseph Riley of HUD found that about half the residents in public housing had lived there less than five years.³³ Another study found that the turnover rate in 1975 was about 18 percent.³⁴ Although some of the turnover can be attributed to dissatisfaction with the living environment, it is fair to assume that a proportion of the housing is operating as initially intended, as a stable place from which poor people can improve their economic circumstances. For the large number of vulnerable poor—the elderly, children, and female-headed households—public housing is providing decent housing that they could not otherwise acquire. Among the 29 million people who need low-cost housing, about 4 million are elderly and 11 million are children. For the most part, critics



20

18 Urban design proposal for Freedman's Town by M. Lee, C. Somers, E. Wastler, and M. Zogran.

19 Urban design proposal for Freedman's Town with architectural prototypes highlighted; by E. Landry and M. Transou.

20 Downtown's shadow over the Fourth Ward.

Historic Freedman's Town is in the center and Allen Parkway Village at far right.
Photograph by Paul Hester.

who suggest that public housing is irreparable, or that it does no good, have not looked closely at the statistics. The real failure is that all forms of assistance provide housing for less than one out of four households with incomes below the poverty level.³⁵

For some time, the federal administration has been shifting its policy from providing housing to providing income in the form of rent subsidy. Called the voucher or housing allowance system, it requires qualifying individuals to pay 30 percent of their monthly income for rent and provides a subsidy for the rest. Tenants select their own housing, which must meet certain standards in terms of decency and rent. Advocates of the voucher system expound the virtues of freedom to choose one's own housing, the elimination of automatically stigmatized "projects," and the program's cost effectiveness.

After an extensive study of direct rental subsidies, several significant problems with the program were uncovered.³⁶ For example, the national housing supply does not meet demand in terms of available low-rent units that meet minimum standards. Added to this, the needs of certain groups, such as large families, are especially problematic given the housing presently available. Ethnic minorities still experience

discrimination in housing, so that a smaller portion of qualified housing is actually available to them. Housing allowances are less appropriate for low-income elderly than the provision of specialized housing. And there are what might be called "shadow costs" in private housing: utility and transportation costs and the risk of eviction may be higher. Under ideal circumstances, a direct cash subsidy might be preferable to the provision of housing, but under actual circumstances, the program has serious flaws.

Conclusion

The Houston example holds a number of troubling implications for public housing in the United States. The most problematic public housing—that is, the oldest, inner city developments—will be targeted for demolition. Razing these developments, given available demographic information, will precipitate the destruction of poor, black neighborhoods as well. Not only will this multiply the amount of involuntary displacement, but a vast number of low-cost rental units will be lost. The further reduction of an already insufficient supply of low-cost housing will proceed hand in hand with increased reliance on housing allowances. Thus, as more people receive rent subsidies, there will be less housing available toward which they

can apply the subsidy. The number of homeless people can only multiply as the "housing of last resort" is eliminated.

Public housing is considered a nonrenewable national resource that must be preserved. To save it will inevitably require greater subsidization from the federal government. This is unlikely to happen in the near future, but in the meantime, municipal housing authorities, design professionals, and concerned citizens can work to delay such irreversible actions as demolition. This "treading water" strategy does not improve the housing situation for the poor, and there are no assurances that future policies will permit a more constructive approach. Biding time, however, does permit the residents in threatened housing to plot out alternatives for their lives. And preserving the public housing and poor neighborhoods leaves open possibilities for revitalization in the future. Under present circumstances, creative examples across the country demonstrate that when all actors are moving in the same direction, public housing can be saved and, moreover, improved.

NOTES

- 1 Median household income in the Freedman's Town neighborhood for 1979 was \$4,775 (compared to \$18,474 for the City of Houston). Nearly 60 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. U.S. Bureau of Census, Tract 400.26.
- 2 Efraim Garcia, director of planning and development in Houston, organized a majority of private property owners in Freedman's Town to sell land to a single developer. In return for new infrastructure, the developer must include an area of approximately six blocks as an historic district, some elderly housing, and some open space. Garcia's plans are not definite at this point.
- 3 There are approximately 1,000 residents at Allen Parkway Village. The city estimates a population of 6,000 in Freedman's Town, while community groups ascribe a larger area to Freedman's Town and estimate 8,000.
- 4 Carol Stack has written one of the best descriptions of life in a poor black neighborhood, explaining the importance of such networks: *All Our Kin* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).
- 5 The 1986 federal budget proposal cuts modernization funding to \$175 million from \$1.725 billion in 1985. (Note that the \$1.725 billion is amortized over twenty years to produce approximately \$800 million annually for modernization.) Mary Nenko, National Organization of Housing and Redevelopment Officials, Washington, D.C.
- 6 Chester Hartman, ed., *America's Housing Crisis* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 2.

- 7 See, for example, "City Reports," *Journal of Housing* (January 1981), pp. 40–41. The article describes the Lorain, Ohio, Metropolitan Housing Authority, which instituted efficient operations, eliminating the need for HUD subsidies.
- 8 Raymond Struyk, *A New System for Public Housing* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1980), pp. 42–43.
- 9 Chester Hartman, D. Keating, R. LeGates, with S. Turner, *Displacement: How to Fight It* (Berkeley, CA: National Housing Law Project, 1982), p. 10.
- 10 Craig Flournoy and G. Rodrigue, "Separate and Unequal: Subsidized Housing in America," *The Dallas Morning News* (February 10, 1985), pp. A1, A24–26. This excellent investigation was reported in daily feature articles during the week of February 10–17, 1985.
- 11 E. P. Achtenberg and P. Marcuse, "Towards the Decommodification of Housing," in Chester Hartman, ed., *America's Housing Crisis* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 202–231.
- 12 Diane Ghirardo was actively involved in organizing the charrette, and a majority of Rice architecture faculty assisted students with their schemes. Jurors for the competition were Lenwood Johnson from Allen Parkway Village, O. Jack Mitchell, dean of Rice University School of Architecture, Thomas McKittrick, president of the Texas Society of Architects, and Aldo Rossi, who needs no explanation.
- 13 "War Needs: Housing," *Architectural Record* (April 1942), pp. 47–50. "Project Center Building," *Architectural Record* (May 1942), pp. 52–53.
- 14 This and other information not otherwise footnoted was obtained in a series of interviews with select Houstonians conducted by the author in 1984.
- 15 "Technical Report: Allen Parkway Village/Fourth Ward." Prepared for the HACH, September 1983. 115 pp. See Section V: Demographics.
- 16 Ibid., p. X-5. This report states that HUD will not disburse the funds until the future of Allen Parkway Village is certain; however, this does not explain why the funds were not spent at the time of allocation when presumably HUD would have allowed it. The executive director of HACH reverses that statement, saying HUD will not allow them to spend money on repairs, so that demolition is the only option (*Houston Post*, November 16, 1983). Another explanation is that HUD officials never granted final approval for Allen Parkway Village's rehabilitation because HACH was in a state of financial mismanagement. This kind of bureaucratic Catch-22 creates a smoke screen for city redevelopment plans.
- 17 Ibid., p. X-5.
- 18 Estimates were calculated by James Bridenstine for use in an upcoming hearing with HUD. Bridenstine thinks any large developer could rehabilitate Allen parkway Village for half the housing authority's estimate. If resident labor is included, the cost would be one-third of the HACH estimate.
- 19 "Technical Report," op. cit., p. II-9.
- 20 Ibid., p. XI-3.
- 21 Clare Cooper, *Easter Hill Village* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), pp. 217–218.
- 22 John Morris Dixon, "Subsidized Housing," *Progressive Architecture* (July 1984), p. 65.
- 23 Paul Chapman, project manager at Mayan Construction, Houston, roughly calculated that the costs for either of the two winning schemes would be about \$4–5 million, which does not include subsurface site work or work inside the apartments.
- 24 Instructors for the studio were D. Cuff, P. Rowe, and M. Underhill. The research and design concentrated on the forty blocks declared historic.
- 25 In an unpublished survey (April 1985) of six Texas housing authorities, Paul Crowther found that modernization of eighteen individual housing projects had occurred in the last five years.
- 26 R. Kolodney, "Self-Help Can Be an Effective Tool in Housing the Urban Poor," *Journal of Housing* (March 1981), pp. 135–142.
- 27 Unpublished survey (1984) by Mike Diggs, HUD, Washington, D.C.
- 28 See for example, Earl Phillips, "Opinion and Comment," *Journal of Housing* (May/June 1984), pp. 70–71.
- 29 A brief summary of Lake West proposal is published in *Progressive Architecture* (July 1984), pp. 79–81. A complete description is provided in two reports prepared in March 1984 for the Dallas Housing Authority: "Lake West Master Plan" (110 pp.), and "Lake West Technical Supplement" (23 pp.).
- 30 See Roger Montgomery, "High Density, Low-Rise Housing and Changes in the American Housing Economy," in S. Davis, ed., *The Form of Housing* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1977). See also Lee Rainwater, *Behind Ghetto Walls* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1970).
- 31 Cushing N. Dolbeare, "The Low-Income Housing Crisis," in Chester Hartman, ed., *America's Housing Crisis* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 29–75.
- 32 Ibid., pp. 49, 69.
- 33 Joseph Riley, unpublished study, HUD, Washington, D.C., 1979. The sample consisted of 10,000 tenants.
- 34 Struyk, op. cit., p. 17. The sample included eleven public housing authorities in very large cities.
- 35 Dolbeare, op. cit., pp. 36, 37.
- 36 J. Freidman and D. H. Weinberg, eds., *The Great Housing Experiment*, Urban Affairs Annual Reviews, Vol 24 (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1983).

Thoughts on Visualizing Thoughts

Jan Digerūd

Drawings by
Jan Digerūd and
Jon Lundberg

That part of a building project which I term architecture concerns immeasurable values. It expresses a human choice and human experiences far beyond that which is usually associated with exact calculations and daily life's basic necessities.

I consider the subconscious to be a storeroom for experiences, impressions, and dreams. An architect's abilities and ambitions make him capable of transforming thoughts into concrete three-dimensional solutions within a given framework.

The sketch plays a decisive role in this process. Through sketching, I can get as close as possible to visualizing an idea. This is the germ that steers the project toward reality.

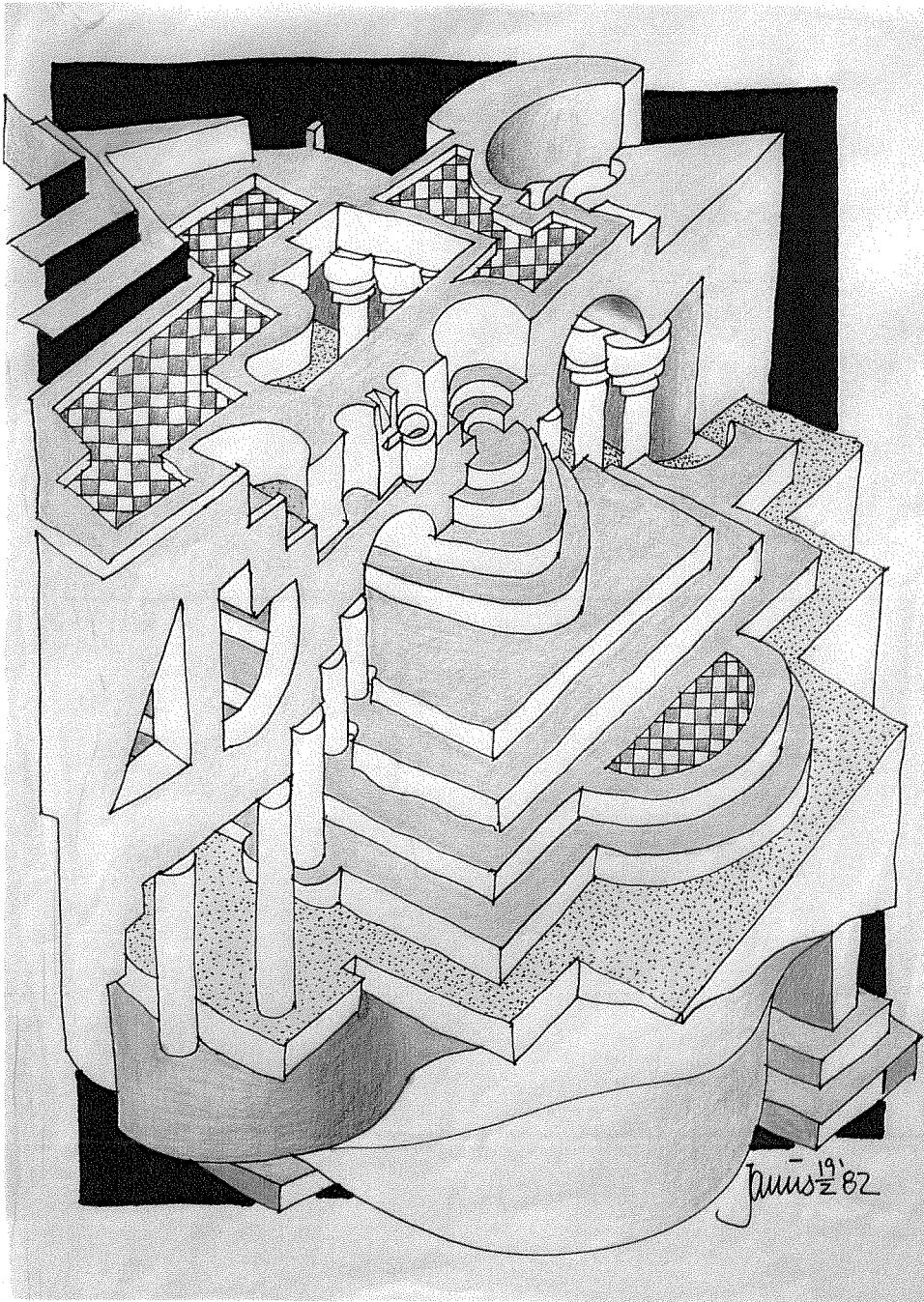
A sketch is a loving attempt to realize *something* in a world seemingly full of impossibilities. The value of the sketch as a tool is equal to the degree to which it builds up, indicates, and tests ideas.

Sketches are the architect's diary. These fragments refer to something seen or thought and can release fantasy as well as exact evaluations.

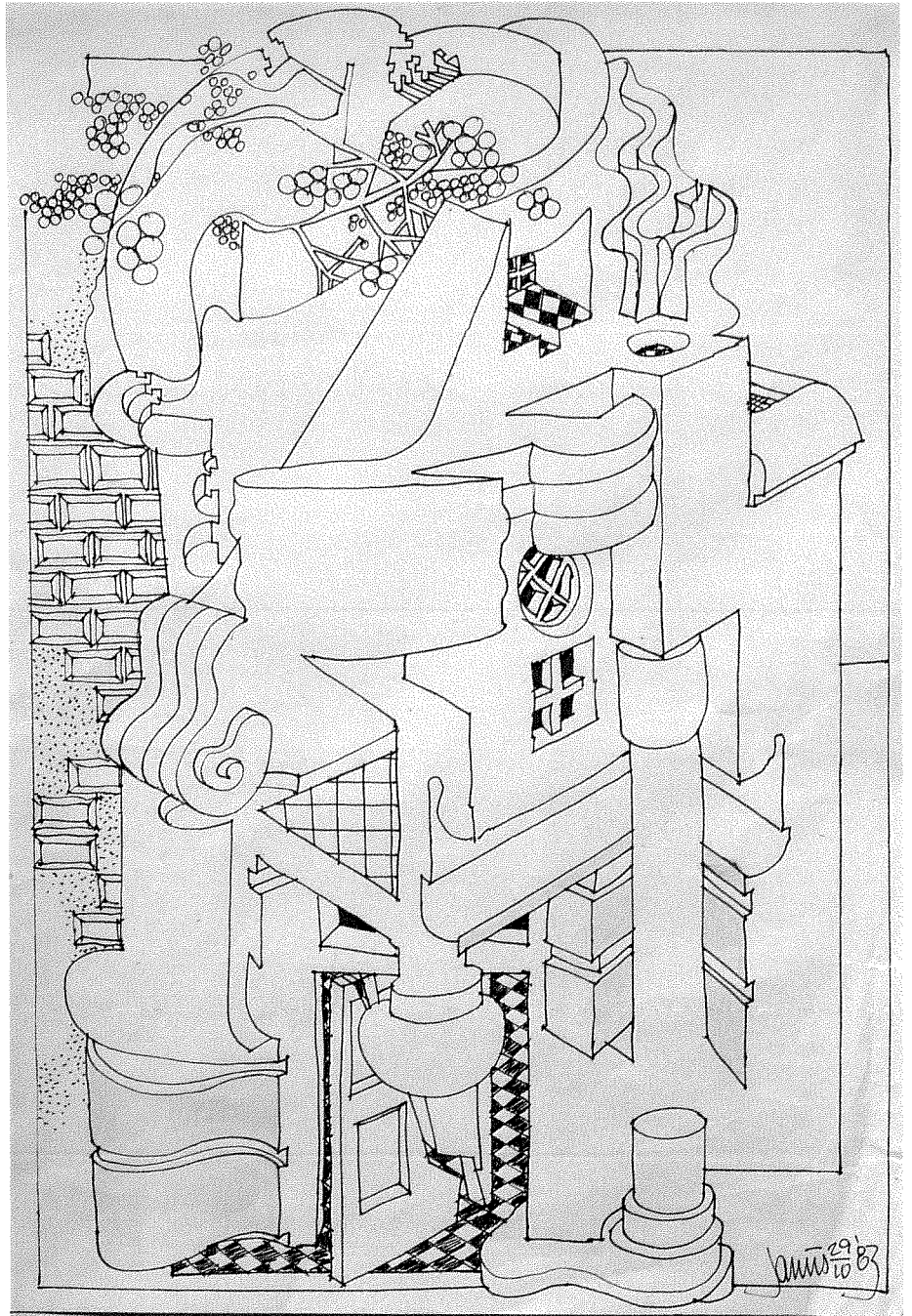
Analytic drawings are small sketches that emphasize main principles in a composition or a construction.

The sketch questions and can answer. It can caricature a reality by emphasizing the essential. It can indicate details, proportions, and scale, determining *quality of place*. A collection of sketches documents a thought process.

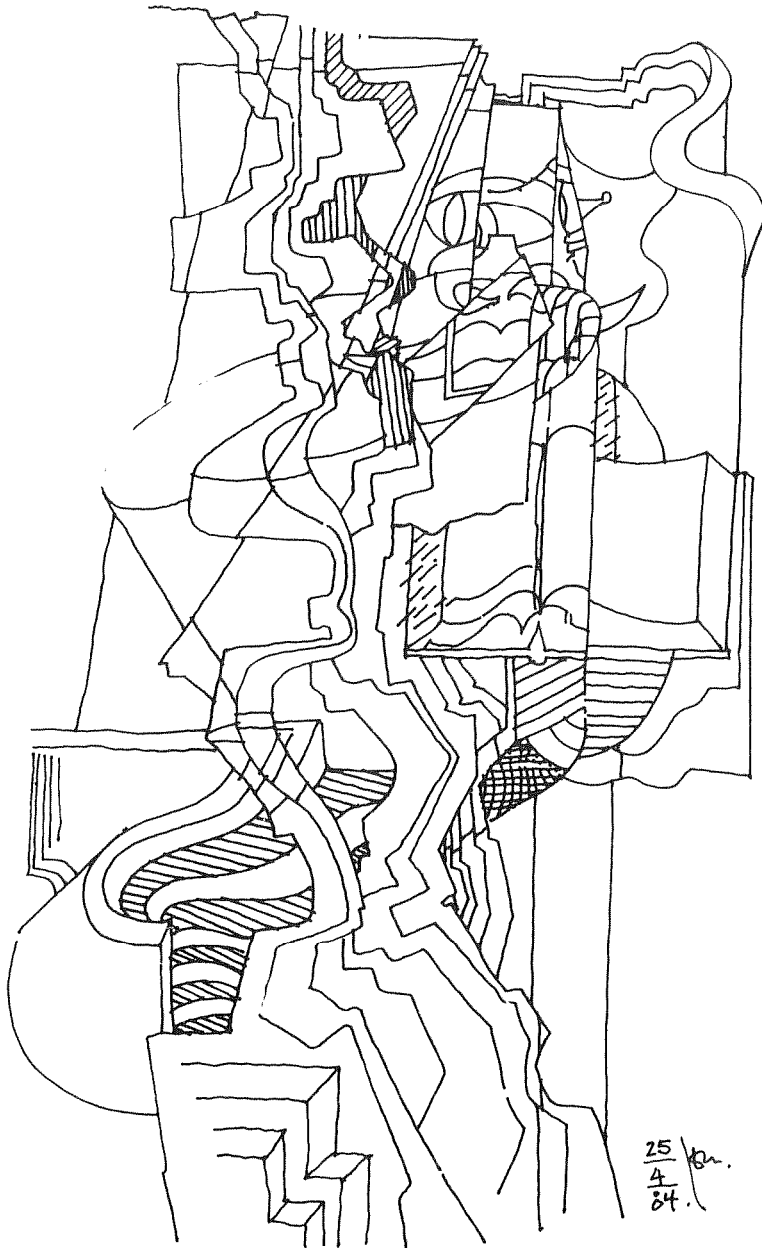
Ideas can be conceived through a sketch, and with this as point of departure, a building has the chance of becoming something more than a functional diagram.



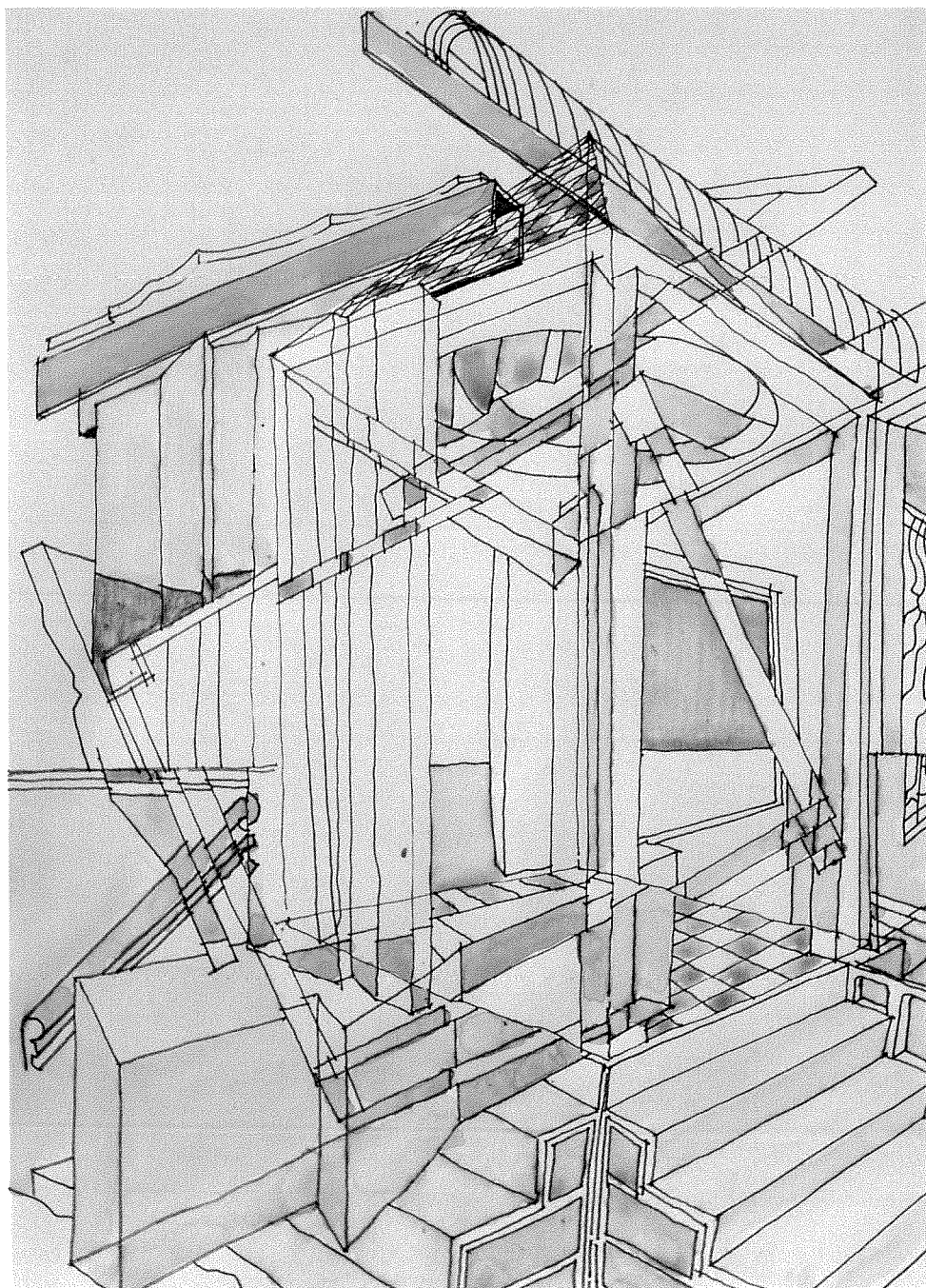
I Drawing by Jan Digerud.



2 Drawing by Jan Digerud.

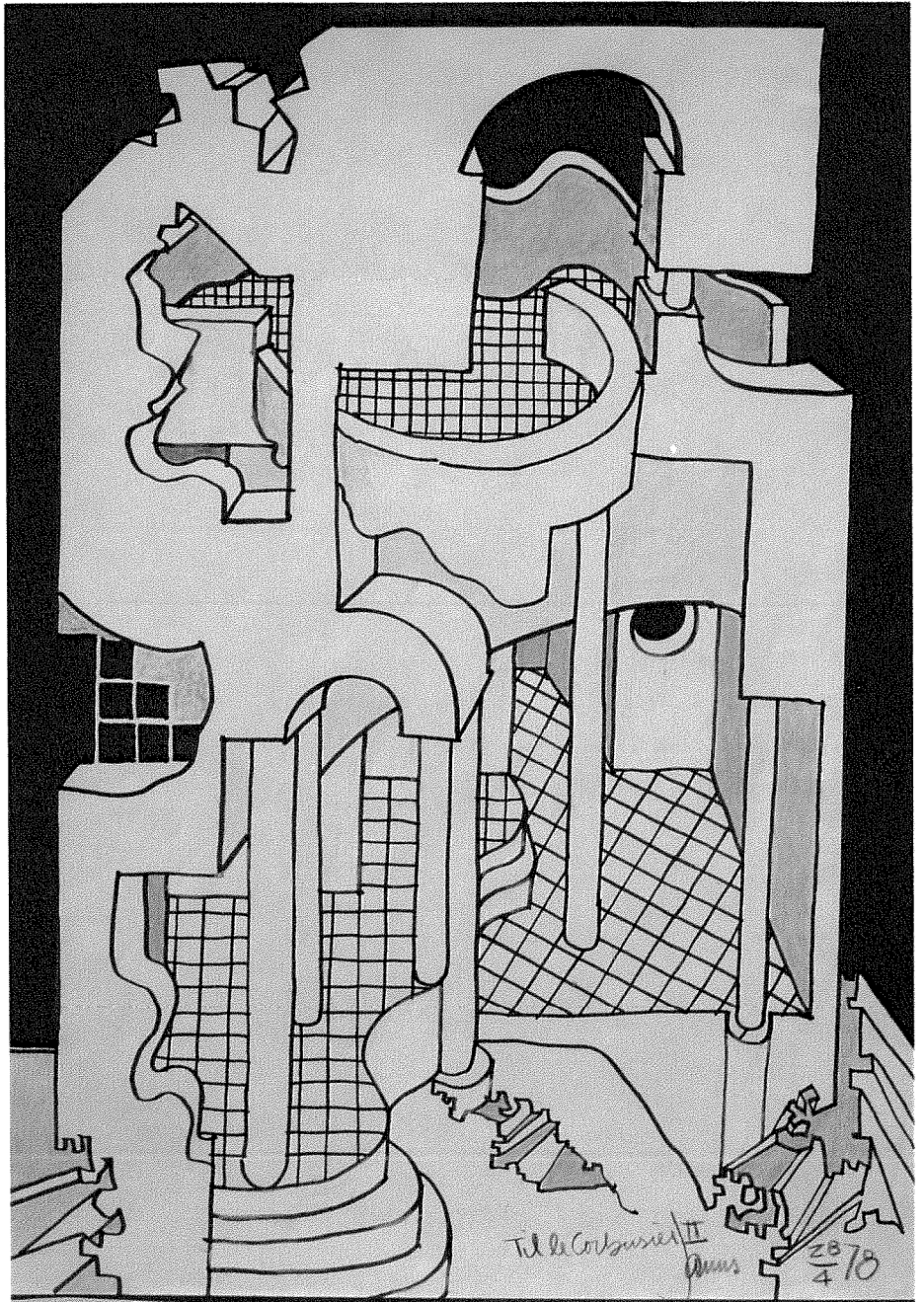


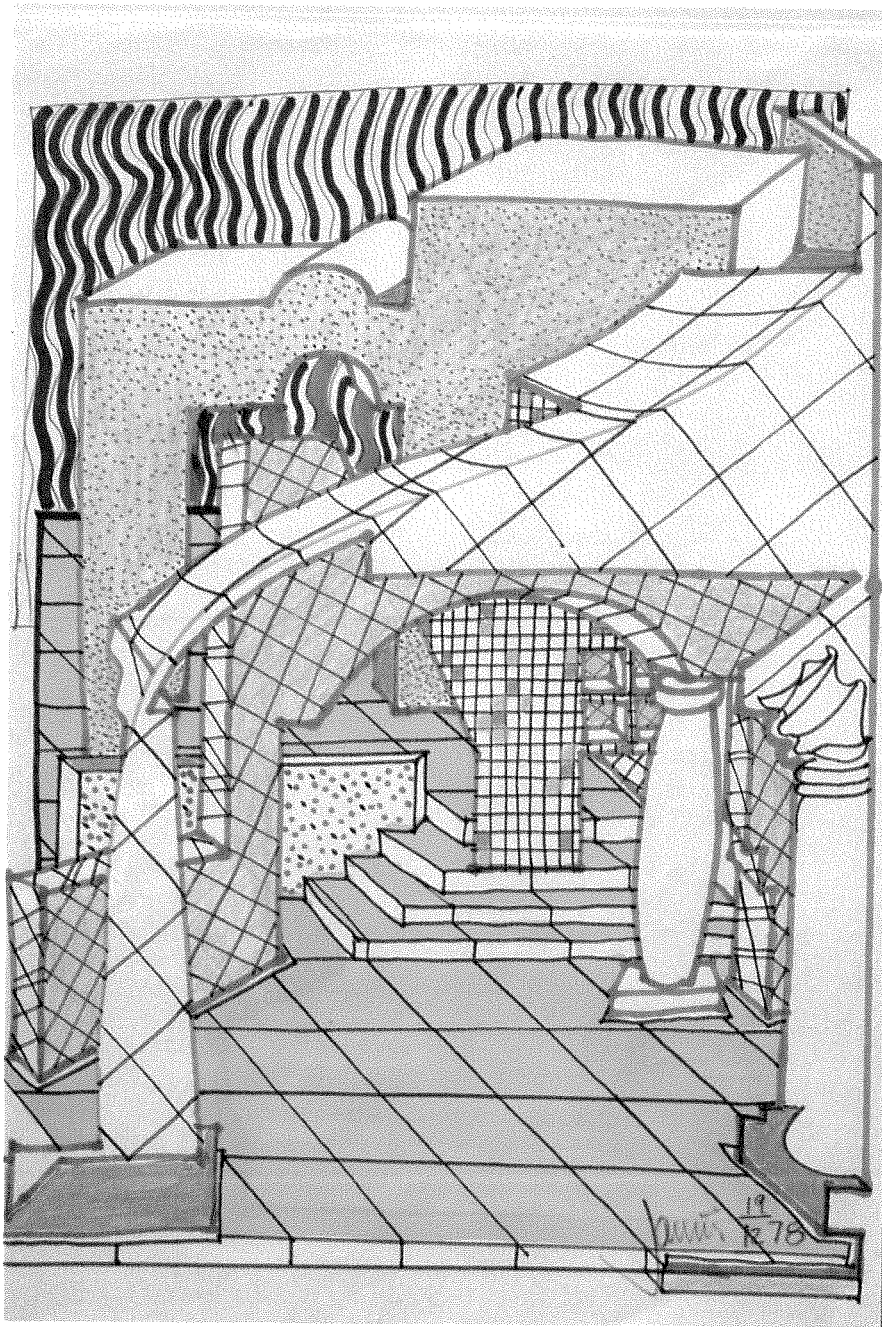
3 Drawing by Jon Lundberg.





4, 5 Drawings by Jon Lundberg.

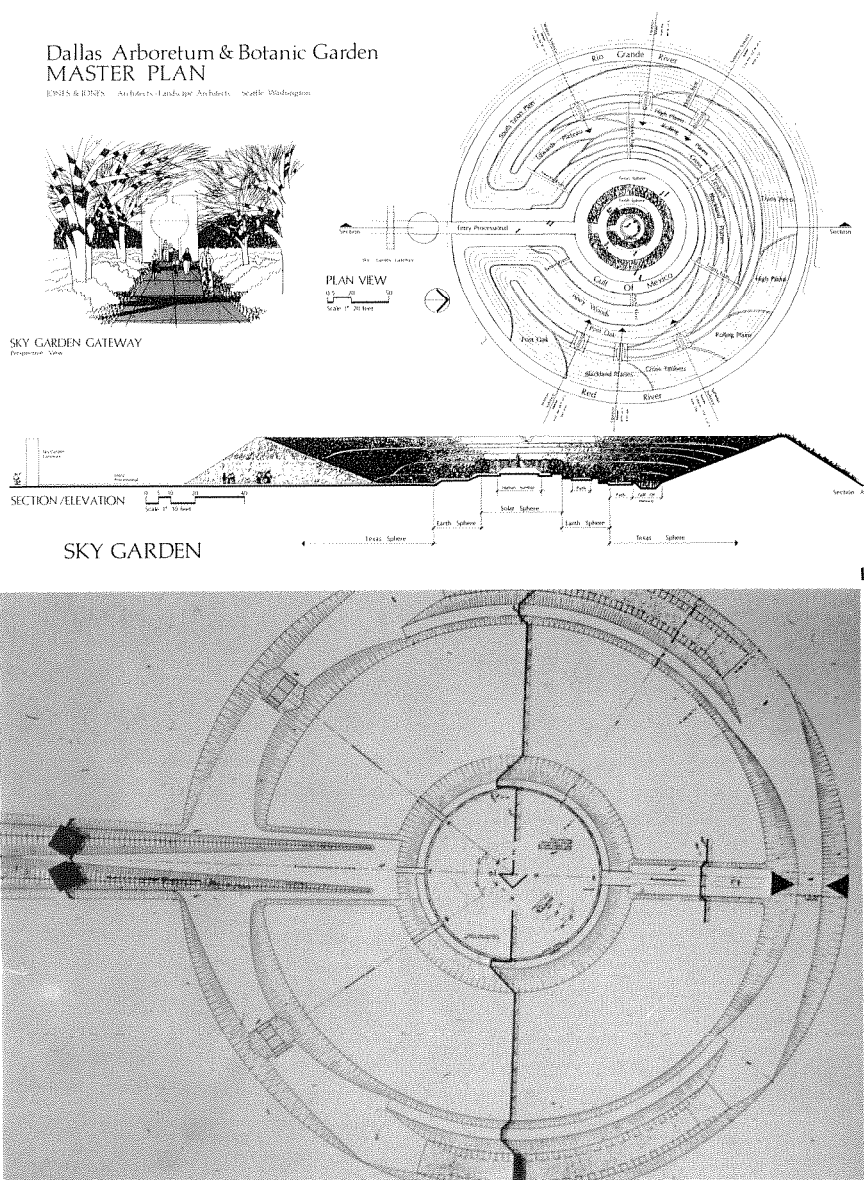




6, 7 Drawings by Jan Digerud.

Landscape Architecture: Making a Place for Art

Catherine M. Howett



1 **Sky Garden**, plan, for the Dallas, TX, Arboretum and Botanical Garden. Jones and Jones, Architects and Landscape Architects, Seattle, WA.

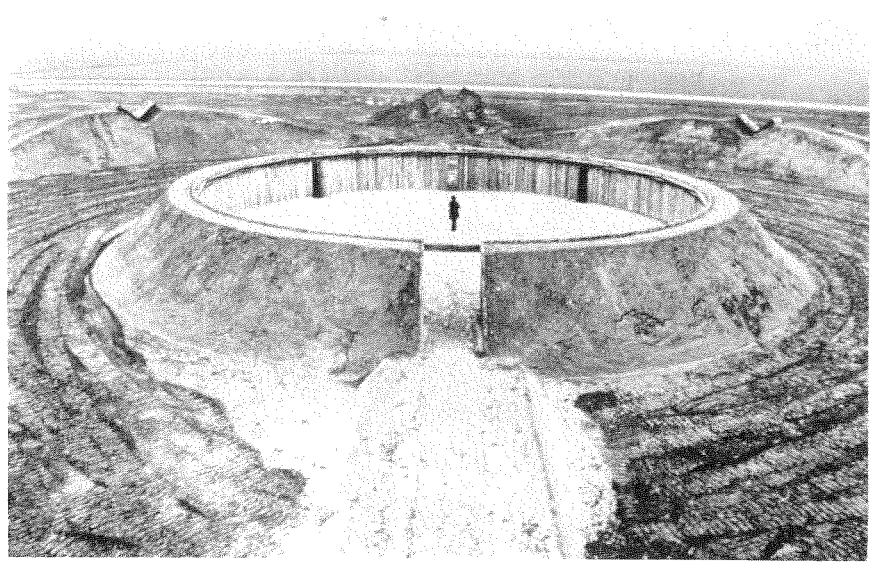
2 **Observatory** (1971), plan, Robert Morris. Sonsbeek Foundation, The Netherlands. Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.

It has been well over a decade since the profession of landscape architecture became aware, mostly through the forum provided by its journal *Landscape Architecture*,¹ of how certain developments in the world of art—variously described under the rubrics of “earth art,” “landscape sculpture,” “environmental art,” or, later, “site-specific art”—were increasingly relevant to the profession’s own historic concerns for the design of outdoor space. At first the suggestion that such art represented “the cutting edge of research in environmental design”² seemed absurd, or at least disturbing, to many practitioners. Today, however, there is ample evidence in the juries and journals that reflect current practice that the design intentions and values of this body of work have, indeed, exerted a powerful influence on recent projects in landscape architecture, in spite of any perceived differences in the artists’ outlook, training, or methodology. One might compare, for example, the proposed *Sky Garden* feature in the plan for the Dallas, Texas, botanical garden and arboretum by the Seattle firm of Jones and Jones with the plan of Robert Morris’s 1971 *Observatory* for a site in the Netherlands. Both works use circular earth mounds to orient visitors to particular configurations of the stars and planets, a frequent theme of outdoor art of the seventies. Similarly, Peter Walker’s 1984 design of the *Harvard Fountain* in front of the Science Center on the Cambridge campus is bound to summon up recollections of Carl

Andre's controversial *Stone Field Sculpture* of 1977, a grouping of glacial boulders on the public green in Hartford, Connecticut, or of Michael Heizer's series of works using massive transplanted rock forms.

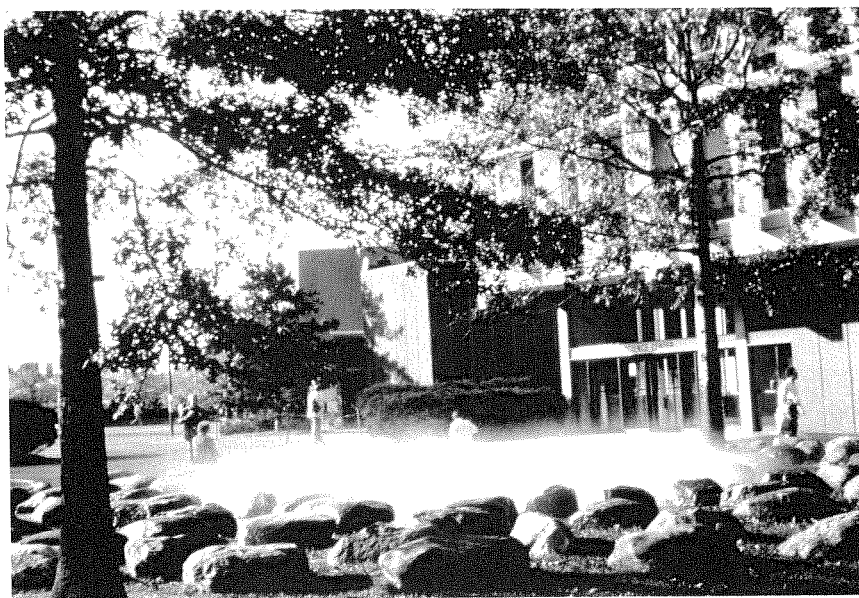
This rapprochement between the world of art and landscape architecture has not been entirely one-sided, however. One of the original motivations for the movement of artists away from studios, galleries, and museums—and away from the limitations of sculpture perceived as three-dimensional precious objects placed in a “setting”—was the desire to force a union of art and the so-called “real world,” the world not only of physical nature and the built environment but of the ordinary human community and everyday life. Robert Smithson was the first to see and propagandize the practical applications that “earth art” might have in the reclamation of landscapes previously devastated by mining or other industrial activities. “Art can become a physical resource,” he argued, “that mediates between the ecologist and the industrialist.”³

Other artists, too, began to pursue opportunities to create a public art that served functional as well as aesthetic purposes. As they succeeded in getting commissions to design such diverse public spaces as parks, play environments, outdoor theaters, urban plazas, and pedestrian walkways, these artists were entering the traditional domain of the landscape architect.



3

3 Observatory (1971), Robert Morris.
Sonsbeek Foundation, The Netherlands.
Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.



4



5

4 Harvard University Science Center Fountain (1984), Peter Walker and SWA Associates. Cambridge, MA.

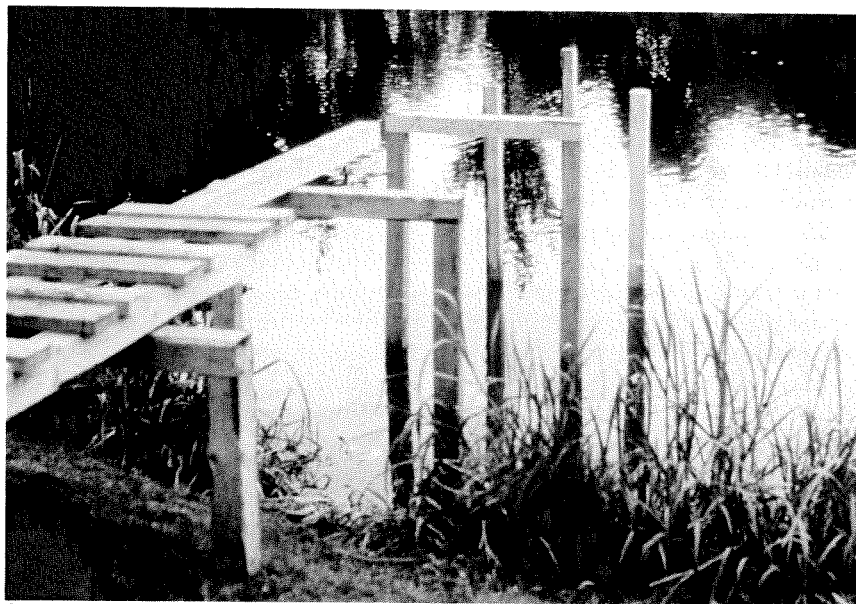
5 Stone Field Sculpture (1977), detail, Carl Andre. Hartford, CT.

Moreover, as John Beardsley has pointed out, their public projects were increasingly made possible by a wide range of public support, especially through the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the General Services Administration, state and local arts councils, and other public organizations, as well as by in-kind and financial contributions from private funding sources.⁴ As early as 1976, for example, artist Athena Tacha won a competition for the design of a “pocket” park on Main Street in Smithtown, New York, a pilot project for environmental sculpture sponsored by the New York State Council on the Arts, with help from NEA, the township, and the local arts council. Believing that “contemporary art . . . should be lived with, not stuck in a museum,”⁵ Tacha took special pride in the fact that, although three finalists had been selected by a professional jury, her *Tide Park* was chosen as the winning design by public vote after the community had been given an opportunity to study models of the three proposals.⁶

Increasingly, in recent years, the hope shared by many artists that they might experience this kind of engagement with a sympathetic audience through the medium of a socially useful art—overcoming that alienation of the artist from the larger community that had so often characterized the Modern period—has seemed finally within reach of fulfillment. An artist like Richard Fleischner currently has no less than six major public projects in

the works, including “a courtyard in the new Dallas Museum, . . . a series of modular blocks around a soccer park in Jerusalem, . . . and a sequence of interlocked exterior courtyard spaces at MIT.”⁷ Calvin Tompkins has commented on a situation that has become typical for artists like Fleischner, whose work is centered in the unique character of a given site. “[It] means, for most of them,” Tompkins said, “taking into account a complex of social, political, historical, topographical, and architectural considerations. It means working within limits, and with all sorts of people whose main interests are not aesthetic ones—bureaucrats, safety engineers, union representatives, citizens’ groups.”⁸

It would be naive to imagine that the pressures of having to deal with a battery of other consultants and to grapple with complex design programs for sites in which art must serve functional ends—or, if nonfunctional, at least demonstrate social usefulness, as in the case of monuments—has had no effect at all on the kind of art that is now being produced. At the very least, public spaces designed to accommodate human activity of one sort or another must be safe to use and, generally, pleasant to experience, values that have not always been obtained in a number of significant environmental projects. Alice Aycock’s work, for just one example, has frequently addressed the experience of fear and dread that certain landscape configurations can evoke. She manipulates the conventional



6



7

6 Union Pass (1977), George Trakas. At Documenta 6, Kassel, Germany.

7 Berth Haven (1983), George Trakas. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Seattle, WA.

vocabulary of architecture—doors, walls, roof, floors, stairs, ladders, chimneys—in order to communicate ambiguity and uncertainty, what she calls a “vocabulary of disjunction . . . in the tradition of Bosch, Piranesi, Boullée, Ledoux, Lequeu, Smithson, and many others.”⁹ Artistic intentions of this sort have not found a place in the new public art. A comparison that illustrates this transition might be made between some of George Trakas’s early works for outdoor exhibitions—his *Union Station* for “Projects in Nature” at Merriewolds West in Far Hills, New Jersey, in 1975, or *Union Pass* at Documenta 6 in Kassel, Germany, in 1977—with more recent installations, such as *Source Route* (1979, 1984) on the campus of Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, and *Berth Haven* (1983), on the grounds of the Western Regional Center of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Seattle, Washington. The two earlier works, centered in the experience of passage through a landscape, incorporated as major features watery pits blasted out of the earth with dynamite charges. One reviewer compared the experience of walking toward the deformed junction of Trakas’s two narrow bridges in *Union Station* with “approaching the scene of some violent accident, a collision, perhaps between the industrial and the natural.”¹⁰ *Source Route* and *Berth Haven*, by contrast, both provide visitors with an opportunity for a benign encounter with scenic, emotionally nurturant aspects of nature—“to see at close

hand the wildflowers and, with luck, some of the wildlife,” as Calvin Tompkins remarked of *Berth Haven*.¹¹

So while many landscape architects have been opening themselves to the imaginative challenges of environmental art, artists in their turn have in some measure moved in the direction of more accessible, functional, and collaborative site-specific art. John Beardsley has confirmed this “pronounced merging or at least overlap of intentions” that has inevitably given rise to questions about the classification of given works as art or landscape architecture, an issue, Beardsley wisely observes, that is “at once too large and too fruitless to tackle.”¹² He does admit, however, that when he began work on his catalogue for the 1977 Smithsonian exhibition *Probing the Earth: Contemporary Land Projects*, he worried, “in those less tolerant times,” about whether James Pierce’s works for Pratt Farm and Harvey Fite’s *Opus 40* (1939–1976) would be criticized as being too gardenesque in character.¹³ Robert Smithson had, after all, warned artists against the seductions of idealized, formalized landscapes, the “memory traces of tranquil gardens as ‘ideal nature’—jejune Edens that suggest an ideal of banal quality—[that] persist in popular magazines.”¹⁴ Smithson had even posed the question, writing in 1968, “Could one say that art degenerates as it approaches gardening?”¹⁵

I believe that Smithson’s question

strikes to the very heart of misgivings that many artists and architects share about the profession of landscape architecture, and that it is, moreover, simply a variation of a question that persistently recurs in frequent, anguished self-examinations within the profession: Is landscape architecture an art? One might better ask if landscape architecture is *still* an art, since most of these critiques claim for the modern practice of landscape architecture antecedents in the whole history of outdoor placemaking—in the magnificent ceremonial environments of ancient civilizations, in the triumphs of villa design and urban planning of the Italian Renaissance, in the legacy of French seventeenth-century formalism and the brilliant school of Le Notre, in English eighteenth-century landscape gardening and the development of Picturesque theory. The reason that the painful question repeatedly emerges within the profession is that, with very few exceptions, there seems not to be much continuity between the importance, quality, and public celebration of landscape works produced within these great traditions and contemporary practice. Yet how ironic it is that the figure of Frederick Law Olmsted, “father of American landscape architecture”—whose prodigious career dominated the second half of the nineteenth century, whose claims to continuity with the great traditions just described are unquestioned, whose genius gave form not only to superb landscapes of every sort in hundreds of



8

8 **Foreground: Janus** (1978–82).
Background: **Triangular Redoubt** (1971),
Motte (1975), **Earthwoman** (1976–77),
James Pierce. Pratt Farm, Clinton, ME.

American cities but to a theoretical corpus and aesthetic canon that have remained dominant for almost a century after his death—should now be the object of a kind of Oedipal assault from within the ranks of his professional descendents.

A 1981 article by Stephen Krog for *Landscape Architecture*, significantly titled “Is it Art?,” illustrates this reaction very well. Krog expressed his fear that “the art in landscape architecture is experiencing suspended animation. The profession seems to cower in the shadow of Frederick Law Olmsted.”¹⁶ His point was that twentieth-century American landscape architecture had not produced a body of theory and practice equivalent to the achievements of the nineteenth century or of the Modern movements in architecture and the fine arts. “Devoid of movements, eras, dogmatic philosophies,” he complained, “. . . today’s landscape architecture is banished from the higher realms of art; without them, landscape architects will continue to perform competent but tawdry, sycophantic works.”¹⁷ Besides the lack of a critical and theoretical forum within the profession, Krog attributed its failure to achieve high art to the tyrannies of having to serve a design program and clients’ needs. In his view, “the primacy of ‘function’ obviates the regard for artistic merit,” and he seriously proposed that site planning be made an entirely separate discipline devoted to “the technical requirements of

adapting the land to human use” so that “the term ‘landscape architecture’ can be reserved for the artful manipulation of landscape environments for human experience.”¹⁸

Grady Clay, then editor of *Landscape Architecture*, had distributed Krog’s essay before its publication to selected respondents, and eleven letters were published in a subsequent issue of the magazine. While none of those commenting on Krog’s thesis seemed to take exception to his perception of a malaise within the profession, many did deplore the idea that the possibilities for art in the design of outdoor environments could be separated from the demands of program and function. Marc Treib and I both suggested that the profession routinely operates as a *craft* that, in the hands of exceptionally skilled practitioners, can produce genuine art. “When art exists,” Treib wrote, “there is an increase in both scope and refinement, and it offers us richer experiential rewards. Transforming and transcending the requirements of the mundane and pragmatic solution is the key.”¹⁹ Garrett Eckbo, too, emphasized the potential of landscape architecture, in spite of its being rooted in specific programmatic requirements, to become art—even to be, in fact, “the ultimate art, because the landscape, social as well as physical, is the home, and the source of inspiration, for all other arts.” He proposed that the critical attribute to be looked for is the “qualitative experience” that

art generates, “measured by memorability, intensity of response . . . degrees of pleasure, emotion, inspiration, aspiration, new relations between known elements (which bring out previously unnoticed qualities in those elements), and so on.”²⁰

Eckbo’s appraisal of landscape architecture’s place in relation to the world of art seems to me at once wiser and more realistic than Krog’s suggestion that the profession might be redeemed as a legitimate art by handing over its practical, technological side to a separate profession of site planners. This is especially true, since, as we have already seen artists doing site design within the context of a design program for public use have been more and more willing to accommodate themselves and their art to functionalism and responsiveness to social needs. In doing so, they have embraced, and rightly so, the same history that landscape architects claim as their own. Lucy Lippard has amply documented the ways in which the arts and rituals of prehistory have functioned as models for contemporary work in the landscape.²¹ John Beardsley and others have pointed out continuities between the aesthetic of English eighteenth-century Picturesque tradition and the work of such artists as Walter DeMaria, Michael Heizer, Nancy Holt, Charles Ross, and James Turrell. Robert Smithson himself celebrated, in a perceptive 1973 essay in *Artforum*, the ways in which Frederick Law Olmsted’s landscape architecture had

embodied more complex and nuanced ecological and expressive values rooted in that same Picturesque tradition, values that Smithson wanted his own work to reflect as well—the art, as he called it, of “the dialectical landscape.”²²

Smithson admired the “dialectical” landscapes of Olmsted but deplored the “jejune Edens”—the perfected, idealized, artificial, and gardenesque landscapes of the shelter magazines. Perhaps Olmsted, too, had implicitly voiced the question, “Does art degenerate as it approaches gardening?,” since he and his partner Calvert Vaux are credited with having chosen for their profession the new designation “landscape architecture” at a time, around the middle of the last century,²³ when the terms “landscape gardening” and “landscape gardener” were in common use. In choosing to call themselves “architects,” did they hope to identify themselves with a more virile, rational, technologically based discipline, divorced from the softer-sounding, horticultural associations of the term “gardener”? Whatever the case, by the turn of the century the profession had formed a national association; within the next half-century, apprenticeship as the conventional road to practice had largely been replaced by academic training in any of several new university departments of landscape architecture that were established around the country. These departments were more often associated with agriculture, architecture, and engineering than

they were with art, and the curriculum leading to a degree in landscape architecture has tended to emphasize scientific and technical knowledge as a necessary precondition of good design.

This very process of institutionalization may have exacted a cost, over the course of time, in a needless narrowing of the profession’s vision of its own work, the range of sources on which it might draw, and the freedom with which it pursued new goals or alternative ways of arriving at the same goals. As we move into a new century, the mission of landscape architecture, as I see it, will be to design outdoor places that superbly accommodate our needs as individuals and as members of a community while giving expression to shared values, of which our stewardship of the earth’s natural systems ought to be preeminent. Those needs and values, however, cannot be discovered in isolation from larger currents of ideas and influences in contemporary society or from creative intercourse with artists, architects, theorists, and critics, as well as with scientists and technicians. Art alone, after all, can make those new places meaningful and memorable. Art alone can restore to our culture’s sensibility the most ancient of the metaphors of place-making, the metaphor of the garden—not as a perfected Eden but as a place revealed in process; the sacred space, the place of growth, of beauty, of sensual pleasure; the place of mystery, trial and transformation, transfigured life and death. Newton Harrison, in

describing the sources of his own ecologically based and politically potent art, summed up the complex criteria that can come into play in the design of outdoor environments. He made the point that prehistoric cave paintings were not mere ornaments to the wall but were “survival instructions with references to space, time, movement, magic, location, ordinance and tactics,”—in other words, functional and programmatic public art. “The end game,” Harrison said, stands somewhere “between decoration, special craft and magic.”²⁴

NOTES

- 1 See, especially, “Landscape Sculpture—The New Leap,” *Landscape Architecture* (July 1971), pp. 296–327; and Catherine M. Howett, “New Directions in Environmental Art,” *Landscape Architecture* (January 1977), pp. 38–46.
- 2 Howett, p. 45.
- 3 Robert Smithson, “Untitled, 1971” in Nancy Holt, ed., *The Writings of Robert Smithson: Essays With Illustrations* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), p. 220.
- 4 John Beardsley, *Earthworks and Beyond: Contemporary Art in the Landscape* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), p. 100.
- 5 Athena Tacha, “Tidepark, Smithtown, New York,” *Landscape Architecture* (May 1978), p. 202.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Katy Kline, “Space into Place: Richard Fleischner,” *Places* (Winter 1984), p. 64.
- 8 Calvin Tompkins, “The Art World: Perception at All Levels,” *New Yorker* (December 3, 1984), p. 176.
- 9 Alice Aycock, *Project Entitled “The Beginnings of a Complex . . .”* (New York: Lapp Princess Press, 1977), n.p.
- 10 Roberta Smith, “Projects in Nature,” *Artforum* 14, no. 4 (December 1975), p. 69.
- 11 Tompkins, p. 179.

- 12 Beardsley, p. 10.
- 13 Ibid., p. 7.
- 14 Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," in Holt, ed., p. 85.
- 15 Ibid., p. 86.
- 16 "Is it Art?," *Landscape Architecture* (May 1981), p. 373.
- 17 Ibid., p. 374.
- 18 Ibid., p. 375.
- 19 Marc Treib, letter to the editor, *Landscape Architecture* (July 1981) p. 446.
- 20 Garrett Eckbo, letter to the editor, *Landscape Architecture* (July 1981), p. 440.
- 21 Lucy R. Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).
- 22 Robert Smithson, "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape," *Artforum* (February 1973), pp. 62–68.
- 23 Norman Newton, *Design on the Land* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971), p. 273.
- 24 Newton Harrison, quoted in Lippard, p. 233.

Shadows in Ruskin's Lamp of Power

Kent Bloomer

Notions of light seem to dominate architectural criticism today, while careful discussions of shadow are seldom heard. Yet, shadowy darkness is a powerful presence in our lives and may deserve more attention.

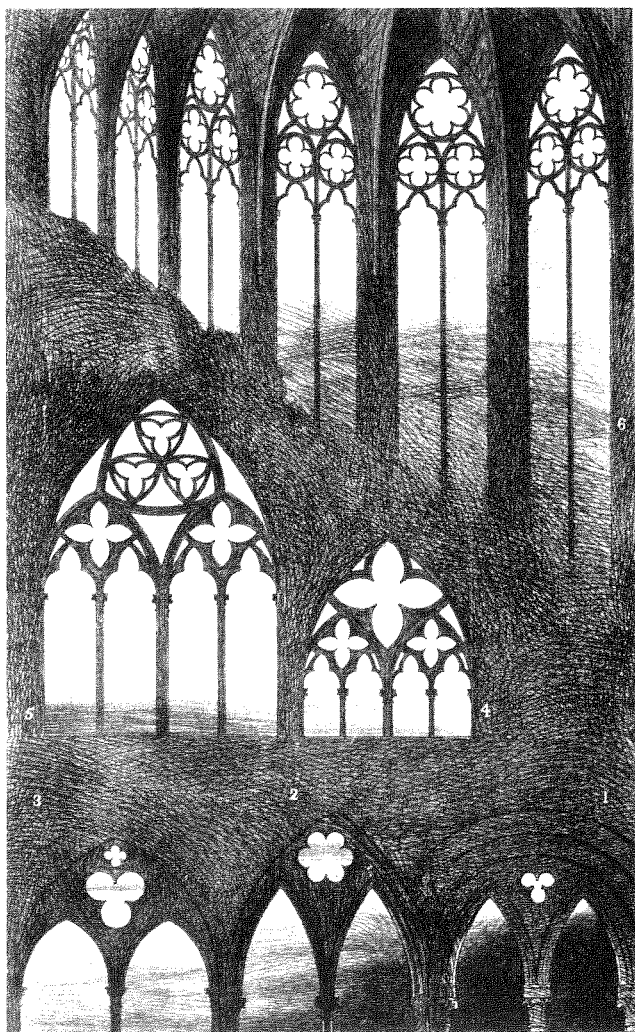
Perhaps the common association of light with truth and beauty inspires us to dwell on brightness; and, perhaps, we have been tacitly instructed that darkness is sinister and unsafe, to be avoided if possible. But this has not always been so. Shadow was given a positive value in the ancient and middle ages; it was an element of beauty in traditional Japanese aesthetics; and it was one of the most powerful virtues in John Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture*.

I believe Ruskin's message is the most useful and the most prescriptive for the modern designer. Not only does he provide us with a theory of meaning about shadow (that would satisfy the history-theory piece in today's architecture school), he also instructs us in techniques of design and placement (that we might use in a studio assignment).

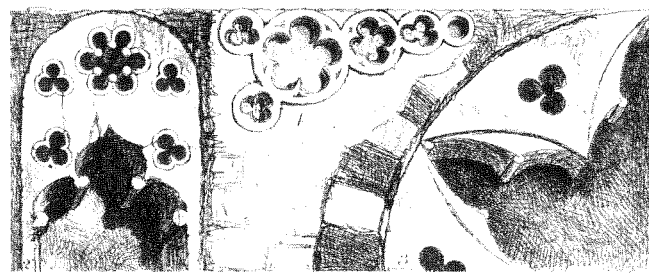
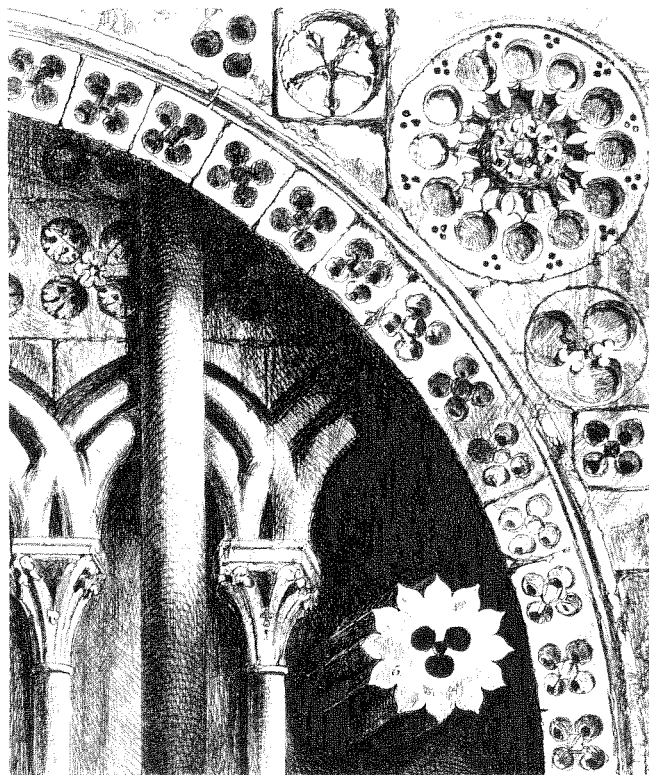
To locate his theory, it is helpful to examine a late medieval image of shadow that Ruskin would firmly dismiss. We know that Ruskin was a modern "gothicist" who positively disrespected neoclassicism. Some of that disrespect was rooted in his lack of faith in the omnipotence of light as a supernatural value as well as classical notions of regular



I Entrance portal of Farnam Hall, Yale University, by Russell Sturgis. Photograph by Kent Bloomer.



2



3

2 Ground in the traceries from Caen, Bayeux, Rouen, and Beavais. Drawings by John Ruskin from *Seven Lamps of Architecture*.

3 Penetrative or "pierced" ornaments from Lisieux, Bayeux, Verona, and Padua.

perfection and ideal form. Specifically it was the notion of perfection that he ridiculed because he could not find its presence in his examination of nature. Ruskin was earthbound and, although somewhat God-fearing in the early part of his life, demanded that all virtues be manifested in the observable panorama of earthly nature.

The medievalist, on the other hand, located the realm of greatest virtue in the skies away from earth. Employing the model of concentric spheres, the earth was a dark and inferior mass at the center of the universe, while the supercelestial realm of eternity and perfection resided in the outermost sphere. Giordano Bruno in his chapter on the “secret-of-shadows” written in the sixteenth century illustrates the ancient vision:

As the ideas are the principal form of things, according to which all is formed . . . so we should form in us the shadow of ideas . . . so that they may be adaptable to all possible formations.¹

The shadows about which Bruno spoke could be found in starry patterns between a dark earth and the brightness beyond. He treated images in the stars as properties of an intermediate world; thus the constellations of Aries and Taurus that we perceive as we look upward were, for Bruno, shadows of a dazzling perfection behind the stars, which, though slightly dimmer, were not as dark as the inferior shadows on earth. This stationing of heavenly light in a

position outside the earth and independent of the earth’s rotation necessarily fixed emblems of celestial virtue into frozen patterns.

Ruskin, by contrast, examined his shadows on earth and declared that

After size and weight, the power of architecture may be said to depend on the quantity (whether measured in space or intentness) of its shadows; and it seems to me that the reality of its works . . . should express a kind of human sympathy by a measure of darkness as great as there is in human life.²

Here shadow takes on an independent meaning and is not treated as an echo of that which forms it. Shadow is darkness, and darkness is a force belonging to mystery and sublimity rather than to beauty and perfection. It is precisely the nature of unknowing in contrast to knowledge that prompted Ruskin to celebrate shadow as a sign of power in one of his *Lamps of Architecture*. He understood that mystery was a fundamentally creative force in our lives.

The positive nature of the sublime was described in the eighteenth century by Edmund Burke, who argued that our sense of the sublime originated in terror, pain, and grief, while beauty provided a respite from all of that with feelings of joy, pleasure, and limited knowledge.

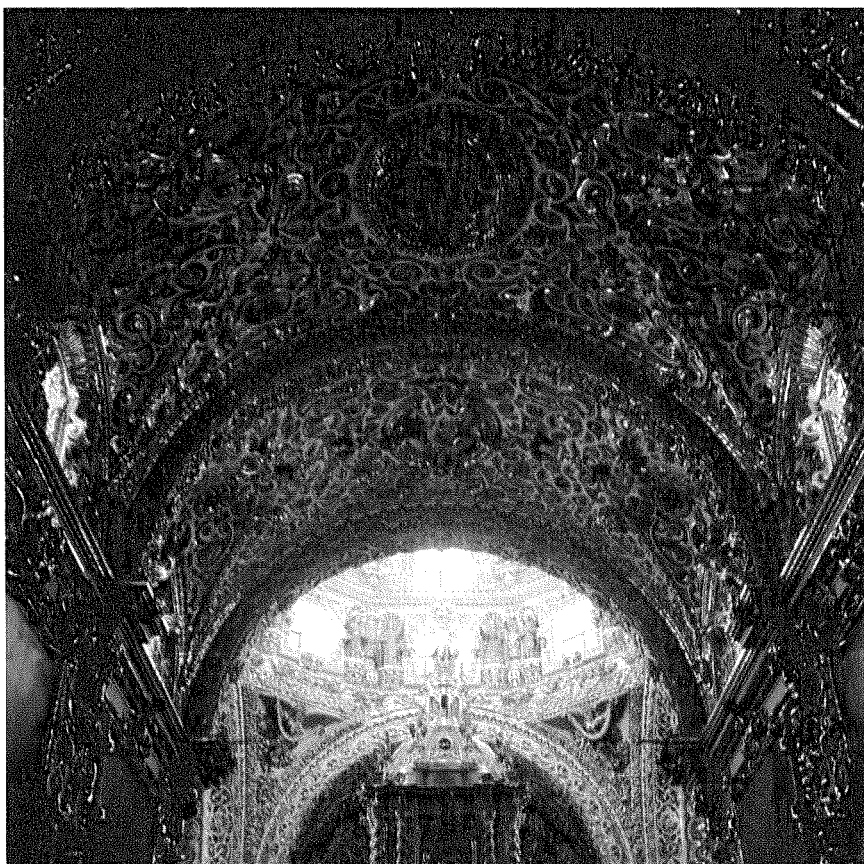
Mere light is too common a thing to make a strong impression on the mind; and without a strong impression nothing can be

sublime. But such a light as that of the sun . . . is a very great idea. . . . But darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light. Our great poet was convinced of this; and indeed so full was he of this idea, so entirely possessed with the power of a well-managed darkness, that, in describing the appearance of the Deity, amidst that profusion of magnificent images which the grandeur of his subject provokes him to pour out on every side, he is far from forgetting the obscurity which surrounds the most incomprehensible of beings.—“*with the majesty of darkness round circles his throne*”—³

Ruskin, understanding Burke’s message, sought the means to incorporate shadow in the ornaments of architecture in a controlled and deliberate mass rather than as accidental shade, as a figure rather than a texture, and as a presence more powerful than light.

The composition of the whole depends on the proportioning and shaping of the darks . . . like dark leaves laid upon the snow.⁴

It is an example of Ruskin’s genius that he identified the “penetrative ornament” as an architectural device able to provide the designer with a means of configuring darkness. That species of ornament is basically a graphic hole cut in a wall as a dominant void in a tracery or lattice, although Ruskin was careful to suggest that the strongest darkness should begin a certain



4 Gold ornaments on the ceiling of the Capillo de Rosario, Church of Santo Domingo, Puebla, Mexico. Photograph by Kent Bloomer.

distance behind the outer surface as a murky, static, and starless mass leaving the ad hoc and brightly moving shadows up front to caress and illuminate the sculptural and material features of the architecture. Ruskin chose to enshrine the darkness, centering its presence and making intense shadow the figure on the field of light.

Such are the principal circumstances traceable in the treatment of the two kinds of masses of light and darkness, in the hands of the earlier architects; gradation in the one, flatness in the other, and breadth in both.⁵

Employing the mechanics of the figure-ground as a visual system that permits two or more figures to interact is characteristic of Ruskin's way of thinking when he is attempting to nourish the coexistence of several meanings in a single composition. The depth of Ruskin's thought develops from his insistence that architecture embody the many, the cyclic, and the interactive characteristics of nature rather than focus on a classical unity bending under the distant and frozen omnipotence of a luminous deity.

An example of Ruskin's multiple vision, and one of my favorite compositions of penetrative ornaments, is to be found in the portal of Russell Sturgis's high Victorian Farnam Hall facing the Old Campus at Yale University. This powerful pediment transforms stars into black beacons that are legible from a distance of several hundred feet. The power and severity of

those ornaments proclaim the Victorian belief that academic learning is both painful and elegant, while the composition includes a curious mixture of the classical, the gothic, and the spirit of industrialism.

The distinction between the sublime and the beautiful and the assignment of those values to the specific conditions of light and dark provides the designer with an elementary meaning system useful to the design of architectural ornament. The very fundamental nature of that distinction and the possibility of realizing that distinction in shaping architectural elements offers a systematic way of designing new ornaments for our modern age.

It is useful in that respect to examine a traditional Japanese understanding of shadow and darkness, at least the version reported by Junichiro Tanazaki in his essay *In Praise of Shadows* written in 1933. In that essay he regrets the elimination of shadows in modern Japanese architecture by the excessive use of electric light and an acceptance of the "Western" obsession with brightness. He argues very convincingly that beauty and repose, not terror, is the gift of darkness. In describing the dark intersanctum of a temple he says

Surely you have seen, in the darkness of the innermost rooms of these huge buildings, to which sunlight never penetrates, how gold leaf of a sliding door or screen will pick up a distant

glimmer from the garden, then suddenly send forth an ethereal glow upon the horizon at sunset. In no other setting is gold quite so exquisitely beautiful . . . or again you may find that the gold dust of the background, which until that moment had only a dull sleepy luster, will, as you move past, suddenly gleam forth as if had burst into flame.⁶

A phosphorescent jewel gives off its glow and color in the dark and loses its beauty in the light of day. Were it not for shadows, there would be no beauty.⁷

Unlike Ruskin and Burke, Tanazaki directly assigns the property of beauty to darkness and even includes a measure of fear in his sense of beauty.

Have you never felt a sort of fear of the ageless, a fear that in that (dark) room you might lose all consciousness of the passage of time, that untold years might pass and that upon emerging you should find that you had grown old and gray?⁸

Unlike Bruno and the ancient Westerners, Tanazaki assigns no pervading or celestial value to light as a quality. If anything he tends to regard too much light as a pollutant, which might sap the beauty out of things.

He is right. Gold, pearl, and lacquerware do lose their luster in bright light, and our sense of the dimensions of time and space may become greater or at least less confined in shadowy places. Indeed the clarity of time and space that we

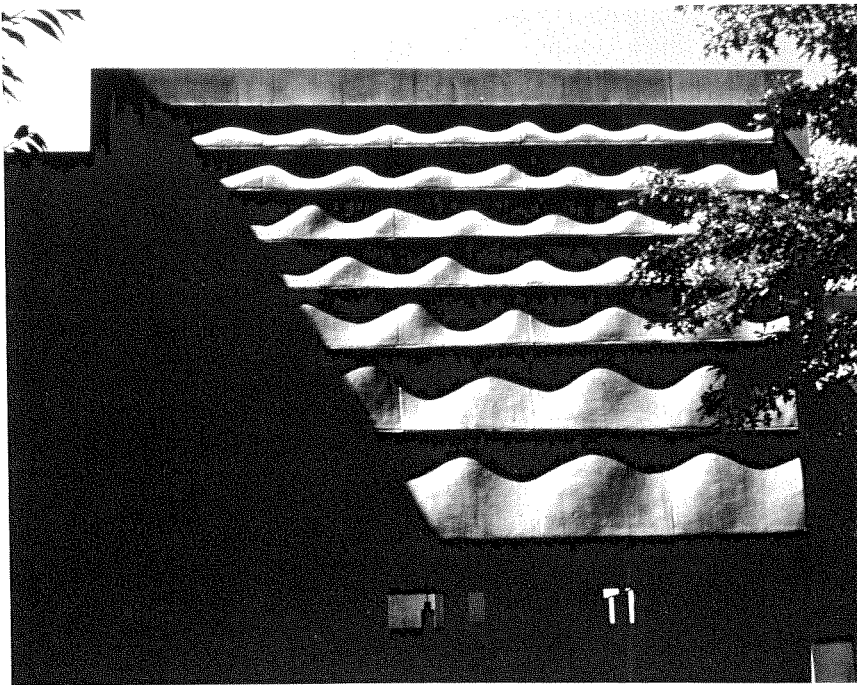
lose in intense shadow assigns to darkness that property of mystery that Burke and Ruskin respected.

Tanazaki and Ruskin are more together than apart in their sentiments because they are both observing the temporality of earthbound nature. Both of them hold a reverence for materials; if one is granite, the other is jade. Their different concerns are similar by turning one's figure into the other's ground. If Ruskin enshrines his penetrative ornaments with illuminated stone, Tanazaki enshrines his gold with shadow. They both observe the respective intensities of their media with extraordinary sensitivity, and neither appear to abdicate their senses to the realm of abstract ideas.

Tanazaki, however, laments the loss of tradition and makes no effort to imagine re-creating the shadows of repose and beauty as a property of modern times.

Mrs. Tanazaki tells a story of when her late husband decided, as he frequently did, to build a new house. The architect arrived and announced with pride, "I've read your *In Praise of Shadows*, Mr. Tanazaki, and I know exactly what you want." To which Tanazaki replied "but no, I could never live in a house like that."⁹

Not so with Ruskin. He saw the modern age begin a century before Tanazaki's essay, and he intended, in those early years of industrialization, to conserve and identify principles that might



belong to all ages. His analysis of shadows and his identification of the penetrative ornament was meant to establish strategies rather than styles. Above all he attempted to assign modern psychological meanings to the power he found in some great examples of traditional architecture.

The meanings he gave to shadows are still a part of our lives, and thus I wonder why we talk about light so much. Perhaps more puzzling is our tendency to deny light its real power and magic by not paying a commensurate amount of attention to darkness.

NOTES

- 1 Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 216.
- 2 John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (New York: Noonday Press, 1977), p. 83. (Originally published in 1848.)
- 3 Edmund Burke, *On the Sublime and Beautiful* (Glasgow: The University Press, 1818), p. 88. (Originally published in 1757.) The quotation is from Milton, *Paradise Lost* II.
- 4 Ruskin, p. 91.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- 6 Junichiro Tanazaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, Thomas Harper, translator (New Haven, CT: Leetes Island Book, 1977), p. 22. (Originally published in 1933.)
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 30.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- 9 *Ibid.*, afterword by Thomas Harper, p. 48.

5 Frieze by Kent Bloomer above entrance portal to the Temple Rodef Shalom in Pittsburgh. Photograph by Kent Bloomer.

River Candles

Joyce Earley Lyndon

The people of Zurich from their two thousand years of history have kept many old customs, but in 1962 a schoolmaster, Hansruedi Obi, and his class at the Ilge School introduced a new one, new in the sense that they took an ancient practice, floating lights on streams, and gave it a time, the eve of the last day of school before Christmas, and a place, the Limmat River in the heart of the city.

The place is the mile-long stretch of the Limmat between the Quay Bridge, where the river leaves the lake, and the National Museum just beyond the main railway station. Zurich has many interesting public open spaces, but this section of the river is probably seen, every day, by the greatest number of people. It is the natural and the original center of the city.

Seven bridges divide the Limmat mile into a series of rectangles, each one given a different character by the adjacent historic buildings. Two bridges are reserved for pedestrians, the newest one, built three or four years ago, and the oldest, the Rathaus Bridge, on the site of the first recorded river crossing. It was recently widened into a piazza, with market stalls, plants, and seats with swingover backs. On a clear day you can see the Alps.

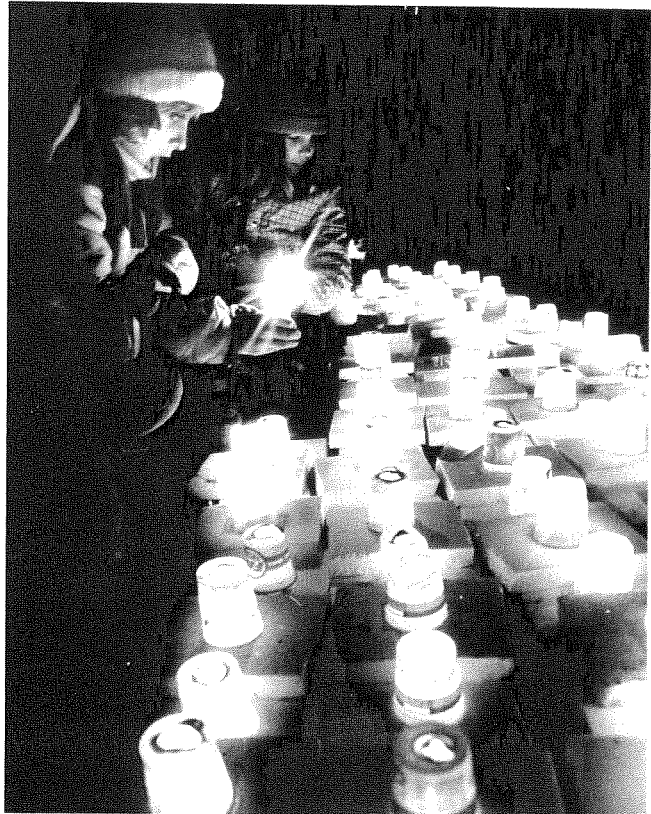
Along the embankments, built in the river in the nineteenth century, traffic

swirls and roars. But on the left bank, between the second and fourth bridge, old waterfront buildings still stand by the river, and a walkway is partly cantilevered over the water and partly threaded through sixteenth- to eighteenth-century courts and arcades at different levels. It is a good place to watch the populations of native birds. Mute swans, white and normally graceful, feed ridiculously, upended. Mallard ducks squawk, outraged. Laughing seagulls shriek over the soot-black coots (diving birds like eggs on legs, with big feet and Chinese white face masks).

The time is the end of a workday afternoon in December. Usually cold and dry. In the streets, thousands of starlights hang out of the dark overhead, over hurrying natives, foreigners, and occasional musicians. The shops are bustling in the last half-hour before they close for the night; cafés are doing good business, as always.

At the river, the black voids between the bridges are decorated with tinsel reflections from the lit buildings, street lamps, and lines of moving traffic. Lime trees on the Limmat Quay are outlined with strings of tiny white lamps, like frozen forked lightning.

The floating lights are launched off a long dock running out from the left bank, below the Quay Bridge



I Making candle rafts.
Comet Photo AG.



2

where the river leaves the lake. Pedestrians on the Munster Bridge, seeing a luminous gold strip extending over the river, are watching the preparations, black silhouettes along the railing.

On the launch dock, there is a babble of children's talk, and you can see their dark shapes moving about. Four of them are assembling the lights at the foot of some steps down from the embankment. One takes out of a box a nine-inch styrofoam square, the raft, with a dark circle in the center. Another sticks on to the circle a short, stout candle. A third lights the candle. A fourth adds the shade, a translucent yoghurt cup with the bottom cut out, inverted. The finished rafts are handed along a line of children on the dock and added to the rows already in place, which are arranged in sets with narrow gangways. Meanwhile the workspace on the dock gets narrower. There are said to be seven hundred candles. At a safe distance, a silent audience of coots watches the preparations; evenly spaced like the rafts, white masks a grey blur in the darkness, they interrupt the reflections of the street lamps on the water.

A pair of emerald eyes moving silently down from the lake turns out to be two open police boats; you can just see the "P" on the sides. They pull in to the far end of

the dock. Children climb into them and begin stowing on the floor candlerafts passed along by others, two at a time, until the gunnels of the boats are silhouetted, candlelit, against the river. One boat moves upstream, close to the opposite bank, and stops. The other, ducks flying low in front of it, holds a position across the current, midstream.

The watchers on the quays and bridges are quiet. Clocks and bells chime six. The first raft is afloat and drifting steadily away. The second follows and the light goes out; the next two are set down more carefully. All along the dock and from the boats, candlerafts are being gently launched until the spread of the river is decorated with blobs of golden light—milky, or lettered, according to the brand of yoghurt.

The long procession moves downstream, under one bridge after another, at the same pace as the small children who are following alongside on the walkway with their parents, attentive and thoughtful. It is the kind of magic they expect at Christmas.

The birds, in contrast, are uneasy. Every bird on the river, and there are thousands, wants to avoid a confrontation with these dangerous smelling objects that move like ducks with their brains on fire. Near the arcaded houses on piles a

family of swans moves upstream in a dignified single file. On a parallel course ten feet away a convoy of lights is approaching. The first light, caught in a cross current, swings in under the arcade. The leading swan veers to avoid it and the two convoys merge in a crossing maneuver where the lights determine the pattern. A small child wants to know why the swans are afraid of the little ships. His mother says it is because they are strange; the swans have not seen such things before. The ducks are less fearful. They are a third as long as swans and much more agile. A small flock can tack around a single light. On a collision course with a flotilla, they take off together and land in the nearest patch of black water, repeating as often as necessary.

Downstream from the approaching front of candlerafts battalions of coots have closed ranks, hoping to intimidate the invaders, and are moving forward as one body. The lights, in contrast to the birds, are a loose collection of individuals following the currents and eddies unpredictably. The coots take off. Hundreds of big-footed, heavy birds run along the water for several yards before becoming airborne, feet pattering, wings vigorously thrashing the surface, a roaring, rushing, tearing storm.

The rafts take about an hour

to reach their destination, one of the city's power stations. Tomorrow they will be collected and the holidays begin.

In 1971, we described the ceremony to some friends, long-time residents of the city. "Candles, you say? On the Limmat?" They shook their heads, almost in disbelief. "But then, so much happens in Zurich."

In 1984 the ritual of the lights was listed in the city's official program. The quiet fantasy has become one of the traditional events of Zurich's Christmas.

The Poetry of Place: Chapman's Homer, *The Iliad*

David Sofield

Perhaps the first widely known evocation of place in Western poetry occurs in *The Iliad*. There are, of course, dozens of place names in the poem, and a number of those named places are described more or less routinely, Homer's primary focus being on what his characters do and say. The "place" at hand is on Mount Ida, overlooking Troy and the plain on which the great battles are fought. One puts the word in quotes because the poet invests the local flora with such powers as render it semimagical and therefore distinct from actual places one might visit, even though the mountain on which the events in question take place is very much there, *in place*, today. We are in Book XIV. The Greeks are rallying, Poseidon has undertaken to inspire them, and Hera wishes to distract her husband, Zeus, long enough for the Greeks to get the upper hand before he notices what is happening. She will seduce him. In Homeric epic, though, a seduction practiced by the principal goddess requires subsidiary actions, requires the aid of lesser gods. So Hera, called like all the characters by her Latin names in the first and arguably still the most vivid English translation of the poem, the 1611 version by George Chapman, requests from Aphrodite a charm that will make her irresistible to Zeus. Before visiting Aphrodite,

. . . took she chamber, which her son, the god of ferrary,
With firm doors made, being
joined close and with a privy key
That no god could command but Jove. (141–143)

About certain architectural details, then, Homer does care, even if for a moment it looks as though what's on his mind is only that very modern problem, building security. In her chamber, Hera anoints her body with ambrosia and "sacred oil." Having, in the next forty lines, received from Aphrodite the sought-for band of fabric figured with "all enticements to delight," she

. . . straight stooping from
heaven's height,
Pieria and Emathia (those
countries of delight)
Soon reached, and, to the snowy
mounts where Thracian soldiers
dwell
Approaching, passed their tops
untouched. From Athos then she
fell
Past all the broad sea and arrived
in Lemnos, at the towers
Of god-like Thoas, where she
met the prince of all men's
powers,
Death's brother, Sleep. . . .
(189–195)

A little festival of place names, if not quite of places. On Lemnos, Hera promises Somnus, God of Sleep, *his* desire, Pasithae, if he will come with her to the Troad, there to cast Zeus into a lengthy slumber after the king and queen of the gods have taken their pleasure. Agreement is immediate, and the two proceed to Mount Ida, where Somnus secrets himself in a tall pine tree to watch and wait until his services are needed. As soon as Hera is in the presence of Zeus, he asks why she is there (she replies, falsely, that she is off to reconcile

Oceanus and Tethys, the Titanic couple who helped bring her up and who “have been/Long time at discord”), and he invites her, if that is the phrase, to make love then and there. His invitation is phrased, we might think, curiously, for he tells her he desires her more than he desired Ixion’s wife, who bore him Pirithous, and the other many goddesses and humans who produced some of his notable offspring. Hera appears to be less upset by his ritual boasting, having no doubt heard it before, than by the prospect of being observed in a compromised position by other gods. In the nineteen lines here reproduced, she questions him, failing—and not seriously intending—to change his mind, whereupon Homer composes what has become the archetypal *locus amoenus* in our literature. It is one that will echo through Latin epic and through the narrative poems of Renaissance Italy, France, and England. More than two millennia later, for example, Milton will attempt, and achieve, a particularly elaborate imitation in *Paradise Lost*. It may be fair to say that no “place” in any literature has had a longer and more imitated afterlife. I have modernized spelling and punctuation while not otherwise altering Chapman’s words. Chapman writes in quite strict iambic meter, fourteen syllables to the line, which requires the following small adjustments: “unsufferable” is five syllables, “heaven” one, “heavenly” two, and “flower” one.

The cunning dame seemed much

incensed, and said: “What words are these,
 Unsufferable Saturn’s son? What? Here? In Ida’s height?
 Desir’st thou this? How fits it us? Or what if in the sight
 Of any god thy will were pleased, that he the rest might bring
 To witness thy incontinence? T’were a dishonored thing.
 I would not show my face in heaven, and rise from such a bed. But if love be so dear to thee, thou hast a chamber sted
 Which Vulcan purposely contrived with all fit secrecy;
 There sleep at pleasure.” He replied: “I fear not if the eye
 Of either god or man observe; so thick a cloud of gold
 I’ll cast about us that the Sun, who furthest can behold,
 Shall never find us.” This resolved, into his kind embrace
 He took his wife. Beneath them both fair Tellus strewed the place
 With fresh-sprung herbs, so soft and thick that up aloft it bore
 Their heavenly bodies; with his leaves did dewy Lotus store
 Th’Elysian mountain; saffron flowers and hyacinths helped make
 The sacred bed; and there they slept—when suddenly there brake
 A golden vapor out of air, whence shining dews did fall,
 In which they wrapped them close, and slept till Jove was tamed withal. (280–298)

The lushest herbal carpet, a bed of (literal) flowers, and golden-vapor walls, so close-fitting as to suggest the prenatal room to which it still

seems natural to want to return, a room where one’s thoughts and desires are tamed. For all of its fancifulness and brevity, Homer has written and Chapman has rendered the perfect modern dream place.

Square to the Road, Hogs to the East

Robert B. Riley



Most of us have read the tales. The quiet, the bright flowers, the tall grass moving to the wind like the sea and high enough, it was said, to hide a man on horseback. Even today, with that vast mesic grassland long plowed up, the traveler driving west on Interstate 74 senses the land open up just past the Indiana line. Here the stretches of tall grass become not an incident within the woodland but the landscape itself, a strange landscape, a landscape so different that a word for it had to be borrowed from the French. A word that George Stewart wrote “. . . has always borne a touch of strangeness and poetry. In English, *meadow* is to *prairie* as a placid cow [is] to a shaggy buffalo-bull.”

The strange beauty of the great grasslands has been reduced to commonplace by the rhapsodies of writers and tourist developers who never saw it. The story of its development over the years from 1830 to 1880 has been thoroughly documented. The settlers left the stream corridors, moving first to the forest prairie edge, then cautiously onto the drier prairie, while keeping a small woodland parcel for fuel and fencing, and finally out on to the wet prairie, where one could take a flat bottom boat for miles in the spring. The technological keys are familiar: the self-scouring plow to cope with the sticky spring soil; the railroad to open markets for the change from a subsistence to a cash economy; the osage orange hedge and then barbed wire to end the fencing controversy that dominated

agricultural discussions and investment for much of the nineteenth century; and intensive mechanization to take advantage of an opportunistic cheap land, expensive labor, ample markets, and maybe a native inclination for tinkering. Less documented are the skills and technology of the immigrant Frisians who drained the wet prairie and the spontaneous, synergistic development of that Midwestern system of grading, marketing, and storing grain—symbolized by the prairie elevator—that was not to be introduced into the other great grain growing areas of the world for a half-century. All evolved within that uniquely American framework, the mile square grid.

All the elements were in place by 1880. The following five decades witnessed the perfection of the system. The ancient northern European animal and small grain agricultural system reached its culmination in a mechanized and highly capitalized crop rotation of corn, oats, and hay, with the raising of poultry, hogs, beef and dairy cattle, apple orchards and miniature vineyards, and a structural assemblage of farmhouse, shed, outhouse, hog and chicken houses, ice and pump and cob houses, barn, shed, corn crib, and windmill. The image lingers still, an apotheosis of American society and settlement system, a subject of endless personal and commercial nostalgia. Each fall, the *Chicago Tribune* still runs the cartoon “Injun Summer,” memorializing that quintessential Midwest landscape.

Cartoons notwithstanding, much of that landscape is gone, even in “Tribuneland” and certainly in that part of the “cornbelt,” east central Illinois, where I live. We all know that, too. If we cherish the image, we sense that reality is different and growing more different. We talk of agribusiness, corporate farming, runoff, and monoculture.

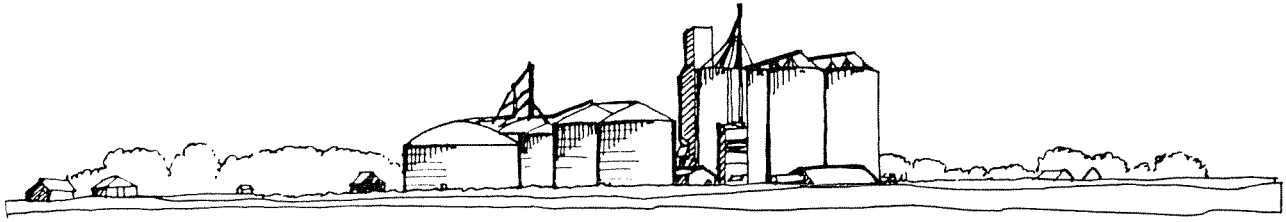
The underlying technological forces that have changed cornbelt farming can be described simplistically as an electro-petro-chemical revolution. Electrification was slow in coming to rural America but finally came dramatically and suddenly, almost entirely a creation of Franklin Roosevelt’s second term. By World War II it was essentially complete. The 1930s and 1940s also witnessed the disappearance of horse and mule. By 1950 electricity and the internal combustion engine had triumphed, chemical fertilizers could be substituted for manure, and chemical herbicides and sophisticated corn genetics continued a productivity push that began in World War II. On through 1980 farm equipment became constantly more sophisticated, and more expensive, and the dense net of township roads was well graded and paved and supplemented by the interstate highway system.

Electrification, gas- or diesel-powered tractors, and the disappearance of horse and windmill might read like ancient history; if the image of the old farm is strong, it also seems that of entirely another time and society, as sentiment increases distance. But

the older, working farm couple of today began farming in that seemingly so far away time, picking corn by hand and throwing the ears in a wagon. If the last five decades have seen dramatic change, it is well to recall that people have lived through it and adapted to it.

The result of all these changes is, in simplest terms, a capital-intensive, two-crop, cash-grain system. If one took the 1929 census of agricultural production for an eastern Illinois county and replaced every product but corn with soybeans, the result would be close to the 1979 census. In those fifty years acreage in corn has oscillated about a steady level, wheat acreage has sunk to a vestigial amount, oats have disappeared along with the horses they fed, and beans compete with corn. Sheep, hogs, horses, and cattle have all sunk to a number less than ten percent of that reported in 1929; orchard trees and vines are no longer even enumerated. John Fraser Hart has labeled the result the “CBM agrisystem”: corn, beans, and Miami.

Such a description conjures up images of factory farms, bare fields and silting streams, and a stark repellent landscape, but the easy images do not always survive a careful look, and some myths are simply that. This is not corporate farming, not a creature of large companies. The investment return, well under five percent, is too small and too unpredictable to interest big business. Farming here is expensive, certainly. Two decades ago J. B. Jackson observed “that the



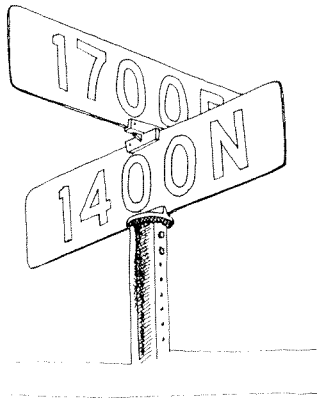
young American without means can sooner hope to be president of a bank than the owner of a working farm,” and the writers of the column “Profit Planners” in *Prairie Farmer* recently advised a would-be farmer with experience and \$130,000 that he hadn’t enough capital to even consider getting into the business. The operative catch phrase is “cash flow,” but almost all of this farmland is still owned by or among families or individuals, however large their assets might be.

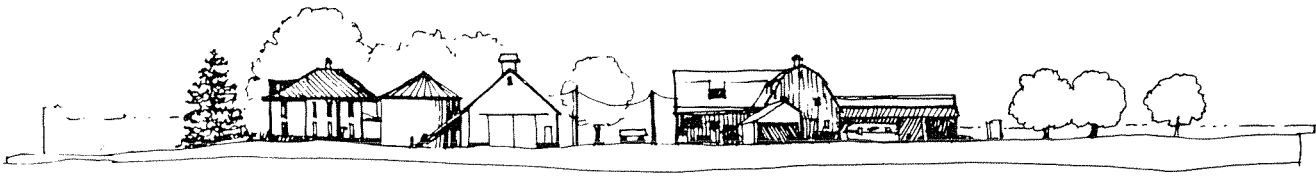
Everyone “knows” that farm size is increasing, and the agricultural census confirms that lore. But for census purposes, “farm” means all the agricultural land under a single “operator.” In the eastern cornbelt, a farm of large size is likely to consist of noncontiguous pieces of land separated not only by other people’s land but by the paved constraints of the ubiquitous mile square township roads. Fewer farms mean somewhat fewer buildings, but beyond that the effect of farm size on the look of the land is not so direct or obvious. While farm “tenancy” has increased over the last fifty years, the effect of that change on the look or the economy of the land is not obvious either, although the increases in cash leasing are thought to bode badly for conservation practices. Most farmers own some land and rent additional land. The idea of tenancy conjures up images of barefoot poverty and mean living, but the *Prairie Farmer* reports that progressive tenants, seeking more land to maximize equipment use and minimize cash flow, are printing brochures that emphasize

their computer-based accounting systems and, in one case, advertising in the *Wall Street Journal*. Nor are Arabs or other foreigners gobbling up Illinois farmland. Less than one-half of one percent of the state’s farmland is registered in foreign ownership, and much of that ownership defined as foreign is simply the land of oil and coal companies with a majority of foreign stockholders.

But if not all lore is true, still the look of the land has changed in fifty years. Probably the most radical visual transformation, and the least remarked upon, is the night landscape: mercury vapor lights, first distributed free by utility companies in the 1960s and called security lights, cast pools of harsh, garish light at every farmstead.

What woodlots still exist away from the stream corridors are sparsely treed and clear of understory; they have invariably been grazed and lumbered over the years, “hogged and logged” as it is called. What scraps of good prairie remain are often to be found along railroad lines or in cemeteries. Good stands of railroad prairie are most likely to remain where a road parallels the tracks, leaving a width of undisturbed soil wide enough for some ecological stability but too narrow to be worth farming. Such strips are disappearing as the railroads turn from burning to spraying for right-of-way maintenance, and economic pressure makes corn- or bean-raising more likely. Cemetery prairie is most likely on fenced but little visited areas, subject to enough





mowing to kill off woody invaders but not enough to drive out the more fragile native species. A mowing once a year for Memorial Day (the “Decoration Day” of my youth with memories of peonies and rusting G.A.R. stars) is often just enough.

The landscape is more open. The orchards and vineyards are gone. What few hedgerows remain have gone to canopy, leaving the eye level view nearly clear. The fences have almost disappeared; neither corn nor beans wander into the road to be hit by cars, and the few animals left learn to avoid that single strand of almost invisible electrical wire on thin metal posts. Two or three old fence posts remain, but only for sight lines to identify property boundaries when working the fields and maneuvering equipment.

There are fewer buildings. Consolidation of ownership usually means removal of farmsteads, consolidation into one “home place.” At the remaining one farmstead, an electrified cash grain farm needs no ice house, pump house, cob house, cattle barn, or chicken or hog house. There are still over one-quarter of a million chickens in my county, about the same number as fifty years ago. In 1929 they were distributed among more than 2,600 farmers, in 1979 among less than 70, a phenomenon that serious students of cornbelt settlement systems call “fowl urbanization.” Some building types have stayed but evolved. The new farmstead will have a shed, but it is likely to be lower, longer, and wider, with a roof of shallower

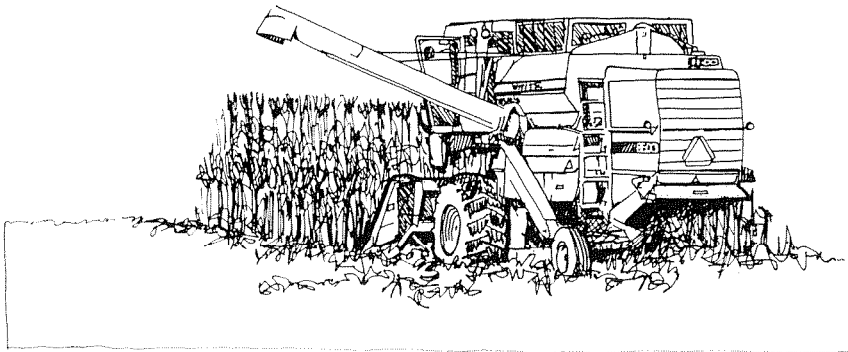
pitch, a prefabricated industrial building of corrugated roof and siding over pole and truss framing. Where a corn crib remains, the only likely change is the replacement of wooden siding by perforated metal, an evolution of material within a stable form. But the greatest change in the working architecture of the cornbelt countryside derives from a single technological innovation: the shelling head on the combine. The word “combine” itself comes from the first turn-of-the-century field machines that both reaped wheat and threshed it but now applies to comparable operations on any crop. Until ten to twenty years ago, long after hybrid corn with its uniform height had allowed the development of a mechanical picker, corn still left the field on the cob, to remain there until fed to animals on the farm or to be mechanically shelled at the farmstead or elevator. Today in the most productive parts of the cornbelt almost all corn leaves the field shelled.

The traditional cornbelt corncrib was a clear, logical, evolutionary solution for storing ear corn and a story worth tracing in itself. Now, with shelled corn or beans or wheat, the farmer must store not a stack of loosely piled, large cobs but a dense, bulky mass of small grain particles, a mass that often needs to be dried and always needs to have air flowing through it to avoid rot. The successor to the corncrib is a round metal bin, with a fan to force air through it and often a tank of propane at hand for warm-air drying. On the largest farms there will be rows or clusters of these bins, loaded from a high, industrial-

looking tower, the “leg,” braced with wire rigging. Such farms, and many of the newest and largest elevators, transcend the shed roof, ad hoc clustered forms of old farm and elevator to take on, with their massive tanks, complex piping, and spidery rigging, the high-tech look of an oil refinery.

But the old cribs often stay. The slatted bins can be lined to hold shelled corn; the loft over the central aisle can serve as bulk storage, the aisle itself can shelter equipment. No driveway is needed because only field-tired vehicles approach them. Maybe it is not worth the trouble digging out the concrete foundations just to gain three more bushels of corn a year. Whatever the reasons, the cribs often stand alone in a quarter-section of land, their stark shapes and weathered tones emphasizing the open, bare flatness of the fields and the sense of time and change on the land.

The example of the corn shelling head eliminating a vocabulary of architectural functions and forms, from crib to cob burner, and introducing an entirely new geometry, shows how little we understand about why the look of the landscape changes as it does. Technological forces affect it in complex and not obvious ways. The rural landscape, for example, abounds with examples of the “cornbelt cube,” a house of square plan and two stories, topped with a pyramidal roof and a central chimney, built in the early years of the century. We can guess that a major reason for its popularity was



the introduction of convection flow warm air, central heating, but no one knows. No one has ever studied the American house as an expression of evolving heating technology, from fireplace to stove to convection flow warm air to forced warm air to, finally, electrical and solar heating.

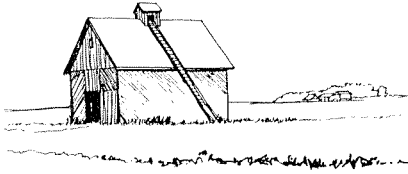
Nor has anyone studied the evolution of farmstead landscapes. For decades the extension literature has offered advice to the farmer. Some of it, such as Wilhelm Miller's evocation of the prairie spirit, has been sensitive and some, like the recurring recommendation of tree massing to hide unpleasant views and frame pleasant ones, simply sensible. Too often it has been accompanied by condescending admonitions that the flow of farm youth to city jobs is caused by lack of rural beauty and would be stopped by tasteful design. A scholarly comparison of the actuality of farm landscaping with the advice of designers and improvers, however, might show that farm families have evolved their own images of "farmstead" independent of professional fashions. Certainly the current actuality, a predilection for huge, velvety carpets of grass, putting-green perfect and unbroken by trees or shrubs, would seem to owe more to the popularity of the self-powered riding mower than to the tastemakers' advice.

We know little enough about the impact of the professional literature on the countryside, but we know even less about the impact of the popular press and advertising. If

fascination with the power mower and the lack of row crop work over much of the summer contribute to the bare look of the farmstead lawn, so does the advice of cornbelt newspapers and the *Prairie Farmer* to eliminate shrubs that offer hiding places to thieves intent on rustling combines. Farm-oriented advertising is big business, as intent on image as on product. Industrial-type farm buildings are given names like “Ironwood,” a nice blend of practicality and romance. The chemical companies have two schools of brand naming: the clean-room, smock-coated, wonder-drug approach of Treflan, Basagran, or Cythion, and the sod-buster, tough-guy school of Bronco, Lasso, Roundup, and Fussilade, in a not surprising demonstration of the importance of both high technology and tradition in cornbelt life. This curious blend of progress and tradition can be seen in the caps distributed by my elevator. They bear the legend “equal opportunity fertilizer,” but the woman’s cap has a powder blue bunny tail tassel on top.



Technology and tradition have produced a different landscape, a landscape that repays care taken in looking at it for what is, not what it was. The visual changes in the cornbelt landscape can better be interpreted as continuity than as disruption. We are lucky, for this is not the case everywhere. In England, where the new farmsteads look more and more like those of America, the change is legitimately lamented. The traditional English farmstead adapted to and utilized topographic changes, formed a



tight compound with buildings enclosing spaces between them, and was made up of heavy and monolithic structures. The new farmsteads sit on land graded flat, with the buildings linearly arranged and made of light striated sheeting over a skeleton. This is an equally accurate description of the new cornbelt farmstead, but it also applies to the older farms here. Cornbelt farm buildings never formed a compound or utilized exterior walls and courtyards but always appeared as independent masses. Their siting obeyed only two laws: hogs to the east and square to the road. The hogs are gone, but the buildings, new or old, are invariably aligned on the north-south east-west axes of the grid. Unsubstantial sheets of corrugated metal over poles and prefabricated trusses are a logical extension of that American invention, the balloon frame, and of the American philosophy of building lightly and quickly. The new farmstead might look simpler because it contains fewer buildings, but its visual and functional rules are the time-honored ones. Its look, stark, clean, sometimes hinting of the industrial, can be seen not as a disruption of a tradition but as its clearest expression, a near Miesian perfection through reduction to essentials.

The larger landscape, too, can be understood as an ultimate expression of traditional values and beliefs. It is open, bare, clean, and organized to the point of starkness. It is an expression not just of efficiency and profit, or of cash flow, but of a belief in productivity, care,

and neighborly respect. To ride a combine at harvest time, high above the corn tops, numbed by noise and vibration, is to feel not just the power in the machine but an elation in using it to transform the land. The remnant hedgerow, the old fence, or scraggly tree is an affront, not just because it means a bushel less but because it resists the human ordering made possible by the machine. A bare, black, fall-plowed field, however erosion prone, however necessary for planting hundreds of acres in uncertain spring mud and weather, is also seen as a sign of care expressed in neatness and order. To feel that care is to understand the affront produced by the single cornstalk in the middle of the bean field. It is to understand the state signs explaining that the shaggy, weedy midsummer ditch is actually a "roadside for wildlife," not a result of shoddy upkeep by the adjacent farmer. And to know what neighbor still means, in a time when even one-man farms average close to 500 acres, is to realize that the open, unadorned farm lawn, clean and kept like the fields around, is also more than a drill ground for power mowers, or a guard against combine rustlers; it is a symbol of openness to others and respect for them.

The new machine and equipment sheds look simpler, even better kept than the older buildings did. There are not only fewer buildings, but they are of neater and simpler shapes. The round bins, often starkly white like sheds and farmsteads (there are few red barns here) and the occasional farm

elevator, with its wire bracing, take on the look of abstract elements. Frank Lloyd Wright thought that the prairie house should be low, with deep overhangs, and should nestle into the land. The cornbelt cube, stark, high and blocky, eaveless, is its antithesis, a bold imposition on the land, a clear expression of human artifice.

This abstract regularity reinforces the dominant organization of the mile square grid. The intersections are marked with bright green signs—1400E, 800N—that tell you just where you are. Mail boxes read “The Bowers—Virgil, Doreen, and Lurleen: 1100N, 633E,” a logical but curious way of anchoring the globe to the southwestern corner of your county. The row crops, too, follow the grid; driving the county roads in the late summer is like speeding through eye-level corduroy. The smaller country cemetery, located on a rise, never succumbed to the curvilinear cemetery planning fashion; its plots and marker stones are lined up so that even the dead are settled on the grid system. With the disappearance of windmills and trees, a new set of verticals, the phone and power poles, provide a regular, repetitive subdivision to that grid. The hedgerows that are left are now simple lines of trees; they read not as low, wide, rounded masses but as thin lacy walls, tracing field patterns and reinforcing further subdivision of the grid. Seen inscribed against a winter sunset, they seem to symbolize nature not only receiving the grid but becoming the grid.

That grid, surely the most extensive visible abstraction ever laid upon the globe, impresses most from the air. On a transcontinental flight west, one first sees it appear tentatively over Michigan, or maybe Indiana. Over Illinois and Iowa it *is* the landscape, with only the briefest of interruptions for steep terrain. By the great plains it has loosened; its grain is coarser now, because roads every mile are not economical, but the pattern remains. By the Front Range it disappears, only to reoccur suddenly in irrigated valleys. To understand it best, fly Illinois and Iowa in a small plane, at say 3,000 feet above ground. To do so is to see the ultimate expression of Cartesian rationality and Jefferson democracy, a noncentrist, nonhierarchical organization. It is an organization so powerful that even the few departures seem to reinforce it: the wrinkling of the land in Iowa like a topologist’s diagram or the subservience of the interstate gracefully curving on top of it only to return to the half-section line, where land taking is shared and the township road system undisturbed. The buildings, simple, abstract cubes set square to the road, the circular counterpoint of bins or an occasional irrigation circle, look like pieces on a gigantic monopoly board, based on the rules of commodity and political equality.

It is a visual landscape that contemporary high-technology farming has molded but not disrupted. The disruptions are the landscapes brought by new residents, the curving roads, and artificial lakes of the wealthier

exurbanites seeking that original niche of human occupation, the wooded stream valley, or the one side of a quarter-section, small-lot subdivision of strip septic tank suburbia, or the single lot with its long, low, dark-stained ranch house set on a “welcoming” diagonal. The farmer has a clear and bold vision of the landscape; the newcomers do not.

In many parts of the world the farmer is considered a sly, dim-witted peasant, but his landscapes are viewed as charming. In America the yeoman farmer, if not an image of sophistication, is still a central figure in the democratic dream, a figure enshrined by Jefferson and as much enriched by populism, grange, and dust bowl as he has been simplified by nostalgia and Norman Rockwell. His landscape is equally worth our understanding and our admiration.