

Places

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**Caring about Places:
Recognition**

**Criticism of Place:
A Symposium**

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**On the Way to Figurative
Architecture**

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**The Case of "Hard" Squares
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Learning from a Stair:

The Lyon Stair of San Francisco

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To Rally Discussion

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of each of a variety of players in the development process, how to make judgments about the suitability of the collective result of multiple initiatives, and how to project alternatives that may have consequences in the further evolution of our neighborhoods and cities. What may critical thought do to enable us to make better the places we live in and guide their evolution and change and direct their stewardship? And/or how may criticism make us see and draw nourishment from more aspects of the places in question than we routinely do?

When considering criticism of place, it is not the works produced but the way in which they become a part of the larger structure and the way they enter into the lives of the people who encounter them that are the subject of concern. The internal character, integrity, and ingenuity of any given work will certainly become a part of that concern, but only insofar as those qualities are seen as important constituents of the experiences afforded by the place or are more broadly instructive regarding the assumptions and conditions that govern our thinking about places and the works that make them.

We have been invited to consider forms of criticism that examine places, “places that result from several works juxtaposed,” as opposed to criticism that locates a “single work of architecture in a chain of works.” Lurking behind this distinction—between criticism of a single work and criticism of place—is, I believe, the implication that single works are products of intentional design actions, which can be coherently related to precedent works, while places are unique and fortuitous. Such a distinction exaggerates the difference between the single work and “several works juxtaposed.” To anticipate my argument, I am going to claim that the distinction between single works and places is only a matter of degree. One reason for this continuity from single work to place is that places are also often the result of considered design actions. However, the point I wish to emphasize is the complementary one: single works also participate in the not fully determined nature of places. I want to claim, in a way that I hope to make clear, that the whole of the physical environment is characterized by quasi-autonomy, a degree of independence from precedent, from intentions, from specific patterns of use and meaning; an availability for re-use and reinterpretation. Such quasi-autonomy requires a theoretical and critical component in any study of environment. Furthermore, since aspects of this quasi-autonomy may be revealed anachronistically, the physical environment must be studied not only in its origins but also in its duration.

Critical Study of Urban Places

When, in the past, I attempted criticism of places, my interest was directed to small sectors of cities, areas small enough and yet large enough that one could be concerned with both architecture and urban structure. I found myself engaged in certain kinds of analysis and in the issue I introduced as “the quasi-autonomy of the physical environment.” The following examples clarify the issue.

Savannah, Georgia

In the 250 years since its foundation, the plan and the physical fabric of Savannah have been resilient in the face of new demands; yet much that is environmentally sound has been preserved through boom and bust. I conjecture that both the adaptability and the tenacity of this urban fabric have been aided by the unusual city plan of Savannah. Consider some of the characteristics of the plan:

The modular plan is additive, without a defined boundary. The plan is multifocal, devoid of a predetermined centrality. The additive module is internally structured by an extensive differentiation of streets. The module is also structured by a differentiation of parcels and blocks. The additive repetition of the module further increases the range of parcel, block, and street differentiation.

A consequence of these features is that the plan can be “read” in many ways, such as a system of squares

joined by axial streets; a set of enclaves (the additive unit, called “wards”) divided by the boundary streets that are continuous through the town plan; a combination of the two previous readings, where the axial streets dominate in one direction and the boundary streets in the other; a set of striated bands parallel to the river, establishing successive, only partially repetitive, zones; or any number of complex intermixtures of these readings.

The scale at which this abstract plan is realized in Savannah further enhances the multiple readings by denying a clue as to a “preferred” reading. As laid out, Savannah turns as many parcels for private development inward to the central square of each ward as it does outward to the boundary streets. This ambiguity of centripetal versus centrifugal forces (which would have been lost in either a larger or smaller ward) enhances the opportunity for multiple readings, whether successively, with changing conditions, or simultaneously, with reference to alternative criteria.

While it cannot be demonstrated here, the history of Savannah reveals that these claims are not merely a formalist reading of the plan. In the years of Savannah’s foundation, the town was organized as a system of wards with physical, functional, and symbolic focus at the squares. In its first period of decline, the river itself became the dominant focus, and the town was organized as linear zones.¹ In its dominant years in the middle of the nineteenth century, the fully ex-

tended Savannah plan offered a complex net in which diverse demands of commercial, institutional, and residential use found discernible niches. The same can be said of contemporary Savannah, although the changes of such uses, coupled with intensified circulation and density, yield yet another “reading” of the plan.

The characteristics of the Savannah plan that contribute to its multiple readings are among what I would term its “quasi-autonomous” features. Such elements of the plan are, to a degree, autonomous, in that they cannot be accounted for by reference to systems other than physical design; they go beyond any original intention in the laying down of the plan; and they have served in a number of different ways. Yet this autonomy is limited in that certain parts of the plan are more appropriate than others for any given use; and there are conditions under which the autonomous characteristics of this plan would fail. Even failure would, however, come at a time and in a way that would reflect this particular set of quasi-autonomous features.

There are, of course, many other quasi-autonomous characteristics of the Savannah plan. To mention only one more, the unusually small blocks of Savannah have inhibited the assembly of large parcels for either public or private use. This fact has constrained certain uses while contributing to the preservation of older buildings and uses. When changes of use and building fabric have come, the small block

has denied some popular forms, such as tall buildings with plazas. To the contrary, the small block has helped to preserve what it provides: an extensive public space with intense and proximate relations between the public and private realms.

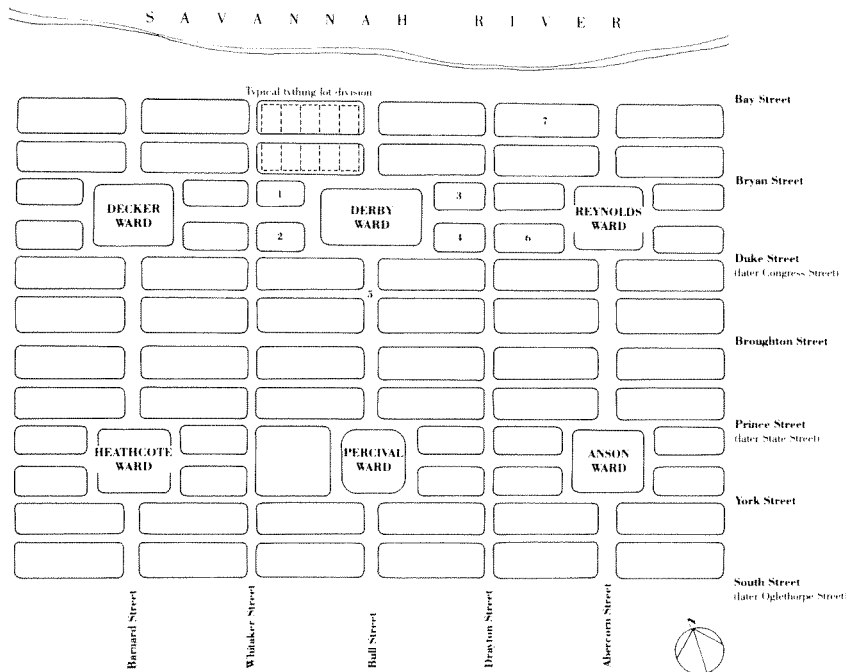
These observations on Savannah reveal what I am prepared to advance as one crucial, though surely not exhaustive, form of the criticism of place. *Any history or criticism of place must reveal, in a given location, specific features of the general problem of the intersection of the internal structure of architecture with a changing historical setting.*

Quasi-autonomy

With the example of Savannah, I would like to recall the content of my first intervention in this symposium. A central issue of the internal history of the discipline of architecture is the quasi-autonomy of the physical environment. Quasi-autonomy is a feature of both the general capacity of the discipline of architecture and any specific physical environment.

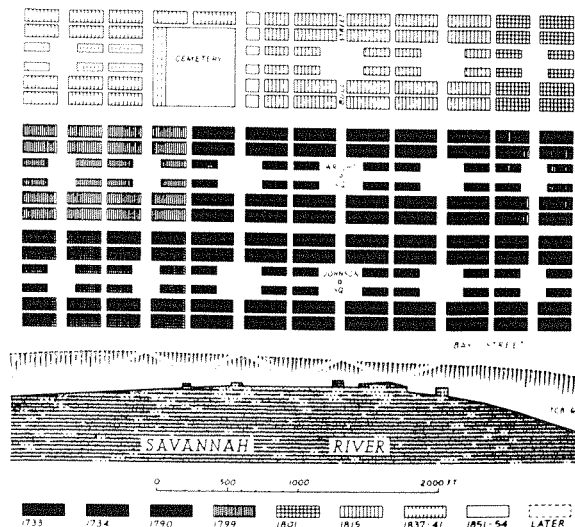
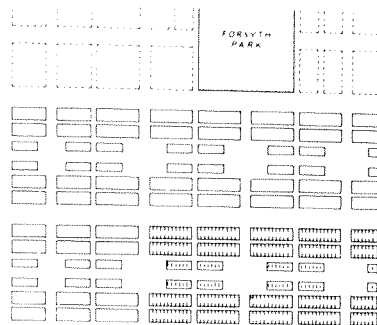
The issue set for this symposium was the problem of the critical response to single works versus the critical response to places. I asserted that there is not a fundamental difference between the single work and “several works juxtaposed,” although there are differences of degree.

A single work is, in the terms I have introduced, a product of the pro-



FOUR ORIGINAL WARDS

1. Public mill
2. Public lake house; House for strangers
3. Public storehouse
4. Church site
5. Public well
6. John Wesley's parsonage, 1736-1747
7. Trust reserved lots



2

fession and can be accounted for, although not fully, in a narrative history. In the first instance, there are those exceptional single works that can immediately be given a place in “a chain of works” and thus be located also in the internal history of the discipline. It is also my claim that even single works that are not immediately recognized for any contribution to the discipline may, in the duration of their use, reveal unanticipated potentials for meaning and use. For these reasons, I have argued that the history of architecture must address the conjectures harbored within the discipline and also consider the duration, not only the origin, of the physical environment.

Any work of architecture, then, can and should be considered both in the particularity of its historical moment—with due respect for “external history”—and within the theoretical, critical, and historical construction of the discipline of architecture.

Criticism of Place

The point at which I arrive, then, is this: “place,” the product of “several works juxtaposed,” is not radically different from the single work, but it does require a shift in our historical and critical response. The single work may be quite amenable to a conventional history and may then reveal unanticipated potentials only over time. On the other hand, “several works juxtaposed” in a place may be too disjunctive for a compelling narrative history and yet immediately reveal poten-

tials that can only be accounted for by the critical and theoretical analysis of their quasi-autonomy. Place, as opposed to the single work, thus requires a heavier emphasis on the quasi-autonomy of the environment and a concomitant emphasis of criticism and the critical dimension of history.

Before concluding, I would like to illustrate my argument with two other, briefer, examples.

New York City: Typical Manhattan Block

The typical Manhattan block is generated by a network of broad avenues extending most of the length of the island and smaller streets that traverse the island. The strongly directional shape of the island is thus reinforced by the hierarchical relation of the north-south avenues over the cross streets. The blocks that are the complement of this network are long and relatively narrow: 600 feet, more often 800 by 200 feet, with the short dimension on the dominant avenues.

The intensity of circulation on the avenues early led to the reorientation of the end parcels of the blocks toward the avenues. The hierarchical relation of the streets was thus complemented by the contrasted parcels and uses on the various sides of the blocks. Larger parcels and buildings at the end served a more metropolitan scale of use, while small parcels and buildings preserve a diversity of other, usually residential, uses. A deceptively simple plan was organized and dimensioned in such a way

as to sustain local diversity even in the face of extensive development.

With the pressure for greater and greater building size on the avenues, and thus for the assembly of ever more parcels into the end block parcel, the complementary relation of the long sides of the block is threatened. The remainder of parcels in midblock becomes too small and too isolated to sustain an alternative environment relative to the intensity of the avenues. A plan that has shown remarkable resilience is reaching, or has passed, its limits.

Conceivable corrections to such a problem can be either conservative or still acceptive of development: either resisting the assembly of end parcels over a certain size or designing these larger buildings such that traits of the side-street parcels are restored.

A quasi-autonomous feature of a plan is thus under severe stress and requires either protection by legal constraints or an architectural solution. Failing one of these steps (or some other stratagem), a complete re-interpretation of the entire city sector is required.

Paris: Block between Avenue Kleber and Rue Lauriston near the Etoile

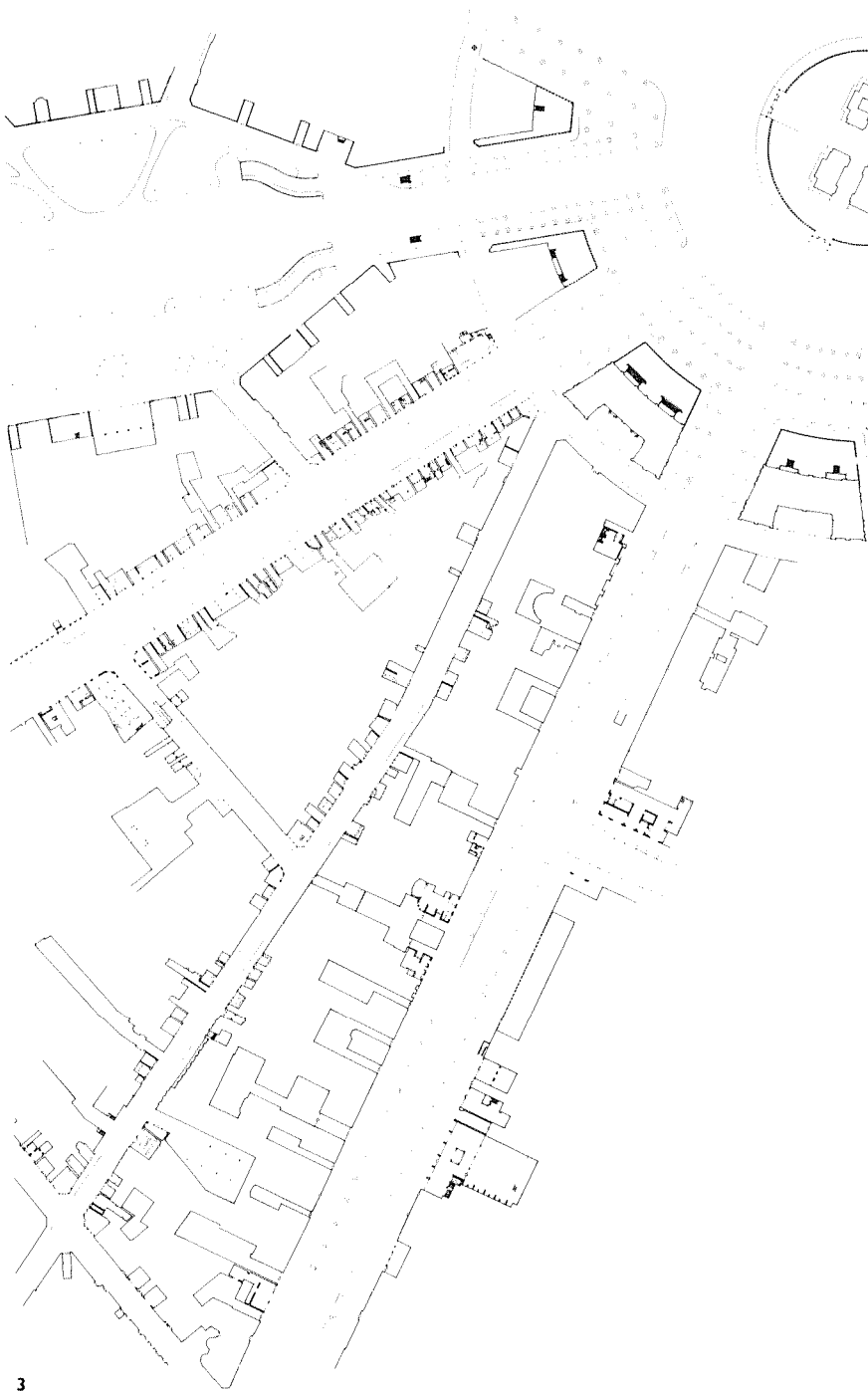
The major streets of Paris typically bound large urban sectors. There is a passage from metropolitan uses along the major streets to ever greater privacy as one penetrates the intersecting but descending order of streets within each sector. Typically, a broad side of a block, or

1 Map of the first six wards of Savannah in the 1730s.

The small blocks, such as those marked 1 to 4, are single parcels reserved for communal use. The typical division of the larger blocks into private parcels is shown at the top center. The continuity of the private parcels from ward to ward and the greater number of streets accessing those parcels yield linear zones, paralleling the river, in contrast to the nondirectionality of the additive square wards. Other "readings" are discussed in the text. From Stanford Anderson, "The Plan of Savannah," *Harvard Architectural Review* (Spring 1981), p. 63.

2 Map of historic Savannah.

The successively lighter shading shows the chronology of the extension of Savannah. The alternative "readings" discussed in the text can be recognized in this plan. From Turpin Bannister, "Oglethorpe's Sources for the Savannah Plan," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* (May 1961), p. 61.



ilot, coincides with the major street, while the opposite side of that block will be part of a much different urban structure. Typically, again, the block will be so deep that buildings fronting the streets will have courtyards and even other buildings behind them on the same parcels. Thus growth and intensification of use on the parcels fronting the major streets may have relatively little impact on parcels that adjoin but face lesser streets. Radical change in one element is possible without necessarily altering the urban sector radically.

Avenue Kleber is a major street of the kind just described and has come under intensive development. As it exits from the Etoile, the first long block of avenue Kleber is bounded on the west by an atypically narrow block. The paralleling long side of this block is rue Lauriston, a narrow street ascending a hill and, until recent decades, a double-sided street with residences and local commerce. The narrowness of this block has made it vulnerable to the intense development initiated from avenue Kleber. Metropolitan commercial forces penetrate the block, pushing out both residential and commercial use and making rue Lauriston a fragile, one-sided environment. Although rue Lauriston may have seemed a minor feature, with its decline, the viability of the entire urban sector of which it is a part is in jeopardy.

A quasi-autonomous feature, typical within Paris, is here weakly configured and stressed beyond its

limits. It may be too late to solve this problem either through legal constraints or by architectural design. A complete re-interpretation of the entire city sector has been achieved *de facto* and only radical steps could offer yet another, more positive interpretation. Rue Lauriston may provide a warning for other less inherently vulnerable urban sectors.

Conclusion

I would like, finally, to reflect on the set of examples I have put before you. The peculiarity of the block in the Paris example is certainly susceptible to an historical account, but it would probably be neither very interesting nor very contributive to any deeper understanding. The systemic character of both the Savannah and New York examples invites and will reward conventional historical analysis. Yet, in all three cases, if we go beyond an account of their historic origins to an account of their temporal duration (as sketched in my presentations), we are rewarded with new questions and observations that reach to what I have termed the quasi-autonomy of the physical environment and of the discipline. I am then led to propose that certain features of these places should receive our critical attention: street hierarchies, network configurations, block and parcel organization, building types and forms, the differentiation of these elements and their relations to one another, and finally, the remarkable tenacity of all these features. The quasi-autonomy of these elements gives

them a different temporal structure than that of the daily unfolding of the city and also a different explanatory, critical, and projective role.

NOTE

- 1 Stanford Anderson, "The Plan of Savannah and Changes of Occupancy during Its Early Years: City Plan as Resource," *Harvard Architectural Review* (Spring 1981), pp. 60–67.

3 Map of part of the 16th Arrondissement of Paris.

The place Charles de Gaulle is partially shown at the upper right. The very large street running west from the Etoile is avenue Foch. The two large radials south and east of avenue Foch are avenue Victor Hugo and avenue Kleber. Between these two avenues is the smaller rue Lauriston.
MIT Urban Ecology Project, Stanford Anderson

Donlyn Lyndon

Criticism can be seen branching into several divergent paths with differing intentions and differing comparative methods. Broadly speaking, criticism may be directed toward evaluating and making us understand better a specific work, or it may be directed toward making clear the conditions under which that work was produced—presumably with an eye to reformulating those conditions. Critics may intend to change the conditions of production through alterations in the discipline if they are internal to the field or through setting the stage for political action if they are external. The agenda for change may lie in the forefront of their considerations or it may emerge from close attention to the particularities and circumstances of the work. Even given this array of choices, there remain two phases to the question of how places might be subject to critical thought: How might the actuality of specific places remain focused in our attention, and what should be the limits of the domain to which we pay attention? More abruptly stated, how can we stay close to the object, and which object(s)?

These issues remain urgent and problematic because they are questions of focus. How do we use our analytic abilities to attend to the way in which places have real consequence in people's lives? It is, of course, precisely the purpose of critical thought to take us beyond the object itself. The purpose of criticism is to reveal things in a new way. But which new ways? There are evidently in any work a great many choices to be made, each of

which could be subject to consideration, each of which could give rise to alternatives, each of which could with some ingenuity be a subject for speculation. The critic's task is to select those aspects of whatever is under consideration that are most fruitful to examine. In criticism it is convenient to look for networks of decisions, to find patterns of similarity in the characteristics of the work that may lead from one aspect to the next so that whatever is taken for specific examination can be understood to have repercussions in the consideration of the whole; the good critic is an experienced sampler. Criticism thrives on precedent, on types and established patterns that allow one to say "Oh, it's one of those" and to proceed to a comparison of the fine points of similarity or dissimilarity that ensue. Places sometimes come in types too, as any geographer can tell you or as is evidenced in the commonality of "courthouse town" or "Main Street" or "waterfront" or even "street corner." But what matters to its inhabitants are its particulars, the things that make it their own, not someone else's. The criticism of places must then go beyond type and address the diversity, intentions, and responses.

What do we mean by places? We mean both something obvious and something more esoteric. Places are where we put things, where we go, where events become actual—where they take place.

Places are space that can be imagined, that can be known. They are

the opposite of the limitless void into which we were once meant to imagine our buildings. Public places are loaded with social significance because they are lodged in the imaginations of many people and structure their interaction. Places result from the intersection of the enduring facts of the world: sun, wind, earth, water, vegetation, and our propensity to define and construct in order to control the impact of the surroundings on our lives. Places are space to which people can give the dimensions of their imaginations and which they can hold in their minds. They are, at base, segments of memory, albeit extended ones.

While it is essential to the notion of place that it have imaginable limits, they are often distinct and overlapping, defined more by location in an overall ordering scheme or by proximity to a recognizable feature than by edges. Public places are usually more like targets than rooms; hence the special potency of those few urban places that are roomlike: the great squares and piazzas of Europe, or Central Park if you will. Here, though, we are talking specifically about the complex, overlapping places of the American city—places that result from several works juxtaposed—from the initiatives of many, perhaps extended over periods of time, and with widely varying means and intentions.

The problem posed is how to make criticism come to grips with the reality of the places where we actually live, how to assess the actions

Stanford Anderson

of each of a variety of players in the development process, how to make judgments about the suitability of the collective result of multiple initiatives, and how to project alternatives that may have consequences in the further evolution of our neighborhoods and cities. What may critical thought do to enable us to make better the places we live in and guide their evolution and change and direct their stewardship? And/or how may criticism make us see and draw nourishment from more aspects of the places in question than we routinely do?

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Caring About Places: Recognition

It is not after all surprising that one of the demands that we make of places is that we be able to recognize them. We are expected to recognize people we care about, to pay enough attention to their characteristics so that we may distinguish them, name them, even bring their features to mind. As a corollary, people make some effort to be distinguishable, some desperately, some with an admirable sense of wit. A few people, by twist of fate or by strength of will need make no effort, their presence simply is distinctive.

So it is with places. Some places, natural ones mostly, are obviously distinct; no wishing is involved. Those that are most well known usually involve titanic forces (Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon come easily to mind). Built places of real distinction require effort; an effort in the making and a corresponding effort of recognition. They respond to our queries because they embody careful, particular thoughts. They may bear the traces of many imaginings, the scars of conflicting territorial claims, the quirks of an obsessed attention, but

they have always a conjunction of shapes that is unique to the place.

Of course, all places, like all people, do differ. It's when we fail to attend to them, or when their particular qualities have been submerged within the abstractions of production that they become anonymous and we become weary, as at a party with too many guests. Even then, places become distinct when they become familiar, when we have matched them to the events of our daily lives, gradually discerned the features of their configurations and watched the light move across their surfaces in various hours and seasons. They become familiar by being renewed, reappearing with some constancy in our midst. We know where we are because we've been there before. How much we may know about where we are has to do with what we bring to the place and with how much it has been formed to pique our curiosity, to provoke recollections and to make itself available to inquiry.

Places reflect aspects of ourselves as novels do, but places are not paginated. We must seek the stories

in them, piecing together the evidence of our senses and joining in the action.

Places, like people, have histories. As a result some are secretive, some bold, some impossibly at odds with themselves. To know places well is difficult. It requires tolerance, imaginative effort and a resistance to the hucksters' images. Only through sustained attention do we see glimpses of community, of what we might have done or might yet do if we are not irreparably singular. These are reasons enough to need places that encourage recognition: that invite us to think about them again—and with passion.



Donlyn Lyndon

On Criticism

Stanford Anderson

Whether in architectural practice or in the activities of historical and critical writing, sometimes it is appropriate to consider the relative autonomy of a work and other times it is appropriate to consider a work in relation to its context. To enter into this issue, I would like to make a distinction between internal and external history.

Any realm of human activity, such as architecture, can be conceived to have both an internal history and an external history. Internal history considers what is unique to a particular field of activity. It is concerned with what is maintained under changing conditions and what may be seen to emerge according to an inner logic of the field. In contrast, external history demonstrates how the field of activity is enabled or constrained by the social conditions that surround it.

If one adopts a thorough-going determinism, the possibility of an internal history is denied. Within a deterministic position, every aspect of a field such as architecture, at every moment in time, is uniquely determined by the economic and political forces that drive the entire society. However, with even a slightly informed knowledge of a field such as architecture, it is not easy to sustain this claim of complete determination. There are aspects of architecture that persist under quite different conditions. There are innovations in architecture not readily reconciled with a claim of external causation. For the discipline of architecture as for

individual environments, there is a quasi-autonomous relationship with the enveloping society.

Facing this problem of accounting for the distinctive characteristics of architecture, the very people who set out from a deterministic position not infrequently attempt to save the situation through a clever stratagem. They maintain a form of historical determinism for society in general *and* a respect for the internal history of architecture by declaring architecture to be an autonomous field.

The core of my argument is to accept neither complete determination nor autonomy. There is, rather, an intersection between a relatively independent field such as architecture and the enabling and limiting conditions of society. There is some internal order to the field of architecture, but its intersection with a particular society is a matter of historical inquiry, *not* logical demonstration.

To pursue an understanding of this intersection—that is, the intersection of a certain state of the internal structure of architecture with a changing historical setting—I assert that we need more than one kind of history and more than one concept of the field of architecture.

Let us make a distinction, perhaps in not quite the conventional manner, between the *profession* of architecture and the *discipline* of architecture. Further, let us consider both a history of the profession and a history of the discipline.

For the purposes of this analysis—though I think this position might sustain some scrutiny—let us allow the term “profession” to stand for the way in which practitioners of architecture perform under specific historical conditions (I would also include here the practice of criticism as well as that of design). We may recognize that the activity of the profession is enabled by specific conditions of the society and limited by other conditions. This acknowledgment of external history does not deny that some choices still remain or that each of these choices incorporates factors that are best explained by attention to the field of architecture itself. Nonetheless, the profession will not, at any given time, employ all the possibilities that are known to us through architecture. Societal conditions may well set constraints on the range of work that can be undertaken. Similarly, fashions within society, or within the profession itself, may channel architectural decisions.

In contrast to the concept of “profession,” the “discipline” of architecture can be understood in the following manner. The discipline of architecture is a growing body of knowledge that is unique to this field; it cannot be reduced to the constructs of other fields. The discipline can be known without tracing every work realized by the profession, yet the discipline is the possession of a wider set of actors than is the profession. Important parts of the discipline may be preserved by, or advanced through, the work of builders, historians, critics,

or amateurs. While the discipline of architecture is not axiomatic, it is susceptible to theoretic formations that are constructed and changed in a disordered temporality, in fits and starts and anachronisms, unlike the evolutionary flow of the profession.

A history of the *profession* will be a narrative history, accounting for the state and the employment of the discipline in specific historical circumstances. A history of the *discipline*, an account of the quasi-autonomous nature of the discipline, will take another form. Even if temporally ordered, the history of the discipline will be notably marked by the conjectural activities of theory and criticism. It will not trouble to recognize “another good example of the same thing” but the

development of new potentials within architecture. Within the discipline, an innovation that opens new potentials can be rightly acclaimed even if those potentials are only realized later. A history of the discipline is an account of the periodic extension of the logic or order of the discipline. Since those periodic extensions may only be realized later, such a history is not in possession of a conventional chronological flow.

As you will have gathered, I am using “discipline” to name that social construct that embodies the internal history of architecture. That social construct incorporates not only architects but critics, theoreticians, historians, builders, engineers, preservationists, and lay

people. In addition, it incorporates institutions, archives, and libraries devoted to architecture. The profession employs only part of this discipline in the service of society.

There are individual works that deserve to be considered in their relative autonomy and for their significant contribution to the abstractions of the discipline of architecture. There are other, indeed many, architectural problems that must be heavily marked by the contingencies of their time and place. *Places*, in the sense of this symposium and this journal, are inconceivable without such contingencies. Yet the concept of place and the criteria for place-making return us to the discipline of architecture.

Mary McLeod

Before discussing specific categories and techniques relevant to the analysis of public places as opposed to individual buildings, we first need to consider the following question: do we write criticism to explain or elucidate the built environment, or do we write it for explicitly instrumental or operative purposes, that is, to change the built environment? The differences between explanatory and operative criticism are not always clear-cut, for even when we are attempting to be most objective we apply values and assumptions that color the methods and conclusions of our analysis. Also, paradoxically, the seemingly most objective analysis can serve political goals.

Closely linked to this problem of critical objective is a second question: should criticism deal with the object of analysis as a static event, frozen in time, or should it consider the object *in* time, how it came to be? In linguistic terms, this is the choice between a synchronic and a diachronic approach.

Explanatory Criticism

Most professional literary criticism is explanatory. The traditional goal of literary criticism, whether the now old New Criticism or recent structuralist and poststructuralist approaches is to explain or interpret a work of art—though admittedly differing components of that work—to a more general audience. Most academic critics refrain from any pretense of shaping literary currents; indeed objectivity or truth was the purported claim until

poststructuralists challenged the value itself.¹

With the exception of Marxist critics, notably George Lukacs and the Frankfurt School before World War II and, more recently, Raymond Williams, Fredric Jameson, Edward Said, and Terry Eagleton, most criticism in literature has been synchronic—dealing with one moment in time—and self-consciously so. Both New Criticism and structuralist approaches emphasize analysis of the text itself. These methods bracket out issues of artistic intentionality, social conditions, and economic parameters unless these are revealed in the operation of the literary work. We would say that New Criticism asks what a text means and structuralism asks how it means; but both, like poststructuralism, refrain from asking why it is what it is or how it came to be. The issue of causality, that is, historical evolution, is ignored.

Architecture, in contrast, has rarely been approached synchronically. The closest example that I can find in architectural writing parallel to the analyses of New Criticism is the writing of Colin Rowe, particularly his essay “Mathematics of the Ideal Villa.”² Structuralism and semiology, the study of signs, have had, of course, their advocates in architecture, but despite Charles Jencks’s two books, more has been written about semiological procedures than about the way buildings actually signify.³ Synchronic analyses of public spaces—whether formalist or semiological—are even rarer.

Thus, it seems that if there is to be an explanatory criticism of architecture, it would have to be largely diachronic rather than synchronic, that is, dealing with the evolution of the object rather than considering it as a fixed event. This, in fact, has been the more typical mode of architectural criticism—history—up to now. Given the complex weave of social, economic, and technical issues involved in the production of any large-scale building, the isolation of formal dimensions in architecture apart from historical conditions is virtually impossible. In contrast to writers and artists, architects ordinarily need clients to create, and their ties to the market are consequently more direct. In addition, as Alan Colquhoun has pointed out, the nature of architectural meaning itself demands a consciousness of the historical situation and an awareness of change.⁴ Unlike written language, in which there is an assumption of a universal lexicon and a general consensus as to meaning at any one moment in time,⁵ architectural form necessitates a conception of meaning that is highly ambivalent, continually changing, and closely linked to context.

Operative Criticism

In brief, operative criticism attempts to affect, not simply to explain, the evolution of architecture. Manfredo Tafuri offers a more complete definition in *Theories and History of Architecture*:

What is normally meant by *operative criticism* is an analysis

of architecture (or of the arts in general) that, instead of an abstract survey, has as its objective the planning of a precise poetical tendency, anticipated in its structures and derived from historical analyses programmatically distorted and finalized.

By this definition operative criticism represents the meeting point of history and planning. We could say, in fact, that operative criticism *plans* past history by projecting it towards the future. Its verifiability does not require abstractions of principle, it measures itself, each time, against the results obtained, while its theoretical horizon is the pragmatist and instrumental tradition.⁶

Most architectural criticism, probably due to the numbers of architects working as critics and the close dependence of critics on architects (for drawings, access to private homes, interior photographs, etc.), has been operative. One thinks of the works of the great Enlightenment theorists J. F. Blondel, Laugier, Lodoli, Quatremère de Quincy; of the Gothic revivalists Pugin, Ruskin, Morris; of the first generation of modern movement historians Sigfried Giedion, N. Pevsner, Alberto Sartoris; and even of contemporary architectural polemicists Robert Venturi, Aldo Rossi, Rob Krier, and Maurice Culot.

Tafuri's definition of operative criticism implies a selective historical—diachronic—account of architecture, whose stages of evolution make the historian's desired development the next logi-

cal step. I would propose instead that operative criticism might be either synchronic or diachronic, although blurrings of method are common in this committed approach. Operative synchronic criticism establishes general criteria for design and judgment; it seeks results not through a selective historical lineage but through standards of "good" and "bad" architecture.

Synchronic operative criticism includes Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction*, a committed translation of New Criticism to architecture (what Pellegrino d'Acierno aptly calls *Learning from T. S. Eliot*) and Aldo Rossi's *Architecture of the City*, which leans heavily on structuralist methods for the concept of type.⁷ Operative diachronic accounts include not only the modern movement classics *Space, Time and Architecture* and *Pioneers of Modern Design* but also recent books as divergent as Alberto Pérez-Gómez's phenomenological tract *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* and Charles Jencks's postmodern apologies *Post-modern Classicism: The New Synthesis* and *Architecture Today*. Undoubtedly, much operative criticism has had a powerful role in shaping architectural history. Whether current approaches can continue to shape architectural history, and whether the nature of their impact is desirable, is more problematic.

Explanatory Criticism of Places

Just as any explanatory criticism of architecture appears to require a

diachronic rather than synchronic approach, any analysis that attempts to elucidate the nature of a place seems to necessitate a consideration of historical forces. But the generating factors, of course, vary from an individually designed building to a public place. One of the most overt differences is the role of artistic intentionality, as opposed to general cultural, social, and economic forces in determining form. Historical accounts of single buildings ordinarily discuss the architect's intentions, earlier designs, and career trajectory in order to establish the parameters that led to a design. While personal motivations are often balanced by social and economic contingencies, the monographic approach generally stresses biographical considerations (in my opinion too much). In the criticism of public places, the balance is inevitably reversed. Tax laws, zoning laws, and neighborhood patterns typically play a stronger role in explaining the nature of a place and its evolution in time than the intentions of any one designer. Indeed, the historian/critic of public places is forced to go beyond conscious generating dimensions to less conscious political and social relations in trying to establish causality or governing structures. For instance, while the design of sidewalks, buildings, or even the overall massing of urban blocks might be attributed to tax incentives, zoning regulations, or a specific designer's intention, the way the various components of an urban fabric join or form a whole may seem to be circumstantial. To begin to understand the connections be-

tween the parts requires not only a historical perspective but one that looks beyond overt, localized motivations to the relations between institutions and productive processes themselves.

Operative Criticism of Places

Operative criticism of a public place also differs from operative criticism of an individual building. The latter seeks either to rally support for an architect's work or a particular design tendency or to condemn that work or design tendency in the hopes of suppressing a form of practice either in the architect himself or herself or in other practitioners. Most current architectural journalism falls in this category. In contrast, operative criticism of a public place, like explanatory criticism of a public place, cannot so readily focus on individual styles and schools, but instead must confront the broader range of issues already mentioned—building practices, zoning legislation, urban institutions—cultural and productive relations in their most encompassing sense. The question of impact is one of motivating institutional, not individual, reform. Influence becomes a more difficult, and inherently more political, issue.

This raises the problem, referred to earlier, whether written instrumental criticism in the sense of

Giedion's and Pevsner's histories is presently effective in the context of improving the public realm. If action is the goal, would other, more varied approaches—journalism with more critical imagery, television documentaries, testimony at public hearings, alternative zoning proposals—be more effective critical strategies for generating change? At this point few individuals believe histories that are overtly polemical sufficiently to act on their proposed belief structures. Instead, more direct operative moves, involving a larger audience and a more direct relation to productive processes, may be the only effective means to begin, in Tafuri's phrase, "planning history."

Finally, I would like to return to my original question about whether criticism should be explanatory or instrumental. While I believe that there is room for criticism of action, I would strongly affirm the need for criticism as elucidation/history. Operative strategies will always remain of a reformist, piecemeal nature unless they are also informed by a broader understanding of architecture in relation to global economic, social, and cultural forces. While there may be no absolute historical truth, only a striving for such an understanding can offer us, I believe, effective grounds for more immediate, pragmatic, operative responses.

NOTES

- 1 Deconstruction questions the assumption that there is a fundamental meaning or truth to a text. Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance* proposes that not only is language a product *difference*, distinctive oppositions, but that meaning is always *deferred*. For an introduction to deconstruction, see Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982) and Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982).
- 2 Colin Rowe, *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1976), pp. 1–27.
- 3 Two books that explore how semiology might be applied to architectural criticism are Geoffrey Broadbent, Richard Bunt, and Charles Jencks, eds. *Signs, Symbols and Architecture* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1980); and George Baird and Charles Jencks, eds. *Meaning in Architecture* (New York: Braziller, 1969).
- 4 Alan Colquhoun, "Historicism and the Limits of Semiology," in Alan Colquhoun, *Essays in Architectural Criticism: Modern Architecture and Historical Change* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1981), pp. 129–51.
- 5 Recently, semiologists and linguists have challenged this notion of meaning as well, stressing the unstable nature of meaning and its endless displacement.
- 6 Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), p. 141.
- 7 In *Architecture of the City* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1982). Aldo Rossi never attempts to reconcile his concept of type, as a constant, with his Marxist analysis of economic transformations.

On Criticism in the Profession

Donald Canty

In a more lurid journal, this piece might be called “Confessions of a Critic.” For I write not as a theorist of criticism but as a practitioner.

I came to be a critic, not through sadism or a special drive to be judgmental, but as an extension of my function as a journalist. My particular approach to architectural journalism is experiential. That is, I believe the core function of an architectural magazine of the kind I have edited is to convey the experience of works of architecture through a combination of words and illustrations.

Since that experience is seldom, if ever, totally positive, I am thrust into the role of critic simply to be true to my readers.

The other papers pay some attention to the purpose of criticism. To me it is simply an extension of the magazine’s function of informing its readers as to what is happening in the built work so that they can learn from it (perhaps even borrow from it). As much can be learned from shortcomings as successes, if suitably analyzed.

Criticism intended to influence rather than inform the reader—to advance a particular style or theory or individual—to me is simply bad journalism. However, it is possible to hope that one’s criticism can carry some broad exhortations, to pay more than lip service to context and user needs, for example.

Before going on to the subject of applying criticism to subjects larger

than single buildings, I would like to make a case that criticism need not be a one-shot exercise but can be applied to works of architecture profitably at various points in their lives. At the project stage, when a design is first unveiled, it is possible to discuss critically its compositional aspects and any messages the architect may mean to convey. It is also possible at this stage to look for the position of this particular work in the designer’s corpus, to assess whether it marks any kind of departure in the architect’s approach or perhaps a confirmation of earlier directions and predilections.

Upon completion comes the time to be experiential. It is important here to give the work its due. It must be shown sufficiently so that the reader can form his or her own impression and make an independent judgment. It must be described as well as characterized.

At this stage also one can begin holding the work up against the needs of the client and intentions of the designer. And one can deal with the crucial matter of fit to context.

However, only by returning to the work after some years of use can the critic make a valid judgment of how well it has treated its users and surroundings and how durable a construction and creation it has turned out to be.

In this respect, as in most others, criticism of places is much like criticism of buildings. For purposes of this discussion as I understand it,

the term “places” is defined as environments larger than single buildings, made up of open spaces as well as buildings. Among those to which I have applied criticism have been multibuilding complexes, college campuses, whole new communities, and precincts of cities.

In doing so, the emphasis must be on the ensemble. Individual buildings become building blocks in construction of the larger environment. They can be dealt with separately along the way, but they must be dealt with mainly as they relate to one another and the external spaces they help shape. Facades are judged, not just as compositions in themselves, but as walls of these spaces.

I have found that this affects the pace of the research and observation that goes into criticism of places. On the one hand, they need to be experienced over time, since nature affects their use more than it does a protected interior environment, and the users themselves are more diverse and unpredictable, changing with time. On the other hand, some of the observation must be done at a fast pace—in one gulp, as it were. This is necessary to get a sense of the whole, with minimum distraction by the parts. In 1976 I did a fifteenth anniversary assessment of the results of the Bacon plan for Center City Philadelphia. In large part it was drawn from multiple visits to the city over a period of years. But a crucial element—a sense of how the pieces of the plan, the individual developments that resulted from it, fit

together—came mainly from a swift, single day’s tour.

A related factor is altitude. Much of the experience of a place must be garnered from the ground. But it is also valuable to view it from above. I have found the helicopter to be a first-rate tool of urban design criticism. And my favorite way of illustrating such criticism is with helicopter-level photos.

It is often difficult in criticism of places to measure them against original intent. There is seldom, as is usually the case with individual buildings, a clear-cut program or a single designer. Urban places grow by accretion under an endless multiplicity of influences, notably the vagaries of real estate economics. Most often the only things resembling a design are a generalized land use plan and a loose framework of development regulations. Still, it can be instructive to trace the people and forces who had major roles in making a place what it is and to bring under criticism the processes of urban development as well as their products.

These papers were first presented at a symposium at the Architectural League of New York with the support of a grant from The New York State Council on the Arts.

Donlyn Lyndon

Places are what we live in. Not just buildings or spaces or geographies or fantasies, but some curious amalgam in which they are the principal parts. And this amalgam imposes its structure around our lives, influencing how we spend our time, whom we encounter, and what aspects of the world are readily available to our attention.

While each of us constructs a realm of private places that are uniquely conditioned by our own memories and experiences, the underlying physical structure of public places and the opportunities for experience that they afford or deny are a common structure that serve as an underlying force in the character of the community.

How may critical thought be applied to this commonality? We make changes to our world through works, through the concentrated efforts of individuals and organizations. Our professions are also organized around types of work. Hence, most criticism of the environment, of places, adopts an intrinsic model that characterizes the history of architecture: namely, to consider each work as one in a chain of works, then to examine the development and change in the career of the architects or in the development and spread of a particular form or way of organizing buildings; or to consider the evolution of cultural norms as represented in a succession of works.

In each model, the single work tends to be the point of focus

then quickly becomes subsumed in discussions that range far afield from the place at hand. The work, not the place that is created out of the intersection of that work with the surroundings and the imaginations of its users, and not the extended range of settlement of which it is a part, is what gets discussed and criticized. Often not even the work is discussed. Rather what critics tend to focus on is a set of ideas of which the work is seen in some way to be emblematic. What are the characteristics of critical thought that bring this about and how do they influence our attention?

On the Way to Figurative Architecture

Christian Norberg-Schulz

... denn wir leben wahrhaft in
Figuren.

Rainer Rilke

The reactions to postmodernism show that it has touched upon something essential. What is insignificant rouses neither enthusiasm nor aversion. Harsh attacks are always a symptom of the fear created by something that endangers one's own established world. Wasn't modernism good enough? Didn't it express our own epoch? Why on earth do the forms that for decades were forbidden appear again: pediments and arches, towers and domes? Aren't they just the manifestation of superficial nostalgia?

Postmodernism, however, did not start as a superficial play with forms. It came about as a protest against the sterile emptiness of "late modern" architecture. Venturi wanted to make architecture *alive* again, and Rossi emphasized the need for general *intelligibility*. Man does not live in a world of abstractions, they said, but is made up of a complex of *memories*. Therefore postmodernism took "known" forms into use. It wanted to tell us who we are and tear us out of the dull condition brought about by late modernism. With his *ultima maniera*, Le Corbusier already aimed at that and thus at the recovery of authentic plastic values. But the neoexpressionistic experiments of his followers did not lead anywhere; they remained arbitrary whims without possibilities of development. Thus they completed the late modern medal: on the one side the sterile diagram and on the other the casual outburst. Post-

modernism refused both and advocated a return to "meaning in architecture."¹ It is therefore a misunderstanding to interpret postmodernism as the freedom to do "anything." Rather it aims at the re-establishment of typical and significant forms. Many of its protagonists, therefore, show a keen interest in semiology and semantics or, in general, in the *language of architecture*.

Let me emphasize again that postmodernism came about because of the degeneration of modern architecture. One simply could not go on building curtain walls and *fenêtres en longueur* forever. And it did not solve the problem to "enrich" the solutions with pseudostructural inventions. But does not a third alternative exist? Did not Alvar Aalto create an architecture that is both modern and alive? And did not his followers, such as Utzon and Pietilä, develop its possibilities further? Certainly they did, but still the "organic" modernism of Aalto lacks what postmodernism searches for. Thus we approach the core of the problem: *What* does modern architecture lack, be it of the "structural," "expressive," or "organic" kind?

The answer is simple: it lacks a satisfactory reference to our everyday world of *things*. Modern architecture was always *abstract*, it drew away from reality or, rather, excluded its concrete aspects. We could also say that it became "non-figurative," because it abolished those "figures" that constituted the basis of the architecture of the past.

Thus it represents a parallel to nonfigurative painting, which rejected the concrete figure, and atonal music, which abandoned the recognizable melody. Why, then, did nonfigurative art come about? According to Giedion, it happened because the known forms, the "symbols," had been "devaluated" by nineteenth-century historicism. Forms that once had served as an interpretation of reality, have become mere status symbols satisfying the need for a "cultural alibi" of the *parvenu*. "Therefore," Giedion says, "we had to start from zero as if nothing had ever been done before."² In practice this meant that modern art concentrated its attention on the *means* of expression rather than the "literary" content. The means of expression were certainly used to solve concrete tasks, but rarely were they employed to create things possessing true identity. As a consequence the characteristic *Gestalt* or figure was lost, and everything dissolved into "patterns" or "structures."³ That is what is implied when we say that modern architecture drew away from reality.

What, then, does "reality" mean in this context? Evidently the means of expression are also related to reality. Color, material, point, line, and texture are abstracted from our given world and reflect it, each in its own way. A nonfigurative composition based on such elements may therefore express something "real." What Husserl called the "everyday lifeworld," however, is lost. The everyday lifeworld does not consist of abstract elements but

of totalities, of concrete *things*. The world is *given* as a world of things, where, Merleau-Ponty says, "each one is characterized by a kind of *a priori* to which it remains faithful," adding "The significance of a thing inhabits that thing . . . an inner reality which reveals itself externally."⁴ Thus our world consists of trees and flowers, rocks and mountains, rivers and lakes, animals and humans, houses and artifacts. These are the things we know, recognize, and remember. Language confirms this state of affairs, because it is the things that have *names*. We call the names substantives, since the things are the substance of the world. It is in this sense we ought to understand Husserl's battle cry against the growing abstraction and quantification of modern science: "To the things themselves!"⁵

Louis Kahn understood that. He asked, "What does the thing want to be?" He answered, "A rose wants to be a rose" or "a school wants to be a school." Kahn aimed in other words at giving architecture a new basis, starting from the totality rather than the parts, turning the approach of functionalism upside down. He may in a certain sense be considered the "father" of postmodernism. But he was still thinking in structural rather than figural terms, and it was his pupil Venturi who should take the decisive step toward a figurative architecture. It is told that Kahn realized the importance of this step and understood that he had been left behind.

What, then, is an architectural figure? It is easy to comprehend the

figural dimension of the pictorial arts. Painting and sculpture "portray," although not necessarily in a naturalistic sense. A building, however, does not portray anything. And it is not a "sign," which may be understood semiotically, as many postmodernists believe. Nevertheless it gathers and represents a more or less comprehensive world by means of imageable figures. To understand this fact, it is illuminating to compare architecture with music. Music does not portray either, but it is based on figures, *melodies*, which are known and recognized and which somehow express reality. Goethe's definition of architecture as "frozen music" is therefore deeply meaningful. What the figures of music and architecture have in common, are their "spatial" properties. They move forward, upward, and downward rhythmically and thereby relate to the positions and movements of the human body. The architectural figures therefore do not correspond to the basic forms of geometry. Musical figures, however, belong to an abstract, mathematical space and are concrete: they visualize modes of being "between earth and sky" and exist in a space where there are differences between up and down, before and behind. Thereby they become images of human existence.⁶

In general we may say that the identity of an architectural figure is determined by how it stands, extends, rises, opens, and closes. This may of course happen in infinitely many ways, but some of these are *typical*. I cannot here discuss architectural typology in detail but

will point out that the basic types have names. Thus we say "tower," "wing," "rotunda," "dome," "gable," "arch," "column," "window," and "gate" and also "lane," "street," "avenue," and "square." The basic interhuman figures are usually called "archetypes" to distinguish them from the local and temporal forms. All these figures were abolished by modern architecture, and as a result it lost a basic reference to reality. Most of the pioneers of modernism, however, had a classical education, and the architectural figures therefore often came back unintentionally. Their younger followers, on the contrary, from the outset learned to conceive architecture in abstract, "functional" terms and produced built diagrams if they did not in desperation take refuge in all kinds of visual narcotics.

When I mention the word "classical," many will certainly ask why classical forms again are taken into use. Aren't they historically conditioned and therefore obsolete? Evidently the classical language of forms was determined by local and temporal factors, but it is also a fact that the Greeks recognized relationships of universal validity and were able to express the truth discovered in typical figures. It is therefore not a matter of chance that classicism kept alive for centuries and that it reappears today. But it is of course of decisive importance *how* the classical language is used. Superficial imitation does not mean anything, since adaptation to different circumstances demands a new interpretation. Today we ex-

perience many interesting attempts at such a renewal.

The basic aim of postmodernism is to recover the figural dimension of architecture. This is the common denominator that unites the various currents of the present moment. The purpose is to make architecture intelligible and thereby *human* in the true sense of the word. It is a misunderstanding to believe that architecture becomes human if we only use “natural” materials and forms.⁷ What is truly human are the figures, the archetypes, and their interpretations, because they keep and explain our existence. Together the figures constitute a *language*, which, if it is used with understanding, may make our environment meaningful. And *meaning* is the primary human need.

Our task is therefore a double one: first, to understand the existential basis of architecture and, second, to explain how the existential content is kept and visualized by means of the language of architecture.

I have already asserted that the architectural figure is a manifestation of man’s being in space and, furthermore, that its identity is determined by its mode of standing, extending, rising, opening, and closing. How can we relate this general characterization to the concrete building tasks of society? To approach the problem, we may take the concept of *dwelling* as our point of departure.⁸ In general the purpose of architecture is to help man to dwell, that is, to find a foothold in space and time. Dwelling,

however, is a complex function. It does not only mean private shelter but first the establishment of a meaningful relationship between man and a given environment. In psychological terms, such a relationship develops through an act of identification, or, in other words, in a sense of belonging to a certain place. We could also say that man finds himself when he *settles*, and his general mode of being in the world is thereby determined. On the other hand, man is also a wanderer. As *homo viator*, he is always on the way, which implies the possibility of choice. Thus he chooses “his” place and, hence, a certain kind of fellowship with other men. This dialectic of departure and arrival, of path and goal, is the essence of the existential spatiality that is set into work by architecture. The *settlement*, therefore, is the primary goal of existential space and the place where the life of the community may take place. This fact is proved by the common use of place names for self-identification, for instance, by saying “I am a Roman” or “I am a New Yorker.”

When settling is accomplished, other modes of dwelling that concern the basic forms of human togetherness come into play. Thus the settlement functions as a place of encounter, where men exchange products, ideas, and feelings. From ancient times, *urban space* has been the stage where human meeting takes place. Meeting does not necessarily imply agreement; primarily it means that human beings come together in their diversities. Urban

space, thus, is essentially a place of discovery, a “milieu of possibilities.” In urban space man dwells in the sense of experiencing the richness of a world. We may call this mode *collective dwelling*.

When choices are made within the milieu of possibilities, however, patterns of agreement are established that represent a more structured kind of togetherness than the mere meeting. Agreement implies common interests and values and forms the basis for a fellowship or society. An agreement also has to “take place” in the sense of possessing a “forum” where the common values are kept and expressed. Such a place is generally known as an *institution* or public building, and the mode of dwelling it serves may be called *public dwelling*. Since the public building embodies a set of beliefs or values, it ought to appear as an “explanation” that makes the common world visible.

Choices, however, are also of a more personal kind, and the life of each individual has its particular course. Dwelling therefore also comprises the withdrawal that is necessary to define and keep one’s own identity. We may call this mode *private dwelling*, intending those actions that are secluded from the intrusion of others. The stage where private dwelling takes place is the *house*, which may be characterized as a “refuge” where man gathers and expresses memories that make up his personal world.

Settlement, urban space, public building, and house constitute the

environment where the various modes of dwelling are accomplished. The language of architecture is founded on these modes and consists of the archetypes of settlement, urban space, public building, and house. To recover the language of architecture, thus, we do not primarily have to recall stylistic elements but study those figures that make the archetypes manifest. The figures are concrete entities that “are” in space in a certain way and “as something.” They have to be understood as manifestations of dwelling and explained in terms of built form and organized space. The archetypes are the essences of architecture, corresponding to the names of spoken language. They appear over and over again in different contexts and are given ever new interpretations. The figures, therefore, are general as well as circumstantial and represent a setting into work of man’s lifeworld. When we say that the lifeworld is made up of memories, we intend the general and circumstantial memories of being between earth and sky, as the Greeks realized when considering the goddess *Mnemosyne*, memory, the daughter of earth and sky. Being the mother of the muses, memory was understood as the origin of art.⁹

Not all postmodernists, however, have grasped the nature of figurative architecture. Many lose themselves in an arbitrary play with motifs, as James Stirling does in his “meaningless” museum in Stuttgart. Others use the types as ends in themselves and thereby become victims of a new kind of abstraction, as Aldo

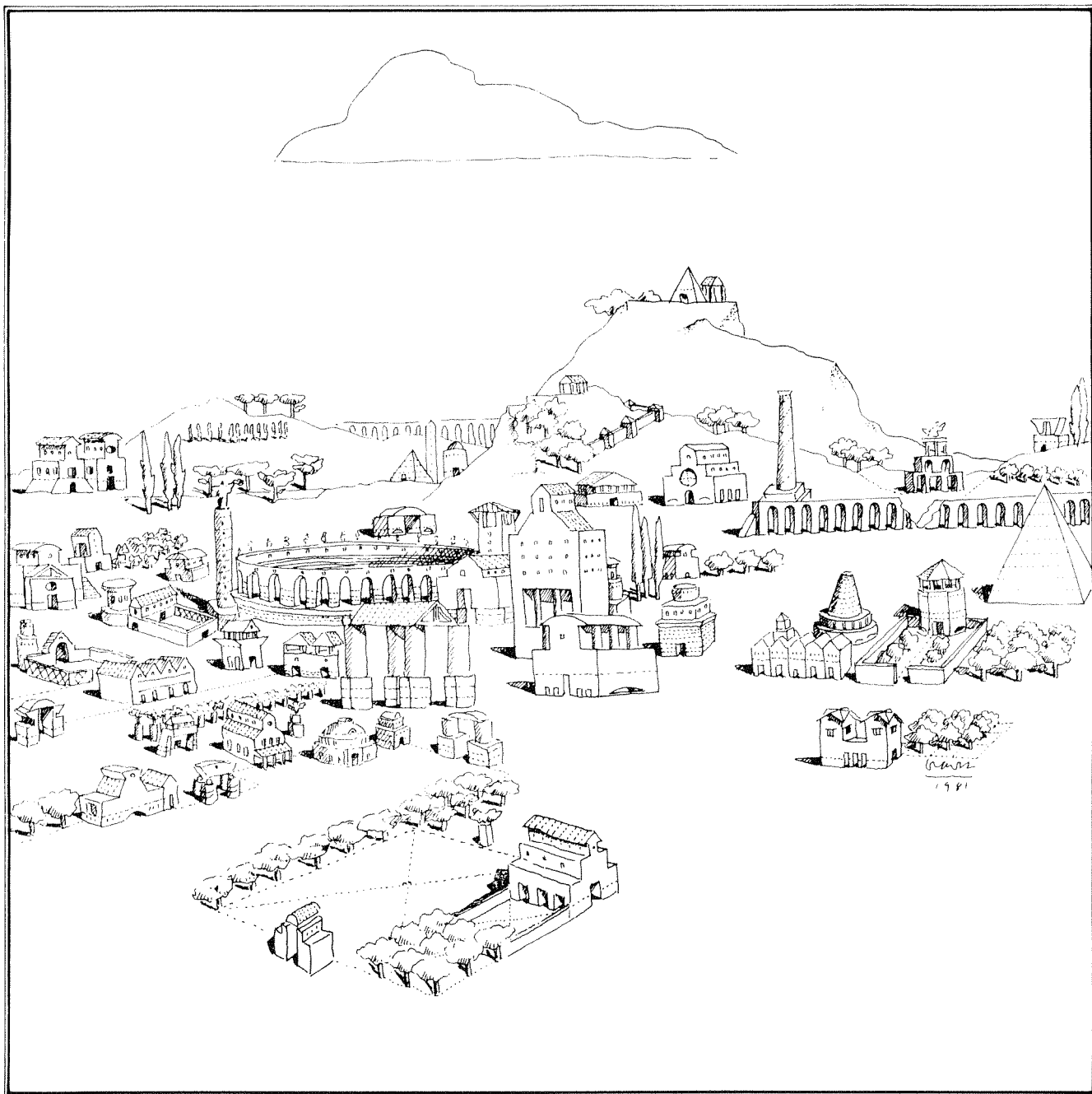
Rossi, who repeats the same schematic forms everywhere. It has to be emphasized that a type does not become alive before it is adapted to time and place, that is, before it is set into work. Therefore postmodernism is not only interested in what is general but in what is local. In other words, it ought to incorporate an understanding of and respect for the *genius loci*. Some postmodern architects have realized that, as did Charles Moore, who always modifies the basic forms in accordance with the place and the building task.

In spite of the present confusion, we are evidently on the way to figurative architecture. When Michael Graves published his *Buildings and Projects* in 1982, he wrote an introductory text entitled “A Case for Figurative Architecture.” There he asserted that “the Modern Movement undermined the poetic form in favor of non-figural, abstract geometries” and that “the cumulative effect of non-figurative architecture is the dismemberment of our former cultural language of architecture.” To escape from this impasse, Graves says that “it is crucial that we re-establish the thematic associations invented by our culture in order to fully allow the culture of architecture to represent the mythic and ritual aspirations of society.”¹⁰

Graves illustrates his text with a drawing that immediately appears as an inventory of architectural figures: pyramid, rotunda, tower, colonnade, and he places them within a landscape consisting of the

figures of nature: mountain and plain, rocks, trees and clouds. The drawing is echoed in the text, where we read, “All architecture before the Modern Movement sought to elaborate the themes of man and landscape. Understanding the building involves both association with natural phenomena (for example, the ground is like the floor) and anthropomorphic allusions (for example, a column is like a man).” And he concludes, “Architectural elements require distinction, one from another, in much the same way as language requires syntax; without variation among architectural elements, we will lose the anthropomorphic or figurative meaning. In this discussion . . . , an argument is made for the figural necessity of each particular element and, by extension, of architecture as a whole.”¹¹ In other words, Graves tells us that the meanings of the totality man-nature are mediated by the architectural figures. Accordingly modern architecture became meaningless because it abandoned the figural dimension.

Graves’s criticism of modern architecture demands a further comment on the relationship between modernism and postmodernism. Since the latter came about as a protest against certain deficiencies, it might seem to represent a break with the former. It would, however, be most unfortunate to adopt this interpretation of the situation. Unfortunate because we *need* the achievements of modern art and architecture. Which achievements, then, do I have in mind? First of all I refer to what is known as “free plan” and



“open form.”¹² The new “global” world demands spatial freedom, and instead of the static compositions of the past, we have experienced the creation of the open *collage*. After the second world war, however, the free plan and the open form tended to degenerate into either rigid “structuralist” patterns or to dissolve into chaotic whims. Here the architectural figures come to our rescue. Figural motifs, thus, may be used both to *mark* paths and centers within space and to *characterize* these “as something.” By means of architectural figures we may in other words express the experience of arriving somewhere. And this may be accomplished without giving up the free plan and the open form. Therefore postmodernism does not represent a break with but a further development of modernism. Hence the words of Giedion are still valid: “One does not become an architect today without having passed through the needle-eye of modern art.”

When I have referred positively to Venturi, Moore, and Graves, I do not intend that their works should be used as models. Graves interprets the types in *his* way, and we have to arrive at *our* interpretations in accordance with the local and temporal circumstances. What is essential, however, is common, and therefore postmodernism opens up for mutual understanding. We all have to employ the same original language, which is general as well as pluralistic and hence truly democratic. Therefore postmodernism is not dangerous. It only becomes

dangerous in the hands of uneducated architects. In other words, it demands that we re-establish our profession on the basis of a thorough understanding of the language of architecture. This is the challenge of the present.

NOTES

- 1 The need for “meaning in architecture” was asserted already in *Meaning in Architecture*, Charles Jencks and George Baird, eds. (London, 1969).
- 2 S. Giedion, *Architecture, You and Me* (Cambridge, MA, 1969), p. 26.
- 3 I call to your attention Christopher Alexander’s concern about “pattern-languages.”
- 4 M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London, 1962), p. 319ff.
- 5 E. Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften* (1936).
- 6 See C. Norberg-Schulz, *The Concept of Dwelling* (New York, 1985).
- 7 This maintained by many followers of Aalto’s “organic” modernism.
- 8 See C. Norberg-Schulz, *op. cit.*
- 9 M. Heidegger: “Was heisst Denken?” in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen, 1954), p. 130.
- 10 *Michael Graves Buildings and Projects 1966–1981*, K. V. Wheeler, P. Arnell, and T. Bickford, eds. (New York, 1982), p. 11ff.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 See C. Norberg-Schulz, *Roots of Modern Architecture* (Tokyo, 1985).

Corporate landscape, Rome, 1981. From *Michael Graves Buildings and Projects 1966–1981*.

Mixed Messages in Suburbia: Reading the Suburban Model Home

Clare Cooper Marcus,
Carolyn Francis,
and Colette Meunier



Some years ago, we discovered a common interest, not the type of thing one would speak too loudly about in a College of Environmental Design. While happily acknowledging to each other our fascination with suburban model homes, we had each felt a little out of step with our academic designer colleagues. We were drawn to look at these dwellings not as Design or Architecture but as artifacts of contemporary culture. Sometimes we found it helpful to imagine we were foreigners, newly arrived in this strange society. What could these model homes tell us about American values?

For five years, we have casually studied the media advertising, sales brochures, physical layout, furnishings, and landscaping of single-family model homes in the San Francisco Bay Area ranging from those in the lowest new-house price bracket to those in exclusive developments commanding prices up to more than a million dollars. All were in single-family “tracts”; for the purposes of this analysis, we have ignored medium-density, planned-unit developments or condominiums. Rather than “research” (such an all-encompassing, misused word), we would term this enterprise “informed speculation.”

When analyzing the various themes represented by model

I Although new house advertising extolls the virtues of “living in the country, close to nature,” the reality is that the natural landscape is either bulldozed for house construction, fenced off, or both.

All photographs by
Clare Cooper Marcus

The following Berkeley students took a seminar on housing with Clare Cooper Marcus in the spring of 1986, observed contemporary suburban model homes, and commented helpfully on an earlier draft of this paper: Steve Aced, Gail Baxter, Phil Erickson, Marge Gladman, Kathy Landis, Gerald Magutu, Terezia Nemeth-Venzon, Onju Roy, Scott Ryan, Fatima Shaker, and Paul Zimmerman.

homes, we were struck by a series of recurring, almost schizophrenic mixed messages. The advertising and the design, layout, furnishing, and decor of the houses embody a startling number of conflicting values. Sometimes one media message conflicts with another; sometimes a message implicit in the layout or decor contradicts contemporary societal norms. As norms and expectations change, we see evidence of considerable ambivalence regarding many values and aspirations, for example, a simultaneous embracing of modern technology and a parallel nostalgic yearning for what may be viewed as the more “simple” life of the past. Or is it, perhaps, a longing for that time when the United States was “on the rise” and the future looked totally rosy? These conflicting messages can be identified under many rubrics. For purposes of this discussion, we will first discuss nature and then look at security, exterior image, individuality, privacy, interior space, sex role cues, leisure, and children. Although our primary focus is the model home, we could not help but make analogous observations of typical site plans and subdivision layouts.

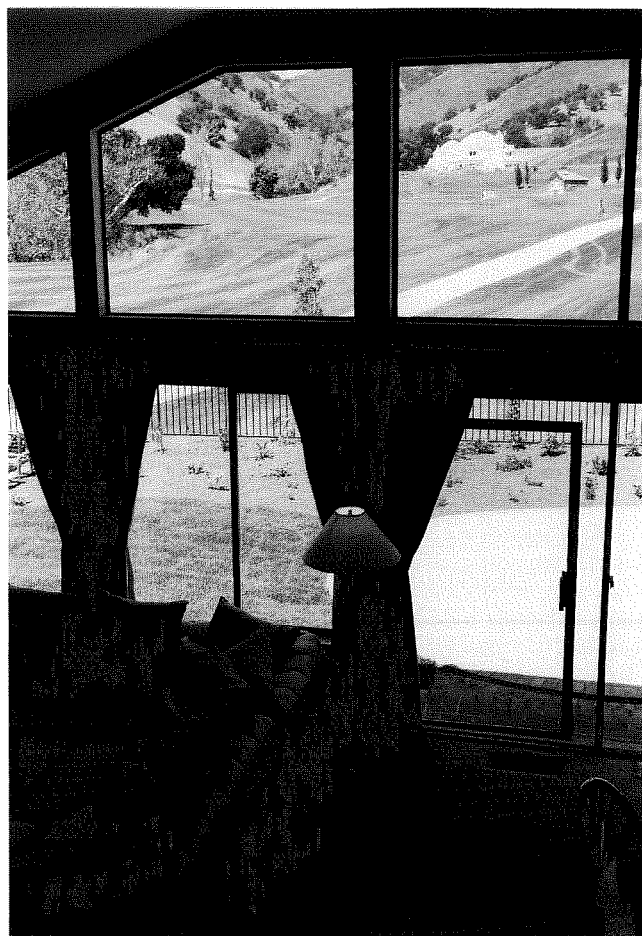
Nature: To Be Seen but not Touched

Suburban model homes and especially their advertising embrace and celebrate the image of nature. This is not

surprising, considering that the first American suburbs grew up around Eastern cities as the wealthy sought homes in more sylvan surroundings to escape from the “evils” of the industrial city.

One hundred years later, the city-country split hasn’t changed much. Contemporary subdivisions—for example, Shadow Oaks, Twin Pines, or Pebble Creek—are frequently named to evoke nature. The actual models (most subdivisions offer four to eight possible styles) are often given “nature names,” such as Aspen, Poplar, and Linden. At the highest-priced development in the Bay Area, most streets are named after trees (Oak Ridge Court, Silver Maple Drive, Conifer Terrace), a particularly disturbing feature in that—with few exceptions—the only native trees left are in the stream beds, where bulldozers could not intrude. Nature is clearly a selling point, as brochures and advertisements make much of community greenbelts and possible views of hills or bay; and the model homes themselves often feature densely lush atrium spaces and an astonishing number of houseplants.

But there is another, conflicting, message. Nature is a nice idea, but the average house buyer is clearly not an avid gardener, bird watcher, or hiker. Yard space is almost always minimal, allowing for only very limited ornamental



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2 Although clearly a major selling point, “Nature” is presented as a picture framed by house or auto windows rather than as an environment to be fully experienced.

gardening, and in fact a major selling point is often the “low maintenance” landscaping or even lack of buyer responsibility for front yards. Houses are dominated by their garages, often accommodating three vehicles, and the subdivisions themselves are usually dominated by a network of overly wide streets. The emphasis on automobile rather than foot traffic is further underscored by a common lack of sidewalks. Some new and expensive suburban developments have main streets completely out of scale with the amount of traffic they carry, and although a sidewalk or bike lane could easily have been provided, it is not. Nature, it seems, is to be viewed through the kitchen or car window, not walked through, seen up close, touched, or smelled.

The attempt to create a natural setting seems to vary quite considerably from low- to high-priced developments. In lower-priced schemes, the site is often flat and treeless, dominated by a grid of streets and standard house lots, with the house in the middle of the lot and fences on three sides. The impression is of human dominance over the landscape, with the same theme repeated in microcosm in individual garden designs (exotic plant materials, rocks, gravel, and tightly pruned shrubs and trees). In some high-priced schemes, an attempt is made to preserve something of the natural vegetation, with

houses clustered or individually sited to preserve views or hillsides. We do not think this necessarily implies that the wealthier classes are more “environmentally concerned” but that “Nature” is one of a number of selling points appealing to higher-income buyers; low-income buyers are probably happy to find *any* decent standard house that they can afford. There may also be a distinction between traditional working class values of neatness and order (manicured gardens) and a more upscale “Sea Ranch” ethic of unblemished nature. Nevertheless, advertising for even a low-priced subdivision surrounded by other tracts and close to freeways and shopping centers will have a blurb about “living in the country.” Perhaps having your own yard is “country” enough for those who have just moved out of an apartment building or sharing with in-laws.

For all income groups, there is clearly some ambivalence about urban versus rural values. Advertising and sales materials frequently make nostalgic references to the country setting, the serenity of “getting away from it all,” and imagery of country kitchens, cozy evenings by rustic fireplaces, and such. But it is the *idea* (or status image) of living in the country that is being marketed rather than any deep attachment to nature. In the midst of the media’s bucolic

reveries, one is frequently reminded of the convenience of freeway connections, ease or speed of commute, and quick access to the more sophisticated pleasures of the city. The highest-priced development in the Bay Area, surrounded by stone walls and entry gates, sports two country clubs, extensive sports facilities, and a three-million-dollar man-made waterfall and advertises that it “combines the sophistication and elegance of the city with the ease and serenity of the country. . . .” If you are wealthy enough, city values are brought out for you in the form (ironically) of the “country” club.

The Search for Security

When new-house advertising extolls the virtues of “country living” and “getting away from it all,” the “all” implies the bustle of urban life, noise, activity, and—presumably—crime (although they are never mentioned specifically). The latest California “new homes” offer deadbolts and door peepholes as standard features; large high-priced developments offer an entry gate and twenty-four hour guard to keep out everyone but legitimate callers. Let’s hope this is effective, because the cheap aluminum windows and sliding patio doors (let alone the *ten* exterior doors in one recently visited \$900,000 model) wouldn’t keep out an ambitious teenager, let alone a serious intruder.

But security has deeper connotations than protection from crime. The cascading pitched roofs and prominent chimneys of high-priced houses may be conveying a message of basic psychological security and warmth in a world that is increasingly full of unpredictable dangers. The small range of prices in any one subdivision ensures that your neighbors will at least be in the same income bracket and—hopefully—have the same child rearing values. The “planned development” ensures that no unexpected commercial or lower-priced dwellings will pop up at a later date.

Similarly, the range of individualizing options is limited. The first large mass-produced developer of postwar suburban houses—Levitt—was severely criticized by the architectural fraternity of the time for offering little choice in house design or layout. In response to this, he started offering three or four models to choose from, a practice that is now a standard procedure in new house marketing. In the 1960s, the choices emphasized number of rooms and colors of kitchen formica and floor tiles. In the 1980s, the advertising emphasizes more, such as “an assortment of floor plans to match every lifestyle,” although exactly what “life-style” implies and how the house design meshes with it is not made explicit. Extra rooms (den, library, exercise room) are offered in the higher-priced models or

are offered as “bonus rooms” you can add later over the garage. The choices are minimal, however, in terms of what people *might* want if given the option: a one-car garage plus extra living space instead of a three-car garage; an attic for storage; a large children’s bedroom—play-room instead of a family room; and so on. But developers know full well that while they are selling a house, they are also selling “an investment”; too much individuality of style or layout may mean higher initial costs plus poor resale possibilities.

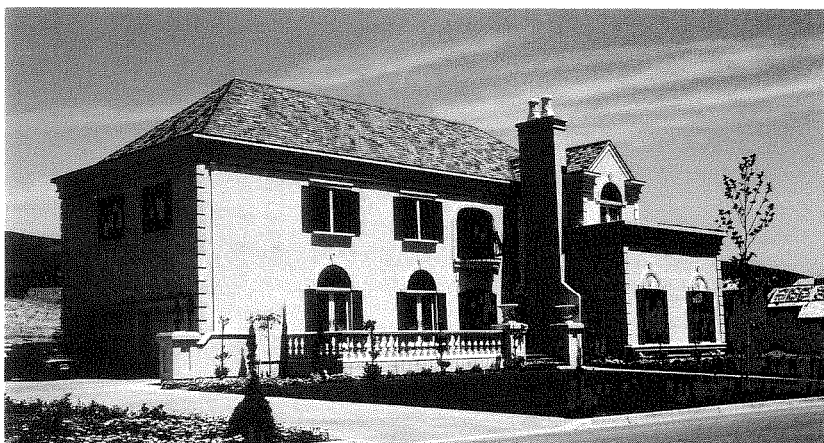
Where and When Is This Place?

Current new house styles often evoke images from the past. This seems especially true in higher-priced schemes, which present a bewildering array of possibilities, ranging from highly ornate neo-Victorian to mysteriously transplanted Tudor to grandiose Colonial.

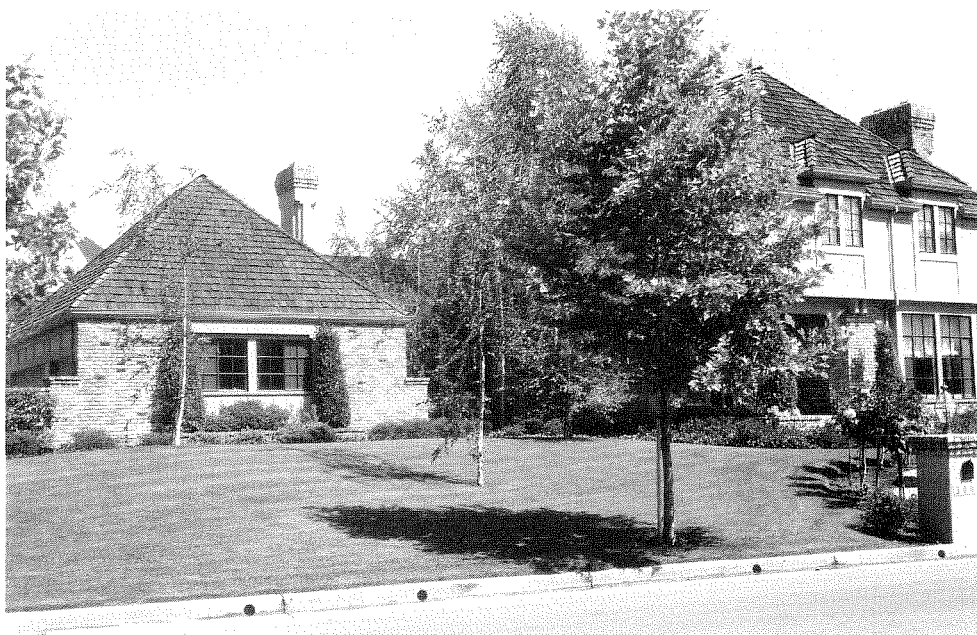
The names of models are very frequently drawn from the Old World, especially British royalty, castles, and stately homes. Perhaps this is a contemporary example of “keeping up with the Joneses”: displaying one’s wealth through a house style reminiscent of homes built by the landed aristocracy in other eras and settings (Southern plantation, French chateau, Scottish castle, English manor house). This symbolism makes some sense



3, 4 Developers are aware that massive chimneys and cascading rooflines convey the image of the warmth of home.



5



6

5 In one high-priced development, buyers are presented with a bewildering array of styles, from Southern plantation to Nantucket "cottage" to Victorian gothic to French chateau.

6 To complete the traditional "historic" image of many new houses, the three-car garage is "rotated" to be approached from the side. From the street, the garage is disguised as a wing of the house, often complete with windows and drapes.

in a state such as California, where there is considerable "new wealth" but few architectural models of "old wealth" to draw on.

Since the three-car garage may produce an anachronistic element in a Victorian or French chateau facade, the latest very high-priced models feature designs where cars enter the lot through a "porte cochère" and loop around the side of the house to a large garage, which from the street side appears to be a wing of the house complete with curtained windows. Thus, the status of the garage has gone full circle, from being secreted at the back of the lot to being incorporated in the house to dominating the street facade to "disappearing" again behind a false front.

Construction of contemporary high-priced houses often employs "traditional" materials, such as stone, wood, and brick. Even less expensive stucco models frequently feature columns, entries, or chimneys showcasing these materials. Mullioned windows are simulated by thin plastic strips applied over large glass windows, and nonstructural exposed beams are often part of family room ceilings. Massive, simulated carved double front doors are often featured, but the tiled entry surface inside extends behind only one door, clearly indicating the other is for show only.

In a world of consumer goods of dubious quality, developers of houses at the highest price ranges woo their customers with messages of “Old World details” and “quality craftsmanship.” A recent conversation with the salesperson for a \$675,000 custom house revealed that the builder had “rejected 70 percent of the marble shipped over from Italy for the fireplaces, and flown in a European wood-carver for two weeks to detail the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century furniture reproductions. . . .” A Sunday newspaper advertisement for a high-priced scheme stated, “In a world of steadily diminishing quality, it is reassuring to know that there is still a place where the custom estate home is cultivated in the time honored tradition. . . .”

In fact, close inspection of many high-priced models revealed brass-plated faucets next to delaminating hollow-core doors and plush carpeting below standard aluminum framed windows. Observing potential buyers inspecting such houses, it is clear that they are mesmerized (deliberately distracted?) by the grandeur of the layout and expensive model home furnishings. Details of doors and windows are far from their minds.

In low-priced subdivisions, the level of quality of materials and detailing is proportional to their price—

what you see is what you get. In many cases, materials and finishes represent a better buy for the dollar than in more expensive houses; ironically, the higher-priced developer can “get away with” lower-quality construction. If we are to believe the advertising, the wealthy are buying community, amenity, exclusiveness, and high-status life-style, and the less wealthy are buying just a house.

In some lower-priced schemes, there is greater emphasis on looking “up to date.” Houses have “contemporary” entries, prominent garage doors, wood-framed chimneys (as opposed to ornate brick chimneys in high-priced models). There are few arched windows, shutters, or antique-style porch lanterns. Is the message from housing developers that the wealthy, who have “made it,” want to relax into styles reminiscent of the Old World aristocracy and the first-house buyers, who are “just making it,” desire a thoroughly modern look? Or is it simply that “Old World” detailing *costs* more and only upper-income house buyers can afford it?

In most price ranges, the interior decor of model homes is heavily biased toward the traditional: chintz, gingham and brocade, “antiques,” prints of old maps, and other historic features are prominently featured. Sales literature



7

7 The open-plan layout of all new houses guarantees that a casual visitor will see virtually the whole dwelling from the threshold.



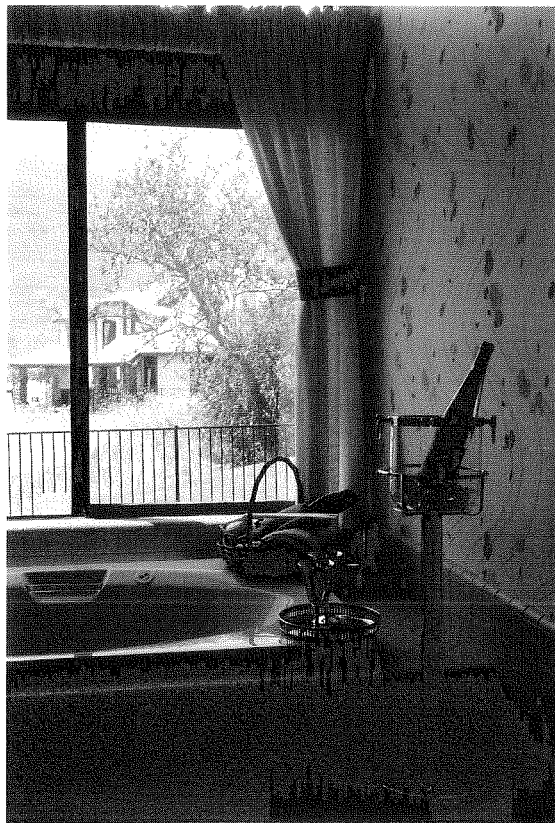
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often creates an “instant past” for home buyers by presenting information on the historic significance of the subdivision locale, specific features incorporated into the new setting, or romantic versions of local “character” stories.

Conspicuous amid all these references to days gone by, a virtual showroom of energy-consuming modern appliances adorns each of the model homes. From double oven with microwave to trash-compactor, instant boiling water device to room-to-room intercom, whirlpool spa-bath to electronic burglar alarm, model homes display a considerable wealth of modern technology. These appliances are usually highlighted in the sales brochures and the advertising, often in the same breath as the traditional family room with beamed ceiling is being lauded. Significantly, when comparing high- and low-priced models, although space standards and quality of materials may be lower in the cheaper houses, the number and quality of standard technical appliances remains essentially the same.

Privacy within the House and between Houses

The issue of privacy as displayed in model house designs also seems to embody a number of mixed messages. Most models create considerable privacy



9

- 8 **Privacy and distance** from neighbors is clearly a value that is *not* being marketed in contemporary suburbia.
- 9 **A remarkable proportion of master baths** are clearly visible from neighboring houses or the adjacent golf course. Is this deliberate?

barriers to the outside world: houses are buffered by semi-private front yards, views into street-facing windows are controlled by curtains or blinds, and entry is regulated by a peephole or even an intercom. However, once a visitor steps over the threshold, a vast amount of the home's interior is thrown open to view. From the entry one can invariably see fully into both formal living and dining rooms; there is often a partial view into the kitchen and sometimes to the family room; and surprisingly often the visitor can see the bedroom and bathroom entries on the upper floor in a two-story dwelling.

Apart from the exposure of virtually the whole house to casual or relatively unknown visitors, this type of layout affords virtually no privacy *between* areas of the house. Ironically, one of the latest built-in luxuries in higher-priced houses is the intercom to all rooms, perhaps another trick to make the buyers think they have more space or privacy than they do, since the open-plan layout virtually ensures that a call from one room will be heard throughout the house. Family members can achieve complete privacy only in a bedroom or bathroom, and there is little chance of two groups of people in the house—teenagers, for example, plus socializing adults—being engaged in separate activities without having a distinct awareness of each other. This seems to

suggest a desire for the sort of family interaction reminiscent of a peasant family in a one-room cottage. However, the existence of the encapsulated home-within-a-home of the master suite suggests otherwise. This cluster of rooms, often entered through double doors, provides a seemingly luxurious setting for eating, sleeping, relaxing, and bathing quite separate from the rest of the house. Subtle details in the decor—two wine glasses beside the fireplace, a breakfast tray on the king-size bed—suggest that here, at last, you will experience the love life you so richly deserve. Often labeled “The Retreat,” the master suite offers the possibility of leading much of one's life secluded from the ruckus without.

While privacy for the couple within the family is clearly a value that consumers are willing to pay for, privacy *between* houses is apparently not so important. It is ironic that many people seemingly move to the suburbs to escape congested urban life only to find themselves in closer *visual* proximity to neighbors than is the case with many high-density apartment buildings in the city or in single-family neighborhoods dating from the early 1900s. There is not a great deal of difference between new high- and low-priced houses in terms of lot width and front and side yard setbacks. If you have more to spend, you clearly

buy a larger house, more and larger rooms, but not necessarily a larger lot. This wreaks considerable havoc with the historic “landholding” image often being evoked in the facade design, since such homes were in historic times almost invariably surrounded by extensive grounds. While salespeople of high-priced models are anxious to tell you about the square footage of the house and luxury extras, we found many reluctant to divulge (or ignorant of) the actual size of the lot.

Compounding the problems of relatively small lots, private areas of houses are amazingly frequently violated by insensitive window location. In some very grand models, balconies off master suites were entirely visible for blocks around or massive entries topped by glass windows afforded a direct view of the stairway to the upper floor to any passerby. Perhaps the very wealthy are willing to relinquish a degree of privacy in return for an opportunity to display their opulent life-style—a return, perhaps, to the picture window of the 1950s.

Another breach of privacy, which we would have believed to be an unfortunate oversight, were it not for its fairly consistent repetition was the placement of windows in bathrooms. In many homes, the master bath, the retreat within the retreat, a luxurious inner sanctum

dedicated to the personal concerns of body maintenance and sensuality, was quite open to views from certain locations *beyond* the house. Surprisingly, master baths had windows of regular, transparent glass placed either within a shower enclosure, so that any normal curtaining effort would be exposed to water and steam, or placed within the room in such a way as to be almost inaccessible for lowering a blind. If the view into the bath was not desired, the window would essentially have to be permanently covered, which raises questions about its provision in the first place. After our initial astonishment wore off, we began to wonder if the windows afforded a deliberate form of “social flashing” of opulent bathrooms and their luxuriating owners to next-door neighbors, passersby, or, in some cases, golfers on adjacent fairways. When we asked salespeople about this issue, they always looked surprised and remarked, “No one has ever complained.”

Perceived versus Usable Space

One of the greatest conflicts displayed in suburban model houses centers around space. Developers and designers of today's new houses seem to place less value on efficient or ingenious floor plans and more on fostering an *impression* of greater space. This is nothing new; pattern books as long ago as the turn of the



10

10 Perceived interior space is enhanced by open-plan layouts and “cathedral” ceilings. How do you water the plants?

century encouraged open layouts to enhance a sense of space. The pervasive use of what has become known as the “cathedral” ceiling (a double height area that may include both formal living and dining rooms and that, in turn, is open to the corridor or landing leading to upper bedrooms and bathrooms of a two-story house) creates the effect of “borrowed space,” where any given room appears larger because the space flows into the area beyond. That open quality is further enhanced by open staircases, with risers omitted to permit visual transparency. It is important to note, however, that virtually all of these mechanisms for creating an *impression* of greater space in fact subtract from the potential for actual *usable* space. A closed stair can enclose a stair-closet, useful for many types of storage that even in higher-priced houses is still minimally provided. In models with cathedral ceilings, extension of the second floor would have created considerable extra space on the upper floor, allowing for more rooms or for dramatically larger secondary bedrooms (maybe even big enough for serious Lego building, say). Considering its effect on privacy and energy consumption, it appears that consumers pay dearly for the impression of greater space.

Interestingly enough, the double height ceilings have created a whole new array

of essentially useless spaces: ledges that help to define the spaces below and bridge-type elements that differentiate space and serve structural functions. These are used by the model home decorators to house an astonishing array of artifacts and plants—many quite bizarre, such as a giant dead cactus—that are supposed to enhance the spaces they decorate. Apart from their questionable decorative potential, these spaces are virtually unreachable—except by a tall ladder from below—for watering plants (no wonder the cactus was dead) or dusting and removing cobwebs. For that matter, many collections of large earthenware pots seen adorning these places in some models could prove dangerous or fatal in case of an earthquake.

The emphasis on the illusion of greater space is further enhanced by styles of model home decoration. Although the scaled down furniture trick does not seem to be so prevalent now, decorators make plentiful use of glass, see-through tables, and large reflecting mirrors on almost every imaginable surface to extend the apparent size of rooms and perhaps to allow buyers to “picture themselves” in this luxurious setting.

There is a pervasive concern at all price ranges about providing an impressive entry. Even the lower-priced models sport massive double entry doors with gleaming

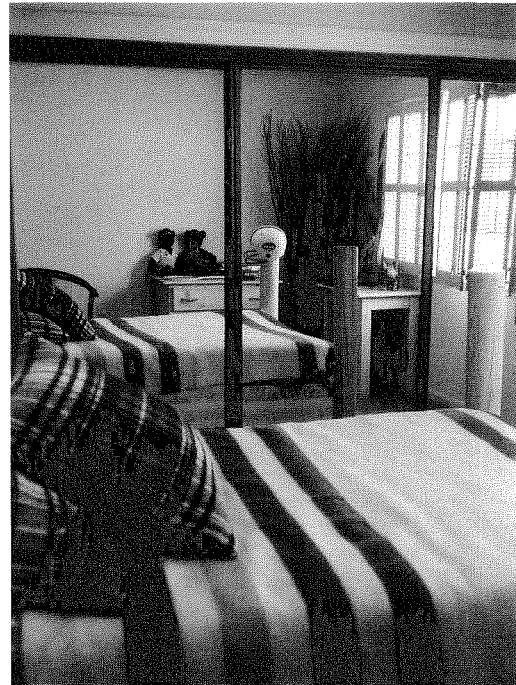
“brass” hardware. The most “exclusive” houses provide some rather astonishing interpretations, from a twenty-six foot entrance “tower” to covered, drive-through porticos reminiscent of hotels or mansions of an earlier era. This ostentatious show of the owners’ wealth seems peculiarly out of step both with the subsequent informal arrangement of the house interior and overall casual California life-styles. To make quite an issue of the arrival of guests at one’s door when the next instant they’ll be exposed to everything from the kids and dog watching television in the family room to someone rushing in their bathrobe from an upstairs bedroom to the bathroom is yet another mixed message. Likewise, when the family probably spends 95 percent of their time entering the house via the garage, bringing in groceries or returning sweaty from tennis, one questions the relevance of the little used and even less often lived-up-to elaborate entry.

Sex Role Cues

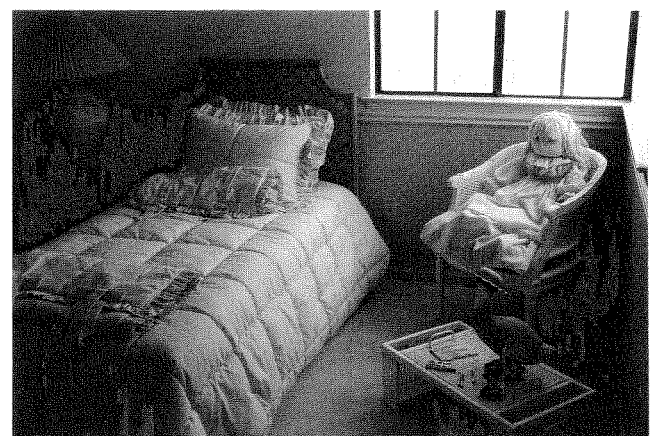
The decoration of model homes offers an interesting array of sex role cues, which by their presence or absence serve to reinforce some conflicting views of who the family is and what family members do in the 1980s. In a departure from the past, kitchens are no longer made explicitly the woman’s territory. They are in fact most often presented in a carefully

neuter mode or as distinctly “gourmet” kitchens, with overtones of cheffy extravagance more appealing to a male cook or “super mom” than a “homemaker.” While this seems to imply that the work of preparing meals is now a shared responsibility, a conflicting message is generated by the areas of the house geared to casual relaxation. The family rooms, dens, and bonus rooms are almost uniformly furnished and advertised with a distinctly masculine motif—incorporating pipe racks, fishing paraphernalia, hunting prints on the walls, model cars and trains, pool tables, and heavy leather furniture—which seems to imply that the men spend more time in leisure pursuits at home than do the women. This then contradicts the earlier impression that the work of maintaining the family is shared. Indeed, a recent Sunday paper ad for the highest-priced development in the Bay Area depicts a man relaxing in an easy chair with newspaper, pipe, and slippers while his wife hovers nearby and small daughter and sheep dog relax on the hearth rug. Apparently, “traditional” sex roles are alive and well; recent research into households in Chicago and New York indicates that in the majority of professional, two-working-parent families, men do less than 15 percent of the housework or other household chores.

When an office or work setup in a den is presented in some



11



12

11, 12 Traditional sex role cues in model house bedrooms. A boy's room has chunky pillows, rough wood bedposts, and a football helmet. A girl's room has pink wallpaper, ruffles, and a doll.



higher-priced model homes, it is invariably decorated to imply male usage. This suggests that if not simply relaxing while the woman handles the bulk of the household duties, the man must then be engaged in serious career-oriented work. The only desk-type work areas provided for women tend to be located within the master (!) suite and include fashionably colored stationery, engraved invitations, and perhaps a diary—certainly no computer terminals.

Bedrooms intended for young children present subtle reinforcements of traditional sex role stereotypes. Rooms for young boys are almost always oriented to competitive sports, with baseball bats and mitts, basketball trophies, or pictures of school sports teams. The colors are more subdued and the lines cleaner and simpler than in the girls' rooms, which use a lot of white painted or wicker furniture, frilled and ruffled accessories with floral patterns, and collections of dolls. Artwork in girls' rooms features ballet or cute puppies and kittens; boys' rooms flaunt flashy high-tech renderings of motorcycles and sports cars. The most "active" orientation seen in a model home girl's room was a horse-show theme, with riding boots and crop artfully scattered about and a display of cups and ribbons from hypothesized horse show triumphs. This was still all played out against a ruffly, floral background. In

virtually none of the models looked at was a desk provided in the "girl's room"; presumably if female children do homework at all, it is adjacent to the television or wet bar in the family room. It seems that while sex role stereotyping has become uncomfortable for many adults, such roles are still part of the collective consciousness in defining children's positions.

Though some may dismiss these decor stereotypes as amusing and harmless, we disagree. Reinforcing the stereotype that boys are/need to be "tough" and competitive and girls are "frilly" does a disservice to the full development of both sexes. Sex-stereotyped model home furnishings will one day seem as embarrassingly prejudiced as the billboards and magazine ads of the 1950s, which depicted all people as white.

Leisure

Leisure-related issues are prominently discussed in the sales brochures and advertising of model homes. Great emphasis is placed on the abundance of labor-saving devices and on the provision of "low maintenance" landscaping, allowing the homeowner freedom from regular duties to enjoy increased leisure time. However, it becomes clear that a very limited concept of leisure is addressed and that the majority of such activities are presumed to take place away from the home. Within

the home, the only clear messages regarding any type of recreational activity center around alcohol. Some of the more expensive houses feature rather extravagantly decorated home bars. One bar we observed featured mirrors on the ceiling and all walls and gave a completely disorienting impression of a countless number of identical people floating into a spacy limbo of hanging plants and stemware. Another was mysteriously revealed, at the flick of a switch, hidden behind a French seventeenth-century reproduction carved bookcase. The lower-priced models often feature a wet bar off the family room or in the den cum guest room; when such an amenity isn't present, its possibility is indicated in the sales brochure floor plan. In contrast, there is no provision for other likely hobbies or leisure pursuits such as serious sewing; nowhere but the garage for any type of furniture refinishing, model-making, pottery, or other messy endeavors; inadequate kitchen storage space for home canning or preserving; lack of yard space for vegetable gardening; and so forth.

The greatest emphasis outside the home is on competitive sports. Sales literature—even for the lower-priced schemes—waxes poetic about tennis courts and swimming pools, and in the more exclusive developments, they play up golf courses and soccer fields. The irony is, however,

that what health educators consider now to be the most overall beneficial form of exercise, simple walking, is neither mentioned nor encouraged. Sidewalks are rarely provided. The luxuriously designed golf courses of many higher-priced developments are laced with concrete pathways to accommodate motorized golf carts; tennis courts and swimming pools are provided with ample car parks. Heaven forbid that one should walk to the setting of one's chosen form of exercise.

Another mixed message—but certainly one not confined to suburbia—is the juxtaposition of a 1980s health-and-fitness orientation together with an almost obsessive focus on food. Magazines of gourmet eating decorate the coffee table; the latest in cookware is displayed in the kitchen. All the model houses we observed had a variety of locations indicated as possible eating places, with formal dining rooms and kitchen nooks being so basic as to be almost unworthy of mention. We also saw stools at bars between kitchen and family room; small tables set up for eating in the corners of family rooms; cozy tête-à-tête seatings in master retreats; and various dining setups on balconies, patios, decks, and courtyards. What was arresting was that each home exhibited *most* of these possibilities rather than a representative few. A recent decorating trend seems to be

in providing more faux edibles for these settings—plastic renditions of martinis (with olives), iced tea (with ice cubes), and ceramic cantaloupe slices—perhaps to ensure that we get the message.

For the Sake of the Children

Surely one of the most perplexing (and disturbing) contradictions in new subdivisions centers around the value placed on children. While moving to the suburbs “for the sake of the children” has long been an accepted rationale, the environment created there for them—as exemplified by the model homes—leaves much to be desired. While the adults of the family are now almost always afforded an owner's suite of major proportions, the children are relegated to bedrooms scarcely large enough to hold a bed, dresser, and desk and certainly too small for a train set or other such toys or for a child-turned-teenager to socialize with friends.

The master suite, while possibly enriching the relationship of the couple, may imply an ambivalent attitude toward children and family life. Children are no longer welcome in the parents' bedroom (“The Retreat”), since there are frequently no doors between sleeping and bathing areas, and privacy required for bathing now extends into the bedroom. In one higher-priced model, not

13, 14 This pleasant pathway is reserved for golf-cart vehicles in a development where children are forced to ride their bicycles in the street and low densities seemingly encourage the use of motor scooters by children well below the legal age.



15

15 Spec-built house priced at more than a million dollars, designed to support a movie image of the romanticized “good life” in times of uncertainty and rapid social change.

only were children relegated to a children’s “zone” but the master suite was literally connected to the rest of the house by a bridge. Children, it seems, must be stored away to ensure their parents’ privacy.

Since the family room is usually completely open to the rest of the main living areas, it is clear that loud or boisterous play may not be welcome there. Outdoors, the dimensions of the backyard inhibit most active play, and in fact the models often feature decks or patios clearly intended for adult use, some even dominated by hot tubs. Beyond the home, lack of sidewalks or bike paths limits children’s mobility; the “scraping bare” of the landscape leaves few places to explore; and low densities and lack of public transportation render children almost entirely reliant on adults for transportation.

If the insistence on adult auto use in this car-oriented culture is understandable, what of children and teenagers who want some mobility on their own—a potentially “explosive” situation with newly independent adolescents? The golf-cart pathways in many schemes would be ideal for cycling, but this is not allowed: “It might be dangerous” say the developers (a.k.a. “We might be sued.”). On several occasions we asked sales-representatives of the Bay Area’s highest-priced

scheme what there was for children, and we were always assured, “We have an Olympic-sized swimming pool, a soccer field, and 16 tennis courts.” Not much consolation for the parents of children younger than seven or eight. No wonder a recent Sunday newspaper advertisement for this development showed two preschoolers having a “fun” encounter with the kindly guard at the security gate, a situation not unlike bored children of the English gentry seeking solace in the servants’ wing. In no tract that we have observed recently was there either a park or play equipment; “something for the children” is evidently not a major selling point.

The lower the price of the house, the more it seems there is passing acknowledgment of the needs of children. A low-priced subdivision in Hercules, for example, located schools, parks, and “a mall for family shopping” on a map of the vicinity; a development in Redwood City provided a sandbox in the common space. These, however, are exceptions rather than the rule.

Perhaps the tide is about to turn. In one 1986 Bay Area scheme in the \$200,000–\$300,000 range, a unique offering is now included: a baby’s room. This developer may be cleverly playing to the yearnings of mid-thirties, childless, two-career couples who have put off having

a family and are now “up against the clock.”

Although babies are occasionally acknowledged and children recognized in sex-stereotyped bedrooms, no models encountered in the Bay Area admitted to the existence of teenagers; it is as if this awkward (and feared?) age group does not exist. No wonder that in one very high-priced development, rich teenagers are reportedly burglarizing each other's homes out of boredom and engaging in a new suburban “sport” known as “turfin’”—driving cars deliberately over neighbor's lawns to create ruts in the pristine sod.

Stage Set, Or Family Abode

The very latest sales ploy in high-priced homes is to sell the customer *all* the model home furnishings, down to sheets and silverware, along with the house. This meets the needs of busy executives who “haven't time” to shop around for domestic appliances and furniture and who need an “instant home.” The house has become a personal hotel to be moved into, lived in, and sold again as a total package.

Finally, one can't help asking what these model homes are a setting *for*, exactly what scenarios the designers and decorators envision taking place within them. The traditional family of father going to work, mother staying at home, and two

children now represents only 5 percent of all households, yet typical model “homes” nearly always imply this kind of grouping. Clearly developers are trying to sell a “home” and not just a house. The continued presence of the “family room,” with table arranged for a cozy family meal, implies that “traditional” values are available *here*, whatever the sociologists tell us. A recent study in Chicago asked high school students to describe a family meal in their home. Most responded, “What is a family meal?” A summer 1986 television documentary on “The American Family” interviewed a teenage girl from an upscale suburb of Dallas; along with talk of frequent corporate moves and teen suicides, she mentioned, almost casually, “It must be five years since my mother, my father, and I all sat down and ate a meal together at the same time.”

Despite (or perhaps because of) the rising divorce rate, model home furnishings and decor tends to evoke romantic or dramatic vignettes: the host couple in formal attire throwing open their impressively carved wooden front door with brass hardware to welcome their stylish and charming guests; the romantic evening in the master suite, silk bathrobes on the loveseat before the fireplace and champagne on the glass table; a creative afternoon in the kitchen concocting gourmet masterpieces for tomorrow's buffet using

copper utensils, French cookbooks, and microwave. Although most model home viewers are probably sophisticated enough to realize that every day does not pass in a whirlwind of social affairs and romantic interludes, as humans we are more persuaded by the notion of how things might be than how daily life truly is. Model house designers play on this theme: if the decor “tells” the customer that in *this* house their marriage will blossom or business will succeed, some will be persuaded. Is that so bad? After all, these houses do sell. Indeed, but we feel it is important to point out that many of the qualities people *think* they are getting with this purchase—privacy, a life in the country, a good environment for the children, lots of space, a good quality house—may prove to be empty promises. The average nondesigner house buyer is not highly sophisticated in making judgments about house layouts and subdivision planning, and you can't “test drive” a new house.

Perhaps, *au fond*, the many mixed messages of contemporary suburban models are disturbing reflections of the all-too-human tendency to fill emotional and spiritual gaps with material goods. Developers cannot sell happiness, success, family togetherness, or nuptial bliss, but they are adept at selling the *symbols* of these evanescent values. As long as the

symbol is still intact, we can deny that problems are rife and that alternative forms of dwelling and neighborhood may be better for some of us and for our children. While the American family is under threat in these changing times, its material symbol—the new, detached house—is very much alive and well.

Blackfeet American Indian Women: Builders of the Tribe

Barbara Oldershaw



I Sewing the tipi cover, a cooperative task that could usually be completed in one day. Photograph by Walter McClintock, courtesy of Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, California, Negative No. MCC-436.

House form is not simply the result of physical determinism but a reflection of a number of choices that a group has made about how it wishes to live. This assumption is central to what follows. Consequently, house forms then provide a profusion of information regarding the culture in which the house form is utilized. When regarded in this way, the house is more than shelter; it becomes what Amos Rapoport describes in *House Form and Culture* as “a physical mechanism which reflects and helps create the world view, ethos, and so on, of a people, comparable to the various social institutions (or mechanisms) which do the same.”¹

For the Blackfeet American Indians, the built environment provided much more than shelter. The Blackfeet dominated the upper Great Plains north of the Missouri River and east of the Rocky Mountains, an area that is now the state of Montana. They had a nomadic existence and depended on buffalo hunting and foraging for their means of subsistence.² The single Blackfoot house type—the tipi—fulfilled its greatest role by serving as a physical representation of the Blackfoot world view.

The Blackfoot dwelling’s function as both an utilitarian and a spiritual entity has become more clear through the recent writings of Native American histor-

ians and autobiographers. The opinions of these historians tend to challenge the theories that were first presented by anthropologists in the 1800s. An area that has been the subject of particular disagreement is the cultural significance of the work involved in constructing and maintaining the house form.³ The importance of these tasks, which were the sole responsibility of Blackfeet women, was vastly under-rated by nineteenth-century chroniclers.

One such observer was United States Army Captain Benjamin Louis E. de Bonneville, whose adventures in the Rocky Mountains between May 1832 and August 1835 were later related by Washington Irving. Regarding Blackfeet women, Bonneville observed that “the duties of a wife . . . are little less onerous than those of a packhorse.”⁴ The anthropologist George Catlin, a contemporary of Bonneville, was rather more blunt in his appraisal. “The Crow women (and Blackfeet also) are not handsome, and I shall at present say but little of them. They are, like all other Indian women, the slaves of their husbands, being obliged to perform all the domestic duties and drudgeries of the tribe.”⁵

It is not surprising that explorers and adventurers had little regard for domesticity. Furthermore, because

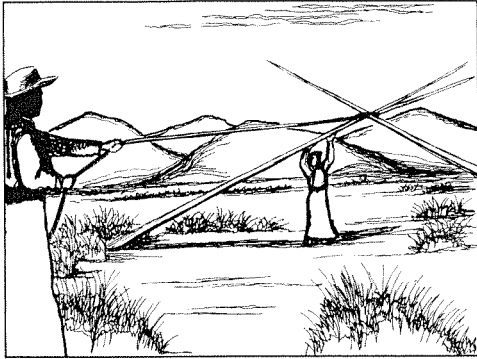


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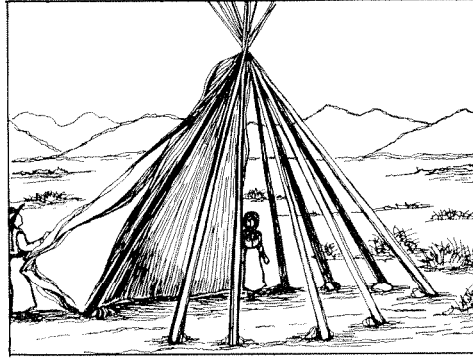


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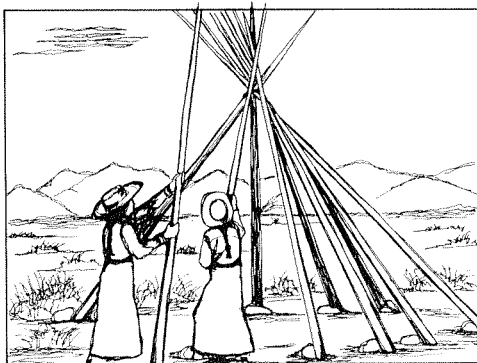
- 2 Preparation of a buffalo hide for use**, an arduous process involving such tasks as scraping. Photograph courtesy of the American Museum of Natural History, Department Library Services, Negative No. 23417.
- 3 Softening the buffalo hide**, another task in the preparation process. Photograph by Walter McClintock, courtesy of the Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, California, Negative No. MCC-434.



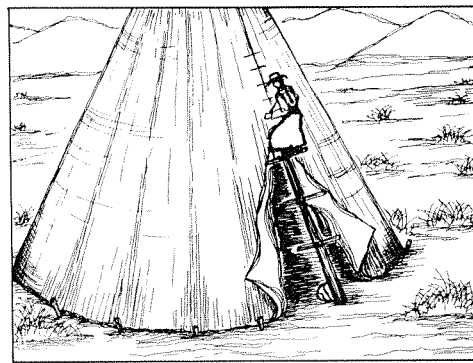
4A



4C



4B



4D

4 Steps in erecting the tipi: A, raising the tetrapod base; B, laying the poles in place; C, raising the tipi cover into place; D, pinning up the front of the tipi cover. Drawings by Susan Jane Priestley.

5 Erecting the tipi on a windy day. Photograph courtesy of Special Collections, Montana State University Libraries.

they were familiar only with societies in which women were supposed to be subservient, these amateur anthropologists appear to have been unable to perceive the balance of power that existed between genders in the Native American populations. Similarly, they were not cognizant of the essential role that gender-specific tasks played in providing subsistence. For example, the mens' work was done away from camp, and in between grueling hunting and warring expeditions, the men returned to camp primarily to rest. Women, on the other hand, did most of their work in the village, and thus visiting explorers were confronted with the sight of women keeping busy while the men rested. Because this apparent imbalance was not given closer examination, for centuries Native American women have had the reputation of being "unfortunate and debased . . . beasts of burden."⁶

Early anthropologists erroneously concluded that women had low status within the tribe due to the nature of their daily tasks. As anthropologist John C. Ewers declared in *Probing the American West*, "the Indian country of the Upper Missouri was a man's world. As homemakers and housekeepers, women performed scores of tasks necessary to the welfare of their families. But their role was a humble one."⁷

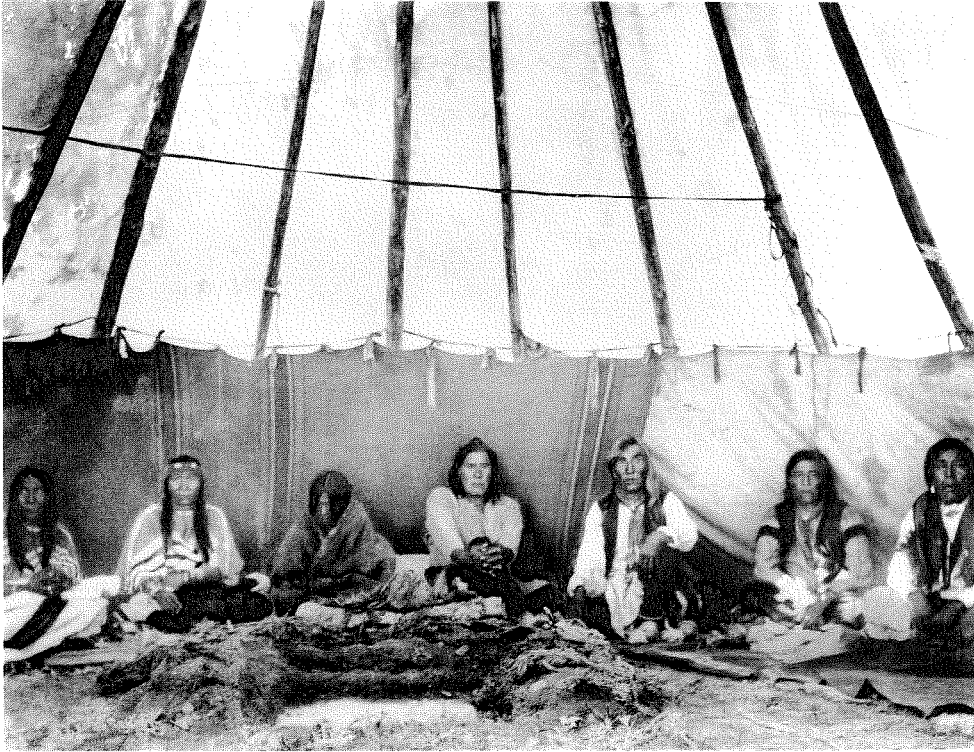
A major component of the women's domestic role was the fabrication of the tipi. The once plentiful buffalo provided the skins used for this purpose. When a woman had sufficient hides prepared and was ready for a new tipi (usually about once a year), she invited close friends to join her for a specially prepared feast. Acceptance of this invitation signaled a willingness to assist in the construction process. For the most part the work was done nonhierarchically, although an older, more experienced woman might supervise the intricate phases of construction. Because the fabrication of the tipi was a cooperative task, it could usually be completed in one day.

In the sign language of the Plains Indians, work is indicated by a hide-scraping motion, which bears witness to the extensive effort required to prepare a skin for use. Each buffalo hide took two full days of work to prepare,⁸ but since some parts of the process, such as drying the hide in the sun, took place over a period of days, the preparation time was actually much longer. A woman of average skill might be able to tan as many as twenty-five hides in a season, but it was unlikely that even a highly skilled woman could complete more than thirty hides in a season.⁹

It is crucial to note that these efforts did not go unrewarded. Women who excelled at skin



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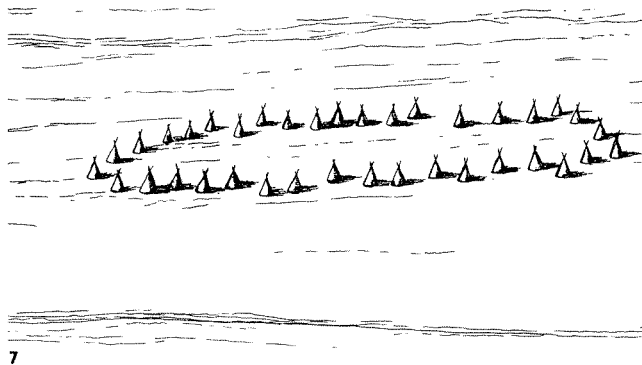
6 Location of the dew cloth in the tipi's interior. Photograph by Walter McClintock, courtesy of the Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, California, Negative No. MCC-238.

dressing were respected for both the quantity and the quality of their work. Ewers reports that older women “spoke with pride of the number of skin lodges they had made, much as the successful warrior boasted of his deeds of valor.”¹⁰ This parallel pride of achievement is consistent with the Native American sense of balance and interdependence between males and females. In the case of the Blackfeet, the women depended on the men to hunt the buffalo while the men depended on the women to transform the buffalo hides into adequate shelters.

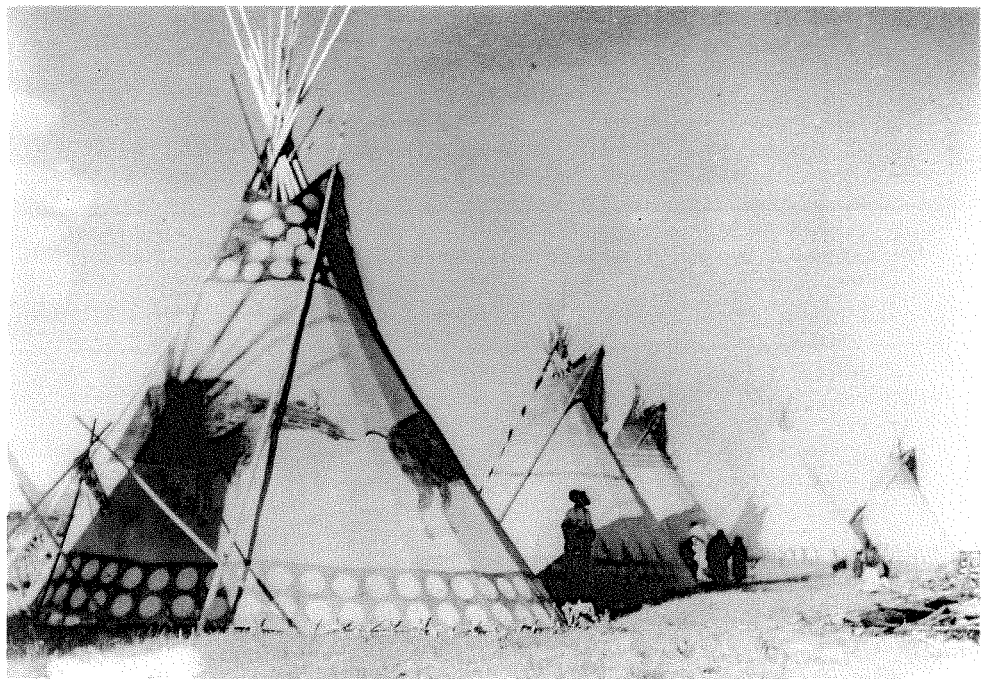
The buffalo hide cover, placed over a framework of twenty wooden poles, provided a dwelling that was extremely well suited to a nomadic lifestyle. The first step in erecting the tipi was to lash four of the poles together at their tips and erect them as a unit, creating a tetrapod base on which to lean other poles. Great care was taken to arrange these poles so that the tipi cover would hang properly and conform to traditional standards for appearance. Once the poles were in place, the fan-shaped tipi cover was raised, wrapped around the frame, and then pinned together using twelve-inch long wooden dowels. Erecting a tipi was a potentially cumbersome task, due to the nature of the materials: the tipi cover weighed close to one hundred pounds and the wooden poles were eighteen

to twenty feet long. Nevertheless, this task could be accomplished by one or two women. In fact, Blackfoot scholar Walter McClintock reports that “the Blackfeet women were so expert that it took them only a few minutes.”¹¹ Even in heavy winds, it rarely took them more than ten or fifteen minutes to erect the tipi.¹²

While the tipi remained a relatively simple structure, minor refinements in the design were important in protecting the inhabitants from the harsh weather of the northern plains. For example, an interior lining called a dew cloth was hung by ropes tied to the tipi poles. Hanging down about five feet, the dew cloth was long enough to be weighted down on the bottom with the numerous pouches that filled the tipi. In addition to preventing rain from dripping off the poles and into the tipi, the air space between the dew cloth and the tipi cover provided insulation, keeping the tipi warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Ventilation was also increased because warm air rising in the tipi brought in cold air from outside, which came in under the tipi cover and rose between the dew cloth and the tipi cover. The movement of this air created an excellent draft for removing smoke from the tipi’s central fire.¹³ In cold weather, sod or snow was packed around the bottom exterior edge of the tipi to prevent



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7 The circular form of the tipi encampment. Drawing by Susan Jane Priestley.

8 The tipi encampment provided an experiential embrace. Photograph by Walter McClintock, courtesy of the Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, California, Negative No. MCC-238.

excessive drafts. In hotter weather, the dew cloth and the bottom edge of the tipi could be unstaked and rolled up about a foot to increase ventilation.

An average tipi was fourteen to sixteen feet in diameter and stood seventeen feet tall.¹⁴ A tipi of this size required twelve to fourteen buffalo hides for its fabrication and typically housed a family of eight: a husband, one or more wives, a grown son, and two or three younger children. Because men often did not marry until they were thirty years of age, they continued to live in the lodge of their parents long after reaching adulthood. It also was not uncommon for men to have multiple wives.¹⁵ In order to minimize the potential disorder created by eight people living in a 150- to 200-square-foot area, traditions developed to govern the use of space within the tipi. The primary organizer of space was the central fireplace, which guided traffic in a circle.¹⁶ Furthermore, tradition dictated that women sat on the south and men on the north.¹⁷ Because the doorway generally faced the east, this placement in turn regulated that women entered and turned to their left while men entered and turned to their right. In addition, proper etiquette required that someone moving inside the tipi never pass between another person and the fireplace. The greatest error was to pass between the tipi's

sacred altar (located directly opposite the door) and the fireplace.¹⁸

The emphasis on circular movement within the tipi was not only efficient but reflected the strong spiritual value placed on the circular form in general and the tipi in particular. The circle was considered a sanctified pattern of movement, which was believed to have no beginning and no end. Edward Curtis interprets the Native American belief in this potency: "everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. . . . The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves."¹⁹ The sense of well-being that was associated with this circulation pattern is exemplified by the response to its absence. For older Blackfeet Indians living today, circular movement within the tipi is "a part of the sacred circle that many people associate with this kind of life. . . . [Modern tipis which] do not have a special center or traffic direction can be very disorienting and uncomfortable for those used to the old ways."²⁰

The Blackfoot sensitivity to the circular form was reinforced by the spatial characteristics of their natural environment, the open plains. On the prairie, "one can see in all directions a continuous horizon which is more or less level. Points

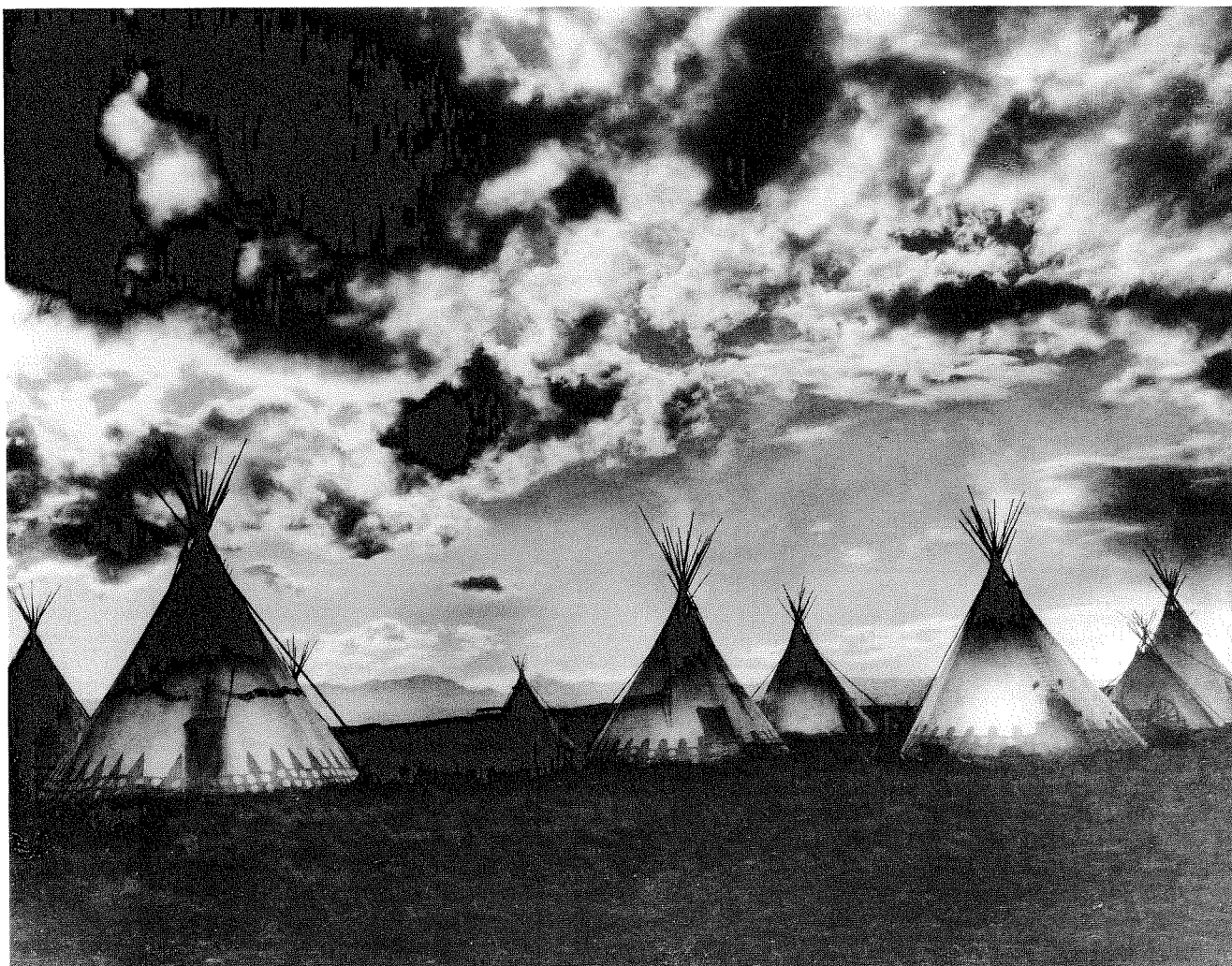
thus appear equally distant, and there is an impression of living inside a circular field of vision and experience."²¹ This perception was reiterated on a more human scale by the circular form of the tipi encampment, which must have formed a welcome sense of enclosure on the broad-reaching prairie.²² Standing within the encampment, rows of tipis two or three thick embraced a large circle on the prairie and curved into one's peripheral vision, thus experientially embracing the users of this space. Blackfeet Indians expressed this quality through metaphors such as "the sacred hoop of the tribe."²³

While the circular plan of the tipi encampment provided enclosure on one scale, the circular form of the tipi provided enclosure on a more intimate scale. In addition, the tipi possessed distinctive spatial qualities. Some of these qualities were discussed by Elizabeth Weatherford in an article about common characteristics of preindustrial dwellings built by women. While emphasizing cross-cultural comparisons, her description of dwellings that have "no edges or planes to interrupt the flow of space" is an acute analysis of the Blackfoot tipi.²⁴ A modern tipi dweller confirmed Weatherford's analysis: "the roundness of our dwelling gives me a very strong feeling—like being inside of a geometric mole-

cule and tumbling through the vastness of the Universe—physical old age next to me, spiritual everlasting age all around: just People, Earth, poles, and tipi covering, with a natural skylight up above and light diffused by the walls all around."²⁵

In addition to providing a particular spatial experience, the tipi facilitated a sense of connection between the dwelling and the surrounding environment. One could follow the sun's progression by the light that filtered through the semitranslucent cover, and the scents of the forest were recreated by the smoky fire and the use of incense made from sacred trees. The wildlife of the prairie also existed within the tipi in the form of skin rugs and clothing. Furthermore, the tipi muffled but did not eliminate the noises of the camp. Consequently, even within the enclosure of the tipi, one felt connected to the surrounding community.

Because of the spiritual qualities associated with the circle, all tipis were perceived as sacred objects. The tipis with painted exteriors possessed even greater symbolic significance. These embellishments were not merely decorations put on the tipi at the whim of the owner but indicated that a particular tipi was the point of convergence for especially potent spiritual powers. Although the tipi cover was



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9 At night the tipis glow like lanterns in the darkness of the prairie. Photograph by Walter McClintock, courtesy of the Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, California, Negative No. MCC-385.

not a sacred entity in itself,²⁶ it was part of a complex of sacred objects that were believed to represent the Holy Spirits with whom the Blackfeet maintained close contact.²⁷ Consequently, the tipi became both a physical manifestation of faith and a location for ritual prayers. The extent of this achievement is expressed by a Blackfoot Indian's analysis that "the spiritual protection of the [painted] tipi meant much more than its physical protection."²⁸ Thus, the tipi was not just a shelter from the natural environment, a particular spatial experience, or a symbolic interpretation of the sacred circle; the tipi also had the potential to become a potent source of emotional comfort and reassurance.

As the builders of this sacred entity, it would seem likely that women would have high status within the tribe. Although early anthropologists placed little value on domestic tasks, the Blackfoot culture recognized the essential contributions that resulted from these tasks. In addition to constructing the tipi, Blackfeet women were also responsible for preparing food and clothing, but their domestic role was not perceived as an oppressive one. On the contrary, McClintock asserts that "women considered it their vocation and allowed no interference from the men, who knew nothing about such things."²⁹ This rigid

distinction between roles served to amplify rather than belittle the role of women in providing for tribal subsistence.

In addition to being respected for their skill and utility as housekeepers, Blackfeet women were highly valued for their ability to give birth. The Blackfeet considered childbirth to be a clear and undisputed sign of spiritual power. As one Native American woman described it, "men have to dream to get power from the spirits, and they think of everything they can—songs and speeches and marching around, hoping that the spirits will notice them and give them some power. But we *have* power . . . Children. Can any warrior make a child, no matter how brave and wonderful he is?"³⁰

Another major indicator of women's status was the extent of their involvement in religious ceremonies. Although many of the religious ceremonies were conducted by men, very often women had an important part to play in these ceremonies. Even if the women did not actually preside over particular rituals, they were fully educated regarding this task. The fact that such information was accessible to both sexes stands in marked contrast to the women's clear domination of housekeeping tasks, in which men were forbidden to participate.

It is extremely important to recognize that the highest religious event among the Blackfeet, the annual Sun Dance, had to be sponsored by a woman. A contemporary Blackfoot woman stated that "this fact, by itself, has long helped women to have a special standing in our tribe."³¹ The Sun Dance celebrated and reaffirmed the spiritual connections between the tribe and the universe and as such was a ritual of renewal and revitalization. The prerequisite for sponsorship of this ceremony is that a woman must be noble, upstanding, and, most importantly, she must have been faithful to her husband. Although in many cultures female chastity is a means of oppression, this is not the case among the Blackfeet. Rather than promoting fidelity based on the belief that women were the property of their husbands, the Blackfeet recognized that it took "great presence of mind and will power" to remain monogamous. "The steadfast, disciplined character demonstrated by an unsullied woman was comparable to the firm courage of a warrior, and indeed, the women proclaimed their chastity in the manner of men recounting their war exploits."³²

The Blackfoot Indian woman's position of high standing within the tribe is further underscored by her status in mythology. More than mere

entertainment, myths and stories taught children about the less tangible parts of their culture, such as morals, ideals, and ethics. The myths of primary importance are those that describe the origins of the tribe and its customs. What becomes clear in these myths is that the American Indian's sense of the cosmos was very much an awareness of balance. As John and Donna Terrell point out in *Indian Women of the Western Morning*, American Indians accept that "for apparent reasons, each [sex] was endowed with peculiar qualities and sensibilities, neither was accorded supremacy, and each was made dependent on the other for existence."³³

Early anthropologists were able to tell us who made the tipis and how many buffalo hides were needed, but they did not understand the importance of this information within the context of Blackfoot culture. Consequently, early male anthropologists reported that Native American women were drudges at the mercy of their male counterparts, whereas evidence from the women themselves reveals that the role of the American Indian woman within her tribe was important and indeed essential. Among the Blackfeet Indians, the women were the builders of the tribe on many levels: they constructed the shelter, they gave birth to new generations, and in the annual celebration of the Sun

Dance they presided over a ceremony of renewal and revitalization. A traditional Cheyenne saying exemplifies the intrinsic role that women played in the well-being of Native American cultures, including the Blackfeet peoples:

A nation is not conquered
Until the hearts of its
women
Are on the ground.
Then it is done, no matter
How brave its warriors
Nor how strong its
weapons.³⁴

NOTES

- 1 Amos Rapoport, *House Form and Culture* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 48.
- 2 After 1830, the Blackfoot people became involved with white commerce as American manufacturers discovered a variety of uses for buffalo hides. At this point, the Blackfoot economy changed from one of subsistence to one involved with surplus production. See William Farr, *The Reservation Blackfeet* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984), p. 4. The following pages focus on Blackfeet customs prior to the 1830s. Horses were fully integrated into the culture, but involvement with the fur trade had yet to commence. The lifestyle is one of nomadic subsistence.
- 3 Katherine M. Weist, "Plains Indian Women: An Assessment," *Anthropology on the Great Plains*, in W. Raymond Hood and Margot Liberty, eds., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), pp. 255–271.
- 4 Washington Irving, *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), p. 81.
- 5 George Catlin, *North American Indians* (New York: Dover Publications, 1973), pp. 50–51.
- 6 Weist, p. 260.
- 7 John C. Ewers, "Mothers of the Mixed-Bloods: The Marginal Woman in the History of the Upper Missouri," *Probing the American West* (Kenneth R. Toole, 1962), p. 62.
- 8 John C. Ewers, *The Blackfeet* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), pp. 109–110.
- 9 R. and G. Laubin, *The Indian Tipi* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), p. 205.
- 10 John C. Ewers, *Blackfeet Crafts*, Indian Handicrafts Booklet #9 (Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, n.d.), p. 12.
- 11 Walter McClintock, *The Blackfoot Tipi*, Southwest Museum Leaflet Number 5 (Los Angeles: Southwest Museum, n.d.), p. 8.
- 12 Laubin, p. 51.
- 13 Ibid., pp. 55–56.
- 14 John C. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfeet Culture*, Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin #159 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1955), p. 251.
- 15 This is partially in response to there being many more women than men, primarily due to heavy war losses. Another impetus for polygamy, especially among the successful hunters, was that many hands were needed to manage a household, both on the move and in camp. See Ibid.
- 16 Beverly Hungry Wolf, *The Ways of My Grandmothers* (New York: William Morrow, 1980), p. 127.
- 17 Ibid., p. 124.
- 18 Adolf Hungry Wolf, *Tipi Life* (Invermere, British Columbia, Canada: Good Medicine Books, 1972), p. 8.
- 19 Joseph Epes Brown and Edward S. Curtis, *The North American Indians* (Millerton, NY: Aperture, 1972), p. 50.
- 20 Beverly Hungry Wolf, p. 127.
- 21 Richard Conn, *Circles of the World: Traditional Art of the Plains Indians* (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 1982), p. 8.
- 22 The sense of reassurance provided by the tipi encampment is a function of the massiveness of the prairies. "Walking alone across the prairie quickly impresses one with the vastness of the universe and the insignificance of the self" (Adolf Hungry Wolf, *The Blood People: A Division of the Blackfoot Confederacy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 227). The tipi encampment would be particularly inviting at night, when the brightly glowing tipis would contrast sharply with the darkness of the prairie.
- 23 Op. Cit. page 9
- 24 Elizabeth Weatherford, "Women's Traditional Architecture," *HERESIES* (May 1977), p. 35.
- 25 Adolf Hungry Wolf, 1972, p. 24.
- 26 Ewers, 1958, p. 165.
- 27 Adolf Hungry Wolf, 1977, p. 123.
- 28 Ibid., p. 75.
- 29 McClintock, p. 8.
- 30 Gretchen Bataille and Kathleen Muller Sands, *American Indian Women: Telling Their Lives* (New York: The Dial Press, 1974), p. 48.
- 31 Beverly Hungry Wolf, p. 31.
- 32 Alice B. Kehoe, "The Function of Ceremonial Sexual Intercourse Among the Northern Plains Indians," *Plains Anthropologist* (May 1970), p. 102.
- 33 John and Donna Terrell, *Indian Women of the Western Morning* (New York: The Dial Press, 1974), p. 4.
- 34 Bataille and Sands, p. vi.

Portfolio: Photographs of Gladding, McBean & Company

Laura Volkerding



1 Earnest Kadel's office, 1984

2 Earnest Kadel's office, 1984

All photographs are copyrighted by the photographer, Laura Volkerding, 1984, 1985, 1986 (as indicated in captions).

In 1984 I first visited Gladding, McBean & Company and, like anyone who has seen Earnest Kadel's* office, I was seduced by the dusty light, the curling, crumbling old photographs, and the almost shrine-like quality of the studio secured by a padlocked door. My first visit was brief, and I only made one or two pictures, one of the Corinthian capital and the other a humorous conjecture of Nipper and Classical Man. I knew that I had to come again. Since then I have made at least a half-dozen trips back to the factory in Lincoln, California, allowing the place to reveal itself slowly. Never did I intend that the work should be a documentary of a place or explain the process of manufacturing glazed terra cotta architectural ornament and vitrified clay sewer pipe. My response was visual, that is, what these work spaces looked like and how I could organize their order and chaos expressively in terms of form, space, and light.

The negatives have been made with an 8 × 10 field camera. The prints are contact prints printed directly by sunlight on printing-out paper and then toned with a gold chloride solution. The choice for this method of printing was primarily for the soft delicacy of the print surface that has a slight pinkish color and a long-scale tonality rendering detail in the darkest corners and the most brilliant highlights.

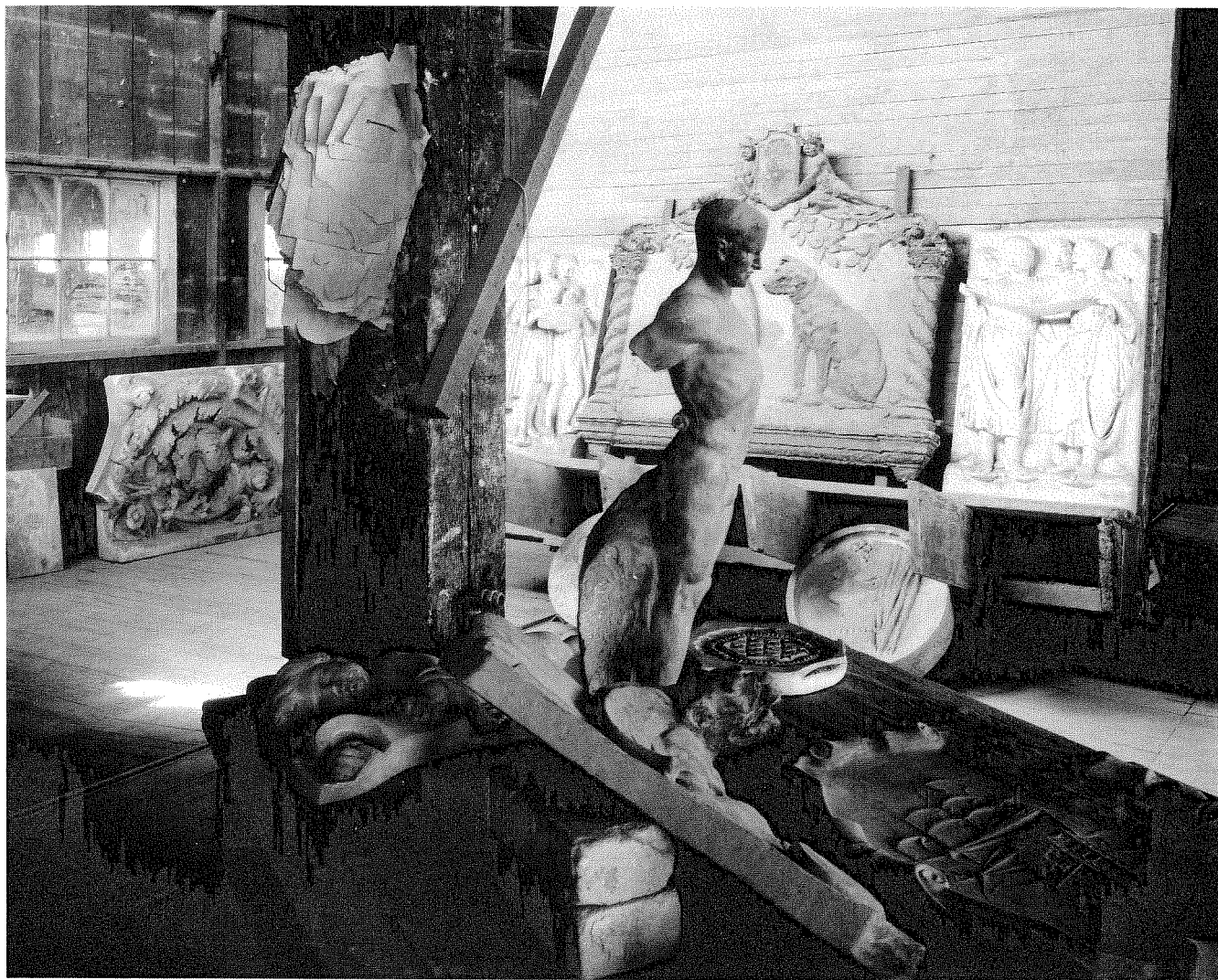
*Earnest Kadel was the in-house sculptor at Gladding, McBean & Company for approximately 30 years.





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3 The studio, Gladding, McBean & Company, 1984



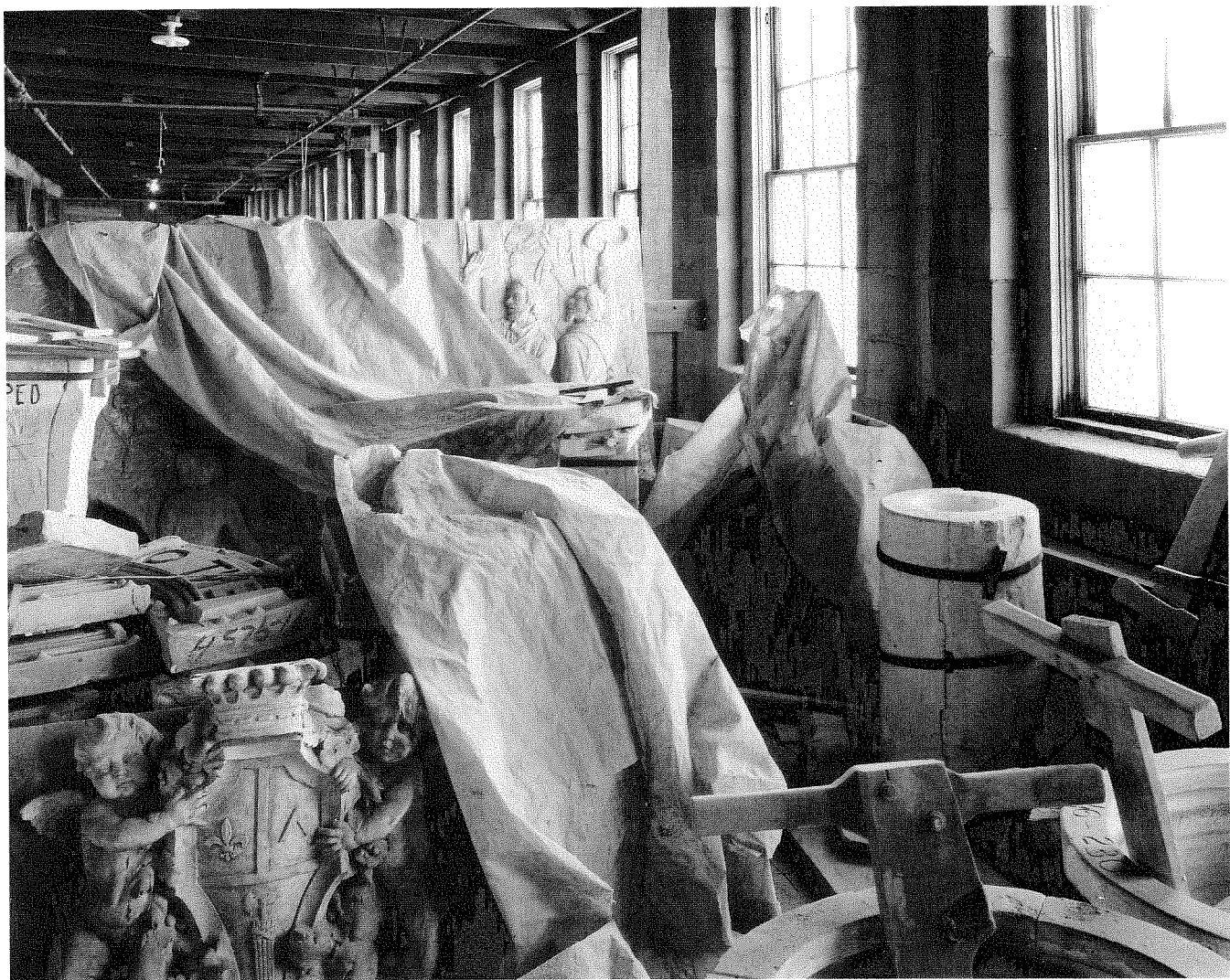
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4 The studio, 1984



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5 Modeling scholars, 1984



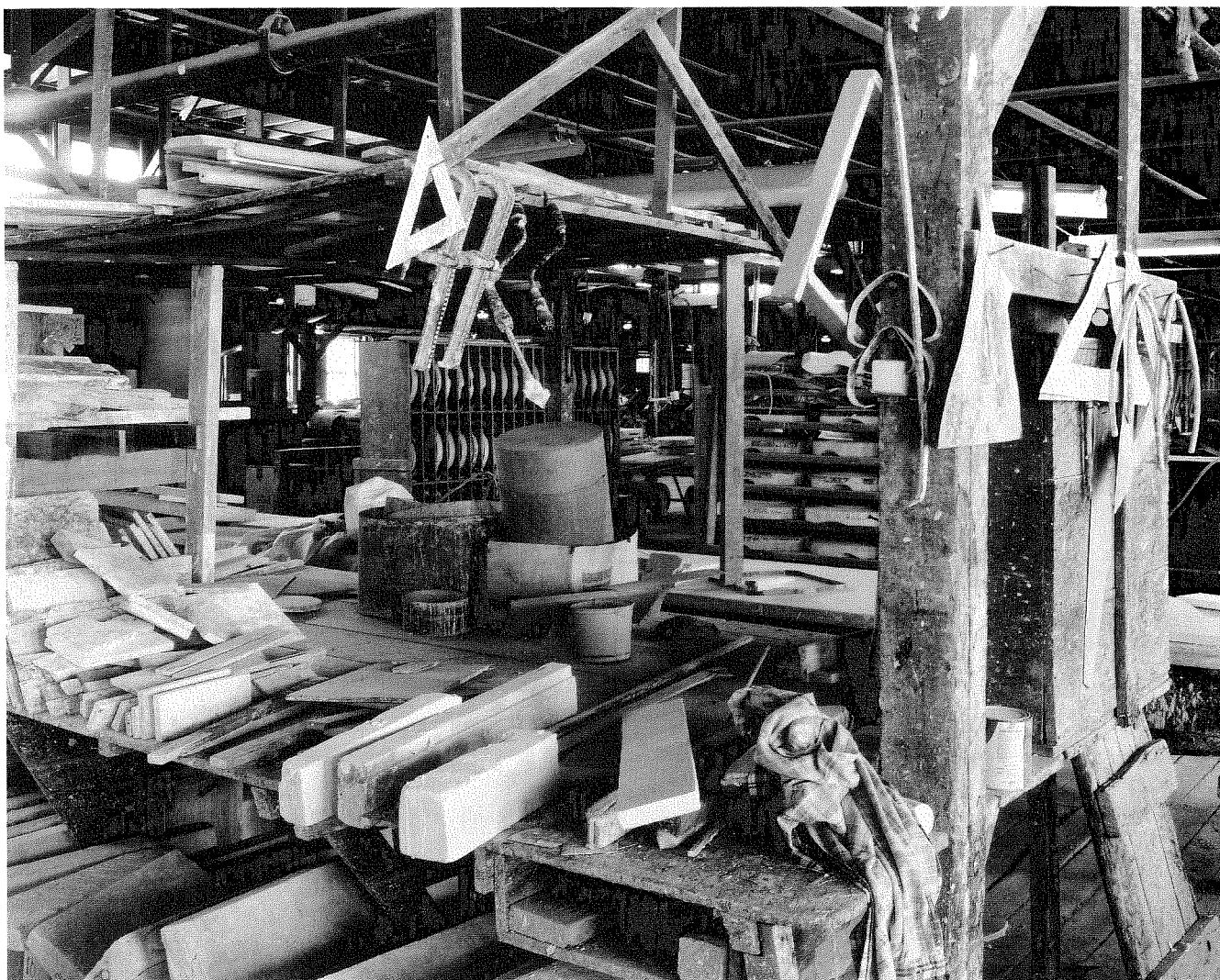
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6 Storage room, 1985



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7 Plaster room, 1984



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8 Plaster room, 1985



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9 Glaze room, 1985



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10 Pipe yard, 1984



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11 Molds and models, 1986

The Company

Work on a county road one mile north of Lincoln, California, led to the discovery of potter's clay in the fall of 1874. Charles Gladding of Chicago was visiting in San Francisco and read of the find in a newspaper. He came to Lincoln and took samples of the clay back to Chicago for testing by ceramic experts. It proved to be of excellent quality and was in abundant supply.

On May 1, 1875, Charles Gladding, Peter McGill McBean and George Chambers, all of Chicago, made a monetary investment of \$12,000 to build a factory to manufacture vitrified sewer pipe. Gladding, McBean & Co. was founded.

Charles Gladding returned to Lincoln on May 12, 1875, with a group of skilled workmen, purchased the land, and began construction of the first plant. This was a frame building containing one down-draft kiln. The machinery included a boiler, engine, pumps, steam press with dies, and a roller crusher. The machinery arrived on June 24. The first rail carload, which held ten tons of 4-inch, 6-inch, and 12-inch salt-glazed sewer pipe, was shipped to San Francisco on August 9, 1875—just 46 days later. Soon pipe was being shipped to cities throughout the state.

In 1884 the company built a two-story office building on a 50-foot lot on Market Street in San Francisco using terra cotta trim made at the Lincoln plant. This was the first time this material had been pro-

duced on the Pacific Coast, and the building attracted a great deal of attention. Terra cotta has since been used to decorate and enhance buildings throughout the world.

In the 1890s the company expanded its building products line by manufacturing fire brick, roof tile, enamel brick, and a complete line of chimney pipe and flue lining. It also began to manufacture garden pottery, including vases, flower pots, benches, tables, fountains and bird baths. A catalog that was published in 1910 showed all of these building products, including porcelain sinks and laundry trays and vitrified salt-glazed pipe up to 30 inches in diameter.

The labor force consisted of about 30 men, and early records show that a strike of short duration occurred in 1906. At that time a 10-hour work day began at 6:00 a.m. and ended at 5:00 p.m. The work week was 6 days, and the pay was \$2.00 per day. Settlement of the strike changed this schedule to a 9-hour work day, which began at 7:00 a.m. and ended at 5:00 p.m. The work week remained at 6 days with a daily wage of \$2.25. This 9-hour day prevailed until 1930.

Clay for production was hauled in on horse-drawn wagons until about 1908, when a new pit west of the plant was opened and a narrow gauge railroad was laid, connecting clay pit and plant.

Wood was the source of energy. It was cut and hauled in by teamsters from the vast stands of pine in the

surrounding foothills. As the supply diminished, wood was brought in by rail from outlying areas. Early photographs show huge stockpiles, which were needed to feed the furnaces. About 1900, wood was replaced by crude oil, which was shipped to the plant in rail tank cars and was used until 1939, when natural gas was piped in from the Sutter Buttes.

Gladding, McBean & Co. operated until 1962, when it merged with Lock Joint Pipe Co. and formed what was known as Interpace Corporation. In 1976 Interpace announced their intention to cease operations at the Lincoln plant. At this time, Pacific Coast Building Products of Sacramento acquired the company, rescued it from closure, and restored the famous name of Gladding, McBean & Co.

The company now covers 411 acres, with 20 acres under roof and even more acres of open "floor space." Currently there are 240 employees, many of whom have been with the company for 25 to 40 years. Some even had fathers and grandfathers working here before them. The payroll peaked in 1948, when the work force numbered about 750.

Today the plant is thriving, manufacturing vitrified clay pipe, roof tile, floor tile, architectural terra cotta, split pavers, and tile veneers.

This brief statement of the history of the company has been excerpted by the editors from a brochure published by Gladding, McBean & Company

Belgium's Choice Squares

Thomas A. Gaines



As a meeting place of streets, people, and ideas, the city square is an artistic expression of its time, changing over the centuries in accordance with available skills and aesthetic needs.

By dint of scale, decoration, and wholeness, Belgium's city squares are among Europe's finest. In its various incarnations, Belgium reinterpreted Italian, French, and German influences to create a quiet, refined architecture of its own. These structures inform its plazas.

And what about the people that history's centripetal force brought together in Belgium's squares? It was here that church and town officials met to plan celebrations. Here Guild members schemed against feudal authority and the Counts of Flanders. It was here that one of history's boldest scams took place: in Ghent's Friday Market, Jacob Van Artevelde declared the English king Edward III king of France, thereby permitting wool to be imported from England to feed his looms. And it is here that politicians tack up their posters for coming elections.

As a resolute searcher for the perfect square, I cite those in Belgium that, for me, most nearly approach the ideal.

Bruges

When the Zwin River silted up in the fifteenth century, the prosperous port of Bruges became inaccessible and fell on hard times. Hanseatic members met in Bruges's squares to discuss ways to keep merchant

I Friday Square at Ghent
Drawings by Patricia M. Browne

traders from abandoning their economically crippled town. As a result of their failure, the industrial revolution passed it by, and its ancient face was preserved. Thus, a medieval square, indeed a whole city, has come down to us virtually intact. It has joined towns such as Avila in Spain, Abidos in Portugal, and Sienna in Italy, which still recall the narrow, curving medieval townscape.

Bruges's cobbled square (also referred to as Grand' Place and *grote markt*) has a surfeit of Flemish heraldry: epic statues of past heroes, banners of the nine Belgian provinces waving in the North Sea breeze, people moving about day and night. After dusk, buildings are spotlighted, yellow beams melding into red-brown brick to create a soft, golden fairyland.

The dominating presence in this square is the Gothic belfry, a high edifice that all self-respecting Belgian towns built to symbolize their medieval power. The eight-sided tower rises twenty-eight stories and looks like no other in Europe. The belfry can be climbed for the view and to witness the clanking of the carillon machinery as its forty-seven bells toll the quarter-hour. Like a music box, a six-foot cleated drum activates each bell.

Opposite the belfry are guild houses with stepped gables. A dozen restaurants, their umbrella'd tables creeping onto the square, occupy the ground floors and provide a touch of modern Europe. In the last ten years, Bruges has



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2 Provincial banners and stepped gables on the *grote markt* in Bruges



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been discovered and exploited by the tourist industry. Accordingly, the *grote markt* is peopled by groups from all over the world lining up at the tourist office (centrally placed in the halles) and studying maps. Palaces, tanneries, and combined homes have been creatively redone to serve as hostelryes.

If a European square had a Roman beginning, its present day shape (though not its architecture) would be based on the early forum. If it came from the Middle Ages, its contour would result from pragmatic need (the widening of a street for a market). If it originated in the Renaissance, it would be designed in an orderly and symmetrical way. Bruges's is one of the few authentically medieval squares in Belgium. Though others came earlier, their additions and "improvements" place them in the later Renaissance.

Veurne

Southwest of Bruges near the North Sea coast lies Veurne, the smallest town on my favored list. Its plaza is unified by its consistent Renaissance structures and their yellow, tan, and brown brick. The total use of this smallest of building materials provides a tactile sense not seen in other squares. Yes, bricks are laid in Flemish bond (alternating headers and stretchers in each course).

Guilds were the all-powerful craft associations that dominated Europe's economic life in the late Middle Ages. As they prospered, they raised imposing buildings for headquarters, display rooms, and warehouses. The guild houses on the square at Veurne were built later than those in Bruges. Their scrolled, Baroque gables toward the square indicate they are from the seventeenth century (for example, the Butchers' House).

3 Town hall (far left), nearby church, and parked cars on Veurne's cobbled plaza

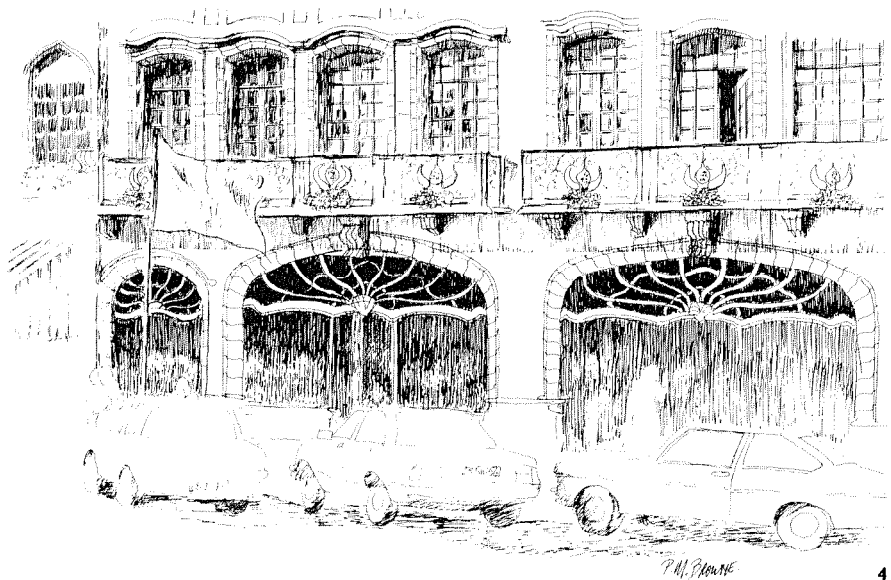
The Veurne town hall on the northwest corner is the square's architecturally most active building; its brick portico has perforated stone with arches, columns, and finials. Town halls and guild houses represent the best of Flemish architecture. Churches, on the other hand, employed less original building forms (German-influenced Romanesque, French-influenced Gothic). They were not constructed on the main squares but were placed nearby on their own small plazas.

Every year since the twelfth century, on the last Sunday of July, the busy commerce of Veurne's main square has been interrupted by the famous Procession of Penitents during which scenes from the Passion of Christ are performed.

Ypres

The quality of architecture surrounding a square is a determinant of its distinction. This is demonstrated in the market square at Ypres, a short distance southeast of Veurne. Every building, without exception, has a special character, from the Romanesque Butcher's (Guild) House to the immense Gothic Cloth Hall, from the wavy, wrought iron balconies festooned with flowers to the sensuous art nouveau store front in the turn-of-the-century style introduced by Belgian architect Victor Horta.

The thirteenth-century Cloth Hall is one of the largest buildings in the world, the equivalent of two complete New York City blocks. Occupying one corner of the square, its pointed and hooded



windows march endlessly down its facade. Small spires mark the four corners, and its massive central tower emphasizes its symmetry. Although it resembles a church, the Cloth Hall was designed to provide a market for the important cloth industry. This made Ypres rich and one of Flanders's important fourteenth-century towns. Destroyed during World War I, the hall, unbelievably, was rebuilt just like the original. Reconstruction is a skill with which the Belgians have had plenty of practice over the centuries.

Tournai

Most squares in Europe, and subsequently in Latin America, were used as markets. (This was never true in the United States). A typical European market square is the triangular one at Tournai in the southern, French-speaking section of Belgium. On holidays, colorful banners project from its second-

4 Store fronts on the grote markt in Ypres



5 Holiday guild banners and
circus trucks in Tournai's
town square

story windows. They represent the local guilds and display appropriate symbols: scissors for the tailors, cattle for the slaughterers, waves for the fishermen, jugs for the potters.

The second oldest city in Belgium (after Tongeren), Tournai reached its peak in the twelfth century, 200 years before Bruges. (In 100 B.C., it was a Roman settlement). The belfry standing in antique splendor on the south side of Tournai's fine square is the oldest in Belgium. Its medieval decorations include stone-carved quatrefoils, finials, crockets, towers, and turrets.

The five pyramidal spires of the twelfth-century Cathedral of Notre Dame a block away brood over the main square as if the church was directly on the square. Its front half, the nave, is massive, low, plain, and rounded Romanesque; its back, the chancel, is high, decorated, and pointed Gothic with stained glass and flying buttresses. The chancel, originally in the earlier Romanesque style, was replaced 50 years after it was built to keep up with the times. Apparently, money ran out before reconstruction could be completed.

Jugglers entertained in Tournai's square in the Middle Ages. Not much has changed: in September 1985, circus wagons took over the square in preparation for a show.

Antwerp

A city square results from the careful placement of structures and represents the most attractive urban ambience a society can create. This is illustrated in the prosperous,

cosmopolitan city of Antwerp in northern Belgium. As the fourth largest port (after Amsterdam, Hamburg, and New York) and the most important diamond center in the world, its main square is appropriately shaped like a diamond.

Like all of Belgium's squares, people made history here. It was in the *grote markt* of Antwerp that thousands of burghers planned their escape from the city during the Duke of Alba's trials of the heretics.

Antwerp's Renaissance-Baroque quality is due to its relatively late construction in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This produced less stepped gables (a medieval form) and more straight and scrolled rooftops. (It is a relief to enjoy a square without the cluttering of parked cars).

For two reasons, fifteenth-century Antwerp became the commercial leader of Europe. Not only was it the main beneficiary of Bruges's decline; it broke the power of the inhibiting guilds. Antwerp's success is reflected in its elegant Renaissance town hall, which occupies the entire west side of the square. Classical orders are properly scaled as they articulate the long range of windows, and the fine northern Renaissance tower could only have been built by a people secure in their world position.

In the plaza's center stands a fountain with the dynamic figure of the centurion Brabo. He is hurling the

dismembered hand of the giant, Druon, into Antwerp's River Scheldt as retribution for Druon's doing the same to boatmen who could not pay his tolls. As a piece of sculpture, it is riveting; as a component of the whole plaza, it relates to nothing else and is irrelevant.

Antwerp's square has something unique for a vintage European city: a low-cost housing project, which appears on the northwest corner and trails off into the old city. A contemporary version of medieval forms, these most "civilized" of social housing units are beautifully planned, the materials are effectively used (orange brick alternating with tan brick), and the detailing is creative (pediments fitted with trapezoidal windows). The design blends well into the rest of the square.

Brussels

As headquarters for the Common Market, NATO, and other international agencies, Brussels, with one million people, is the acknowledged capital of Europe. Its heady continental flavor is everywhere, in its museums, its restaurants, its theaters, its broad boulevards and, yes, its squares.

Almost lost among the many plazas is a small stunning one with more than the usual furnishings (monuments, fountains, fences). It is a few blocks south of Brussels's center and is called Place du Petit Sablon. It honors the sixteenth-century Dukes of Hoorn and Egmont, properly depicted in Spanish costume.



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(Flanders was ruled by Spain in the sixteenth century). This jaunty pair comprises the main segment of a wonderful sculptural assembly, which includes marble busts in green ivy niches. Below are carefully tended flower gardens with wide walkways around a pool. Defining the whole plaza is a beautiful cast iron railing interrupted by forty-eight bronze statuettes representing (by their clothes and tools) the various guilds of Brussels. Enclosing this garden square are pricey stone residences unified by their neoclassic restraint with only an occasional outbreak of Baroque flamboyance.

Because of its available seating, there is less movement and more tranquillity in Place du Petit Sablon

than in most Belgium squares. On Yom Kippur in 1985, for example, devout Jews wearing yarmulkes were somberly chatting on the benches.

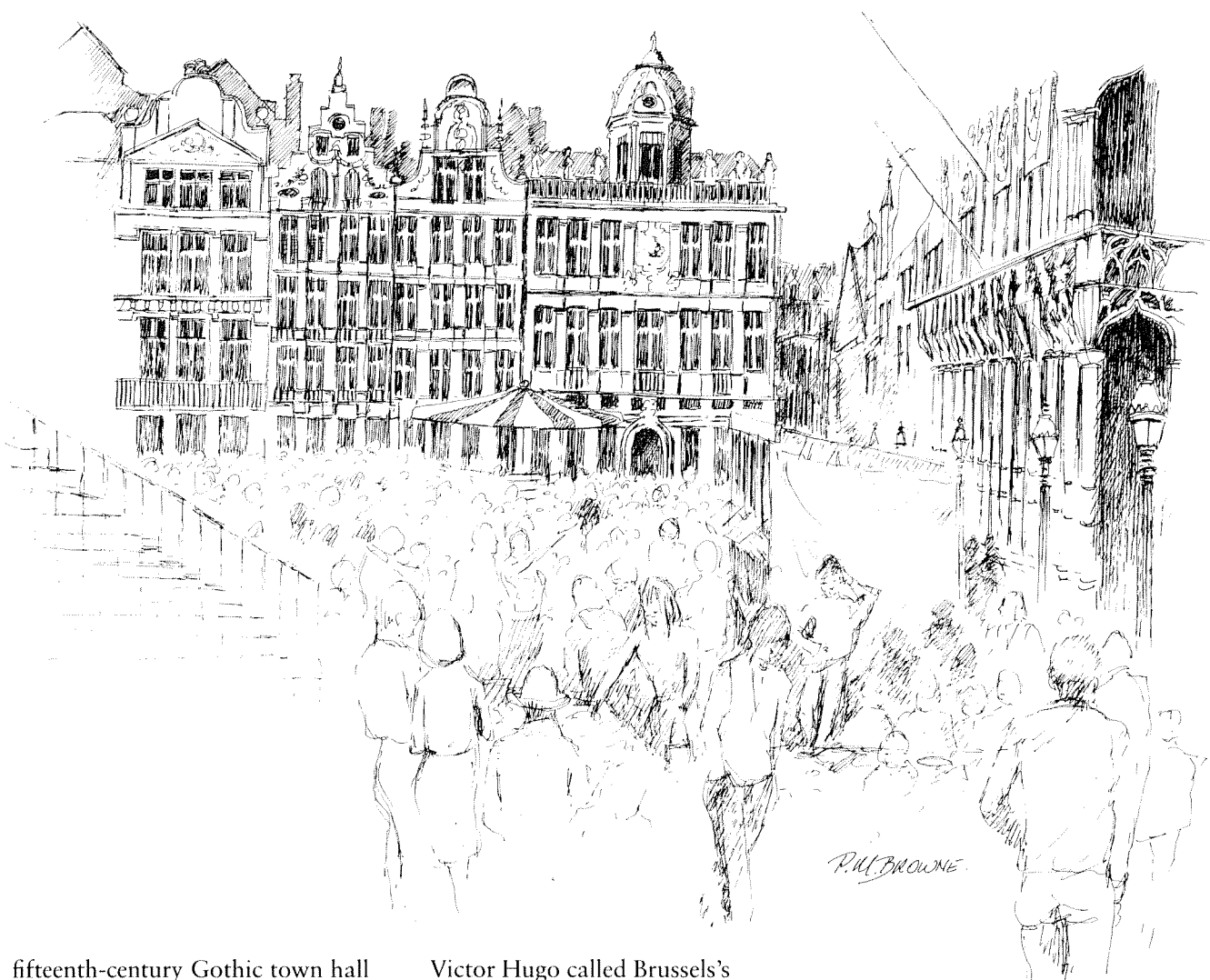
Brussels's Grand Place

The early main square did not always maintain its position as the focus of activity. Antwerp's commercial center moved down the Meir Boulevard away from its old market square. In Brussels, however, The Grand' Place continues to be the whirling center for all the city's happenings. On a bright sunny day in September 1985, for instance, bleachers were quickly assembled and the square was closed off so ticket holders could enjoy a lively renaissance show.

Aside from special events that crowd the Grand' Place calendar, there is a daily flower market and a Sunday bird market. Night lighting contributes to the Grand' Place's fantasy atmosphere, but city officials have been chary with power recently and the square is lit each night for only one hour.

Almost completely enclosed, Brussels's Grand' Place is approached down narrow streets that suddenly emerge into an urban space with the richest facades in Europe. Congruity is provided by the relentless decoration of these Gothic and Baroque buildings.

Peopled with sculptures of emperors, princes, dukes, counts, and mayors plus their relatives, the early



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fifteenth-century Gothic town hall is the star of the square. Guild halls with their allegorical and representational figures are the supporting players. They were rebuilt in Baroque style.

Rebuilt? Yes, once again a Belgian town was wiped out, this time in 1695 by Louis XIV. With the exception of the town hall, all the buildings on the square were leveled. Miraculously, they were reproduced in just four years in their original shape, but this time in the later Flemish style. And what fun they had. The House of Boatmen, Number 6, has a gable that looks like the stern of a ship; the Brewers House, Number 10, has gilded beer hops climbing its columns.

Victor Hugo called Brussels's Grand' Place the most beautiful square in the world. Jean Cocteau said it was the richest theater on earth. In the face of these endorsements, dare I find fault with this most famous of European squares? In my opinion, its scale is flawed by too much mass and detail for the available open area. Its spatial impact is thus skewed by the two-dimensional quality.

While these seven plazas are my favorites, there are other excellent ones in Belgium: Brussels's Place Royale and its perfect symmetry, Kortrijk's fine World War I monument, Mechelen's with its traceried town hall, and the agreeable squares of Louvain and Liege.

6 The Dukes of Hoorn and Egmont in Brussels's Place du Petit Sablon

7 Saturday morning activity in Brussels's Grand' Place

A Visitation in Ghent

Luc Deleu



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1 **“Demonstration of Scale and Perspective”** installation Sint-Pietersplein, Ghent, fireworks by Pierre-Alain Hubert on opening night of the exhibition INITIATIVE '86. Photograph Michiel Hendryckx.

A series of proposals resulted from my studies during the seventies of the social and political aspects of architecture: for example, Proposal for Visible Infrastructure (electricity, telephone, etc.); Proposal for the Abolishment of Traffic Rules in City Centers; Proposal for Fruit Avenues; Proposal for Urban Agriculture; Proposal for Urban Cattle; Proposal for Urban Game; Proposal for Floating Universities. At that time I became convinced that it is very dangerous for an architect to realize his ambitions only in buildings. I wanted to bring my ideas forward for discussion and therefore used the artistic circuit. Now I concentrate on the plastic and structural aspects, not to do away with the social and the political but to make them broader and more clear.

After a visit to the United States in 1980, and more specifically New York and the Mariposa Grove in California, where I saw “The Fallen Monarch,” I wanted to study and show two important facets of architecture, namely scale and perspective. So I have focused on the way scale and perspective views of huge objects (architecture) manifest themselves.

The scale of the Mariposa Grove sequoias is not really comprehensible except in relation to “The Fallen Monarch.” If one of the World Trade Center towers



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2, 3, 4 “Demonstration of Scale and Perspective” installation Sint-Pietersplein, Ghent, 1986. Dirk Jaspaert—Engineer, C.E.I.—construction, with the support of Hotel Furkablick. Photograph Luc Deleu

in New York had been built horizontally, their scale would also be much more comprehensible. People could walk alongside the horizontal volume next to the vertical, and they could see from the top of the tower the same tower lying down. When a tower is lying down the perspective works totally differently than when it is erect. If they are large enough, two identical objects laid down next to each other in opposite directions will appear to be different because of the effect of perspective.

These findings seemed to me to be strong architectural phenomena that could be used in monumental urban projects, which has not been done up to now. This makes clear that the streets in a city can seem to be totally different, depending on the direction one takes along them.

To express these ideas I first had a huge building crane mounted horizontally in a loft, and then in 1983 I had the idea of using two high-tension pylons. A first perspective drawing was made, showing only one point of view. For further spatial research, a series of computer drawings was made. In the beginning of 1986 I was invited to realize this project for an art exhibition in Ghent, Belgium. Because of lack of time and money and some restrictions (no foundations), I considered the realization as a

first spatial sketch, using scaffolding, cables, and counterweights. My aim, however, is to do this installation again very cleanly.

Of course, the choice of the objects with which I work (cranes, containers, street lights, drilling platforms, pylons), the specific manipulation they undergo, and the situations and contexts in which I put them provoke various connotations. So these works want to be a comment on (actual) architectural and environmental thinking. At the same time they are examples and proposals for future organization of our "Spaceship Earth" by reusing objects of the past.

The Case of “Hard” Squares in Barcelona

Josep Muntanola-Thornberg

A large number of “hard” squares, or plazas, were constructed in Barcelona, Spain, between 1980 and 1984, just after the political upheavals following the death of General Franco. The socialist party in power in the City Hall claimed that the squares represented the beginning of a new democratic urban policy. It is true that Barcelona lacked public open spaces after forty years of Franco’s dictatorship. The old regime was not interested in having open urban spaces in popular neighborhoods, since people could stage demonstrations in them. With the change of urban policies, Oriol Bohigas, the architect-in-chief in the City Hall, spoke of a new monumentality in the suburbs of Barcelona, designed to dignify the city and increase public life in the open urban spaces.

In spite of the immediate and persuasive publicity emanating from the city government, which heralded the “modern quality” of these new squares, the first reaction of many users was rejection. Now, several years later, the controversy has quieted down for many reasons, including financial problems, changes in the City Hall and, most of all, the race for the Olympic Games to be held in Barcelona in 1992.

The reasons people cited for disliking the squares were that they lacked spatial

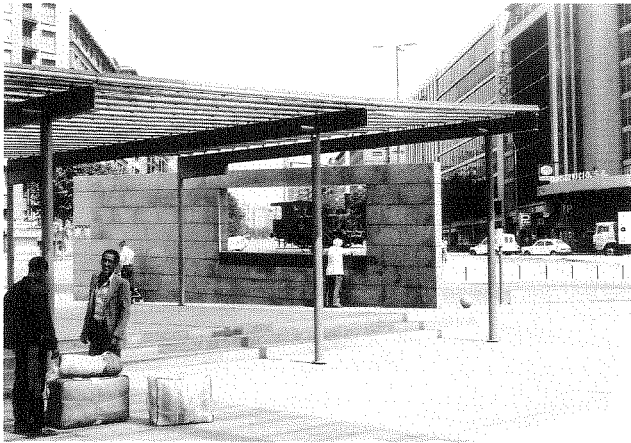
quality and proper comfort due to the absence of trees, green areas, and “soft” surfaces for children. Immediately those who made these criticisms were charged with conservatism. Their concerns were countered with the idea that democracy in Spain needs a “modern” image, so long repressed by General Franco’s censorship.

The City Hall of Barcelona funded a study on the impact of these hard squares on public opinion.¹ One girl about sixteen years of age said, “This square needs some trees to give some intimacy.” Referring to the concrete walls between the people and the cars, a nineteen-year-old boy said, “The edges of this square are badly designed. Instead of a barrier of stone they should have put a row of plants or other soft limit.” People do not like these concrete barriers, which do not isolate from noise and view but produce a sensation of claustrophobia and artificiality. Architects argue that these walls define open public space. Citizens argue that the buildings define the public space, not the low walls.

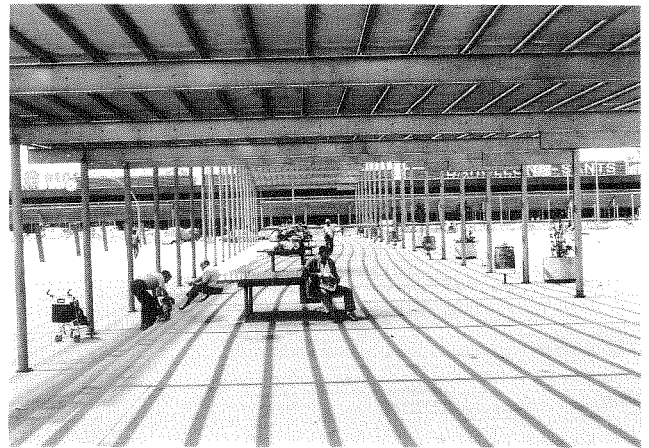
Most of the users agreed that the Plaza dels Paisos Catalans, or “Plaza de Sans,” a new square above the new central rail station in Barcelona, is the square with the best design. At the same time, however, they were very angry about the lack of



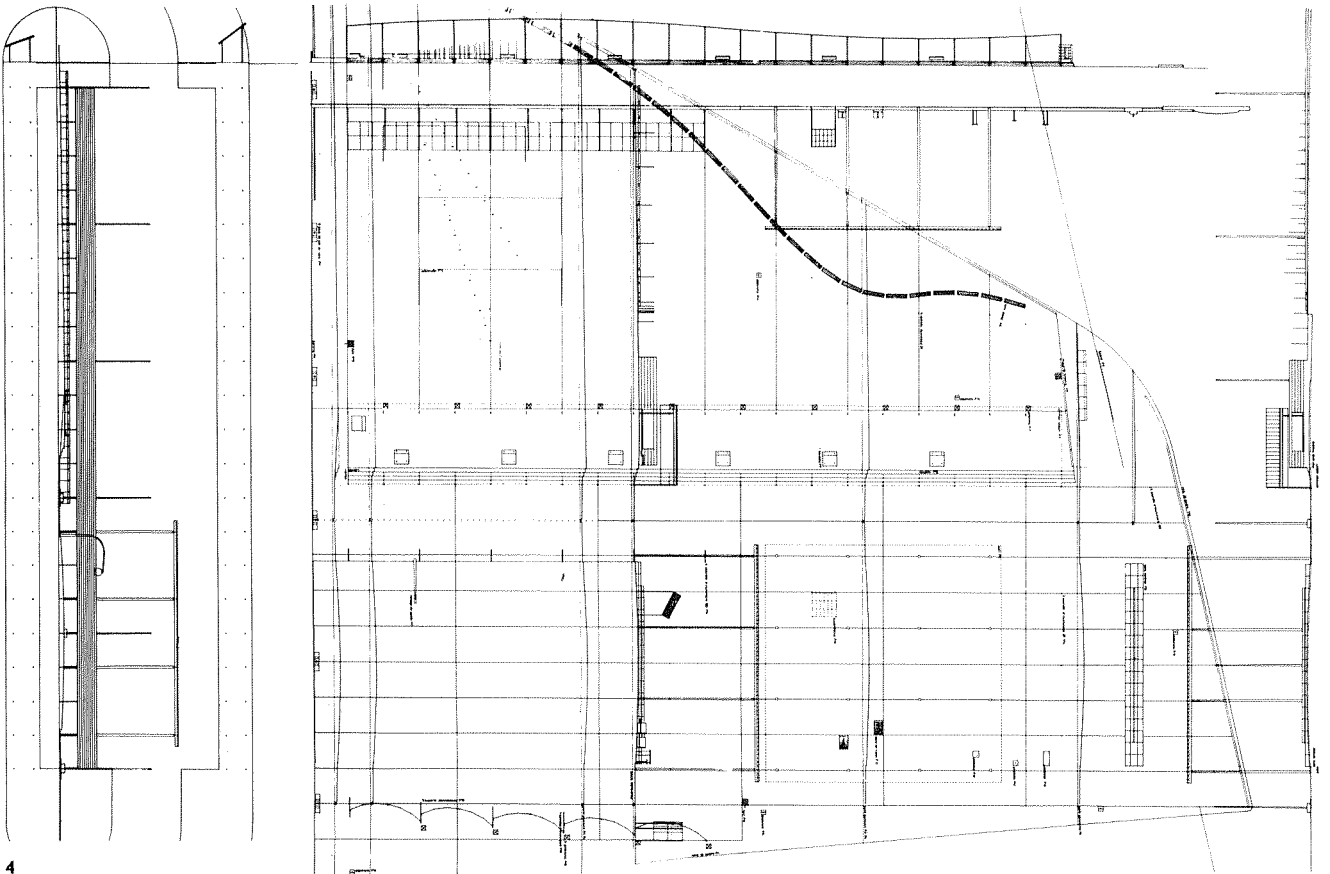
I Plaza de Sans, “hard” bench and elevated shadow roof



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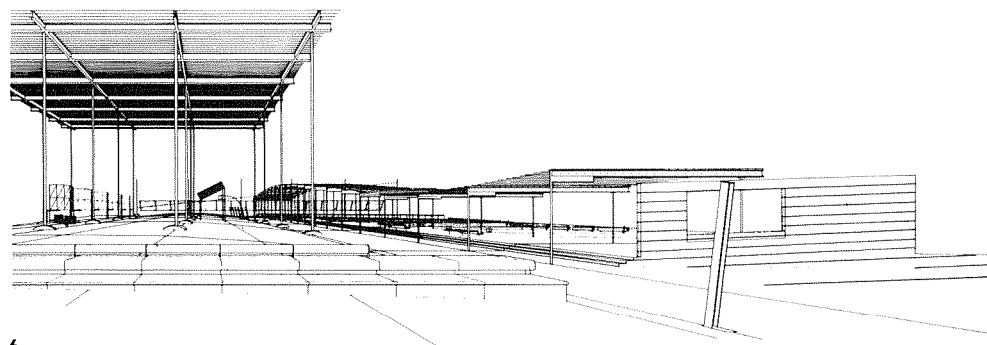
greenery and sandboxes for children and the location of benches in a very windy and noisy area. They were angry because they did not want to accept that either one is “modern” and does not feel comfortable in the square or one is “regressive,” acting against the socialist party (progressive and modern left wing) by wanting a more traditional but usable square.

The design of the “Plaza de la Mercé,” a new square built in the old section of Barcelona, has been much more successful for users, who strongly needed open spaces. They like the monumentality and the division of the space into two quality areas: an open “hard” area and a more intimate, shadowed area. They still think that playing soccer should not be the main use of the open area, as it is now. They ask for public uses, such as parties, exhibits, and theater, which are more appropriate for the hard surface.

“Plaza Real,” a reconstructed square, has produced very different and contrasting opinions. More than half of the users claim that the square has lost its “Classical-Romantic” character, which was created by a mixture of neoclassic and colonial-romantic styles and elements and enhanced by luxurious greenery. Many of these users have abandoned romantic walks around the area and are using other spaces in the

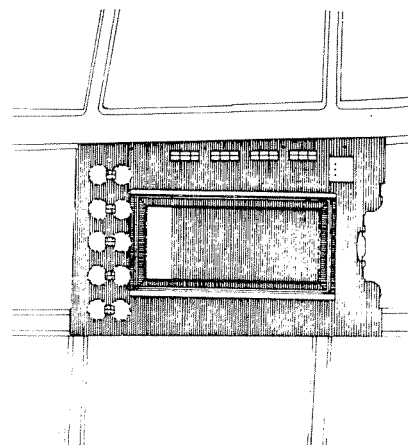
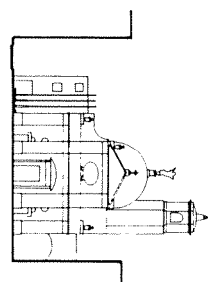
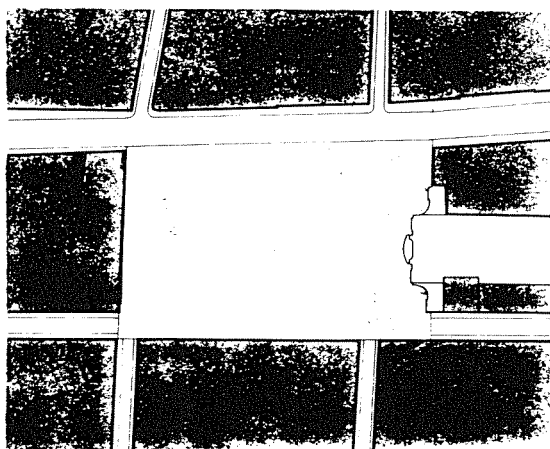


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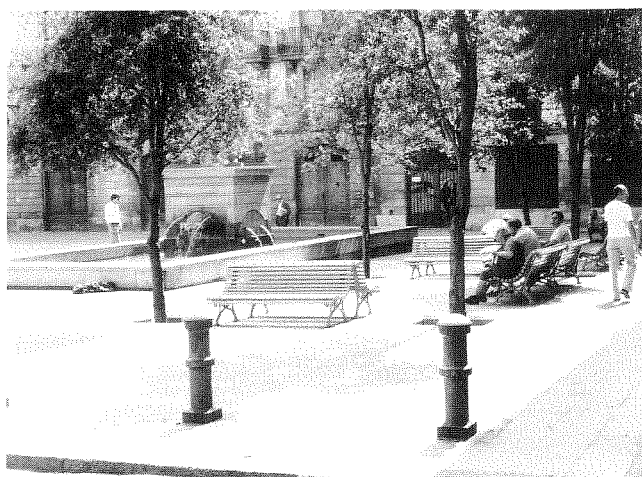


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- 2 Plaza de Sans, urban window as the end of the long shadow area
- 3 Plaza de Sans, shadow area with a futuristic effect
- 4 Plaza de Sans, plan, sections, and elevations
- 5 Plaza de Sans, unoccupied wooden benches
- 6 Plaza de Sans, perspective view



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7 Plaza de la Mercé, plans, sections, and perspective view

8 Plaza de la Mercé, trees, benches, and fountain

9 Plaza de la Mercé, adjacent church

city. However, the Plaza now has new users, who feel that more clarity and visual order have been obtained with the new design.

The socialist party in power in City Hall since 1978 resisted public opinion, which produced a lack of communication among users, designers, and politicians. Oriol Bohigas argued again and again in the newspapers that the architects he designated for the projects were among the most prestigious in town. He stated that the “modern” quality of the squares was preferable to picturesque pastiches and postmodern eclectic attitudes. The opinion of the opponents was characterized as “regressive” and “ignorant.” Bohigas said, “It is very well known that good art [and modern art is good art] has never been popular.” Bohigas added, “I believe that everything has changed because we have now a socialist view of the city, or better, we have a ‘social’ view of the city.” He also said, “This discussion about ‘hard’ or ‘soft’ squares shows a strange lack of culture in our country. The ‘Plaza de Sans’ is the most important urbanistic event of our day.”

Finally, one of the arguments made by the architects in favor of hard squares was that they are cheaper to maintain than the greenery and trees. In three years, the hard surfaces have decayed very quickly and now require considerable reconstruction.



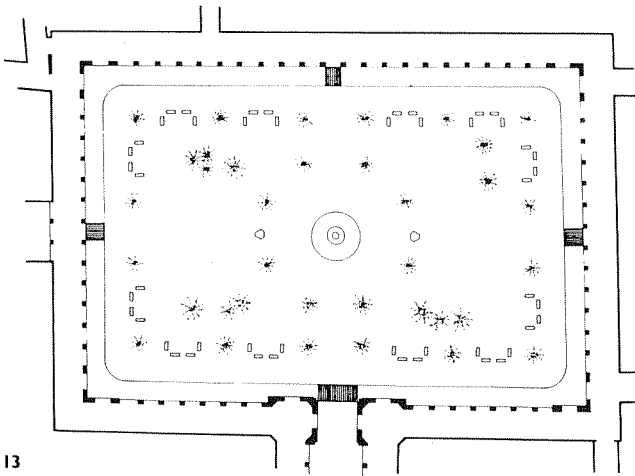
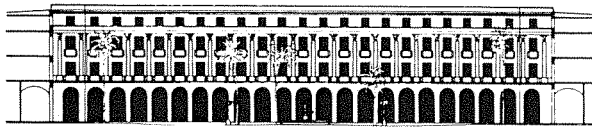
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10 Plaza Real, around 1900

11 Plaza Real, new, modern character



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- 12 **Plaza Real**, rehabilitated facades
- 13 **Plaza Real**, plan and section
- 14 **Plaza Real**, before (top) and after (bottom) renewal

This controversy is, in my opinion, a good example of what happens in architecture when communication between users, designers, and politicians is broken. Some questions should have been discussed: Is it true that modern architecture has never been popular? What about the “abstract” quality of good “modern” design in contrast with “tradition” and previous experience? I would like to analyze very briefly some of these questions.

I. A. Richards wrote in 1924:

The world of poetry—concrete or abstract—has in no sense any different reality from the rest of the world and it has no special laws and no other-worldly particularities. It is made up of experiences of exactly the same kinds as those that come to us in other ways. Every poem, however, is a strictly limited piece of experience, a piece which breaks up more or less easily if alien elements intrude. It is more highly and delicately organized than ordinary experiences of the street. It is fragile. Further it is communicable. It may be experienced by very different minds with only slight variations. It differs from many other similar experiences in this very communicability. For these reasons when we experience it, we must preserve it from contamination. For

these reasons we establish a severance between the poem and what is not to be the poem in our experience. But this is not a severance between unlike things but between different systems of the same activity. This severance of the poetic experience is merely a freeing of it from extraneous ingredients. The “myth” of poetization of experience is due in part to talking about poetry and not about the concrete experience which are poems.

Richards’s explanation clarifies the relations between “modern” and “postmodern” trends in architecture and tradition. These hard squares create a new experience in Barcelona, but they do not create a new world out of nothing.

Modernity has never been opposed to functionality. On the contrary, it has always sought to transform previous experience through new forms, materials, and aesthetics. It has only rejected aprioristic styles. In this sense the Plaza de Sans is a good example. It shows an original design in the way opened by Russian Constructivism, Dada movements, and German Expressionism fifty years ago. However, it was unnecessary to overlook accommodations for the real needs of the users.

Modern architecture disappeared when aesthetics

became a stale redesign of the innovations of the modern avant-gardes and not a fresh expression of a new way of looking to the past and to the future. J. L. Sert, the internationally known Catalan architect, who was dean of the School of Architecture at Harvard University for several years, wrote in 1934 in Barcelona:

... against the dominant desire in the last century of finding one original style and the objective and intellectual orientation in the most advanced architecture today, there exists day by day a broader abyss. This theoretical and intellectual research, a basic law in modern art, is the basis for a new theory in architecture. It was necessary to translate, as in mathematics, the pure mechanistic laws of modern architecture into clear principles thanks to these cold ideas. Once these universal bases are conceived we can think about their plastic appearance, translation into architecture of the complexity of the human spirit. However, this concern with emotions has nothing to do with old and arbitrary complications. Emotions should be filtered through knowledge. Architects have to be in tune with their time, they need inspiration to escape from recent academicisms, like horizontal windows, iron tubes etc. . . .³

The last words are especially important. Hard squares wanted to be modern, but for the most part they have only been cloaked in “modern” style. They have not transformed previous experience; they have escaped from it.

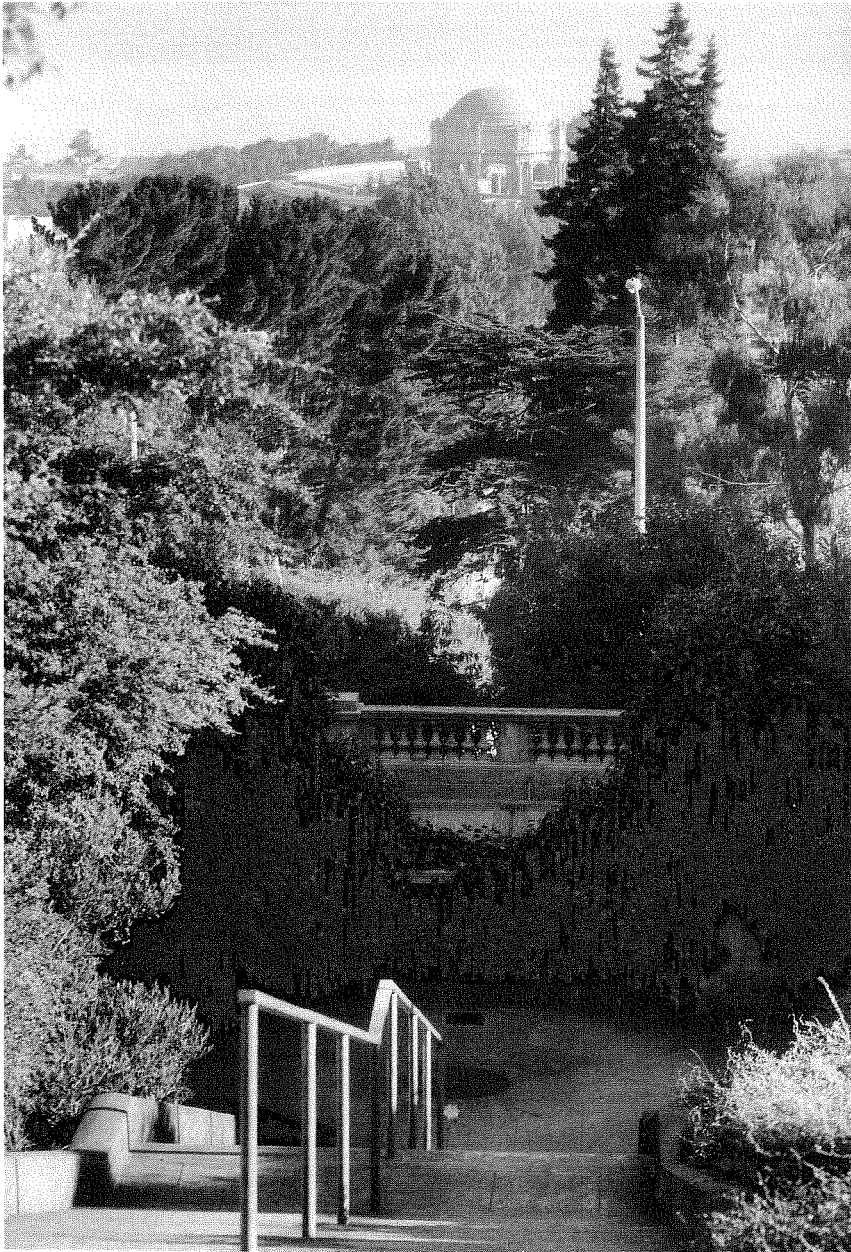
The case of hard squares is closed. The city government of Barcelona wants to forget about the affair and to prepare for the possibility of the Olympic Games in 1992. The hard squares of Barcelona, however, have left their mark on the city and on the minds of the people.

NOTES

- 1 J. Muntanola, *Places Velles i Places Noves* (Barcelona, 1985).
- 2 I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (London, 1924).
- 3 *AC Magazine*. Barcelona, 1931.

Learning from a Stair: The Lyon Stair of San Francisco

Attila A. Batar



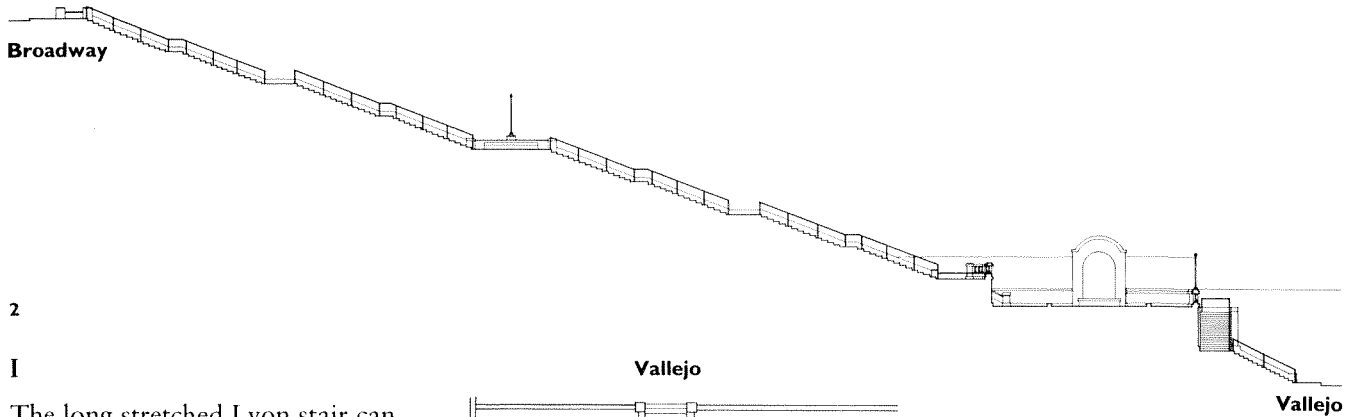
In San Francisco, where straight streets cut abruptly across the hills, the most arduous slopes demand sidewalk stairs. They are all exceptionally long and steep, and most are monotonous and unpretentious sidewalk steps.

At the northern slope of Pacific Heights, still in the middle of San Francisco, where the city's wealthiest neighborhood suddenly terminates and the forest of the Presidio begins, there is a borderline, part of which is Lyon Street. The mansions and the woods face each other on opposite sides, while the street is formed with steps that run from Green Street up to Broadway, a distance of two city blocks.

The Lyon stair is not a proper sidewalk stair, since there is no walkway on the side. Here the stair lies in the middle of the street, which is, for the most part closed to vehicle traffic.

The Lyon stair opens a view corridor especially for the people who are looking down from the top. This visually extended axis leads the eye to the Marina, then to the bay, and finally to the surrounding mountains and the cloudy sky above. At dusk the sun sets behind the viewer, but its rays settle on the bald, gold dome of the Palace of Fine Arts, which becomes its substitute in the middle of the view. Around this radiant focal point the scenery is well organized. It is a perfect vista.

- 1 View north from top of Lyon Stair
- 2 Section of Lyon Stair, upper portion
- 3 Plan of Lyon Stair, upper portion

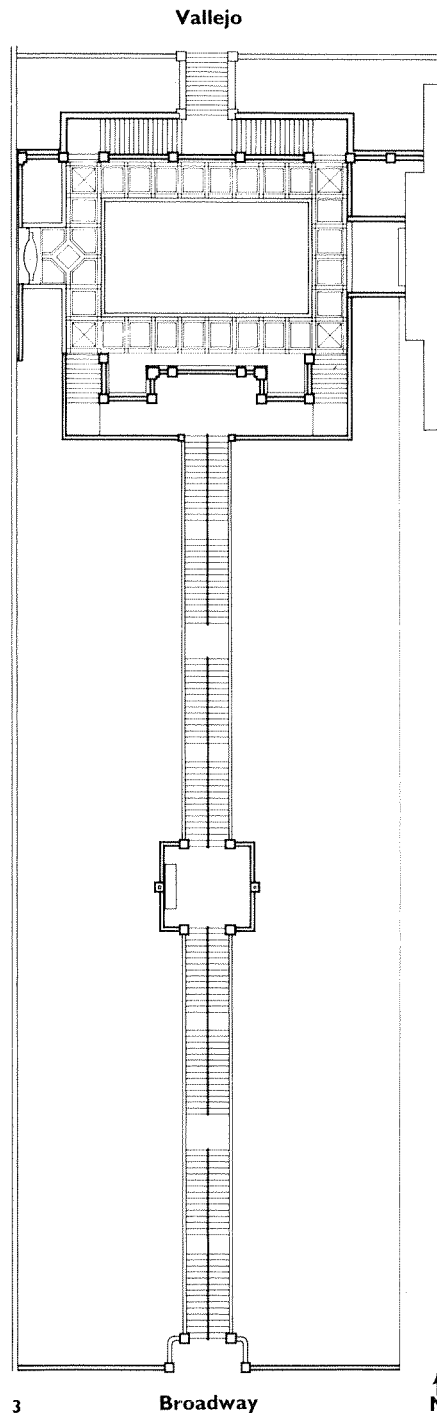


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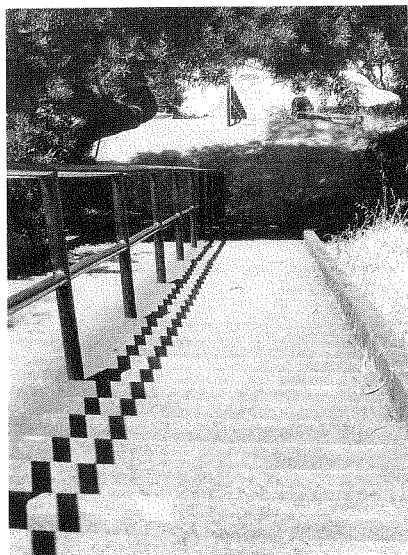
The long stretched Lyon stair can be divided into three sections: the lower, the upper, and the uppermost portions. At the bottom, between Green and Vallejo streets, there lies on a gently sloping area an upside down U-shaped cul-de-sac enclosing a tree island. At the top of the U, where a long, narrow, unthinkable steep stair appears, the cars have to turn back. From here on, it is for pedestrians only. The stairway bursts to the crest at a 60 percent slope, and the effect is astonishing.

Approaching from below, this entire area appears to belong to the forest. Gigantic trees tower above streets and mansions as they grow out from the aisle, from the neighboring lots, and from the nearby forest. They leave everything below them in darkness. The milieu is somber and wildly romantic; it is saturated with the enigmatic mystery of the surrounding forest. The unbroken, narrow, straight flight of stairs, with its 126 concrete steps, lies in this exuberant, woody environment, exactly in the middle of the street. From here up it is no longer a real street; the steep slope's entire width between mansions and forest, with the exception of the stairway itself, is covered by tree trunks and undergrowth. From this wilderness springs forth the dramatic flight of stairs.

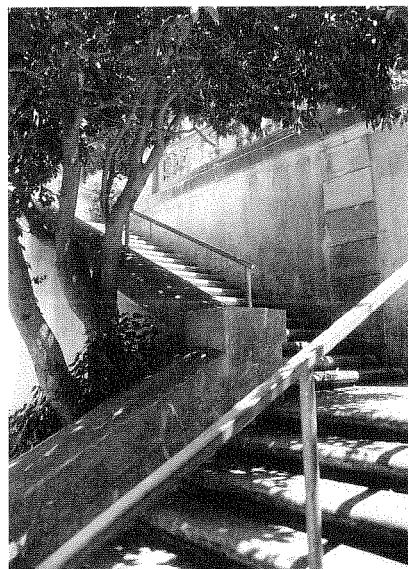




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II

Where the upper portion of the Lyon stair begins at Vallejo Street, a transformed world welcomes the arriving climber. The umbrageous atmosphere gives way to the organized, concrete, and rational. Facing the viewer is a buttressed concrete retaining wall, enriched with balustrades, cornices, and imitation ashlar. This tour de force, flanked with mansions and forest trees, creates a calm, dignified, and elegant effect. It holds back the hill behind and above, where, in a similar way to the lower section of the Lyon stair, plants and bushes, but not trees, cover the site. The street has disappeared. There is no place for cars. There is only the infinite stair in the middle coming into sight. This part of the stair breathes more freely than that below; the green surrounds but does not bury it.

The buttressed wall has a cut in the middle with the entering stair cascading down through it. Each side is guarded by a tree. Further up at the first landing, where the stair divides into two, is an inscription on the facing wall, chiseled in with roman type: LYON STREET. The walls are crowned with balustrades and behind, before the ascenders' eyes, emerges the mansion's main facade. Then there is a surprise: the passerby arrives in a formal garden, in a small palace court or terrace, a solemn ceremonial place, lifted above Vallejo Street. People absorbing the new milieu first see the new architectural expressions: the balustrades, the cornices, the paving patterns, the Renaissance orna-

mentations and elements; then they sense its new atmosphere: the colorfulness and gaiety, yet the formal exclusive and elevated solemnity of the place. It is a drastic change, which shocks and easily creates confusion. One started to walk on a street but has arrived in what looks like a private garden. Is it a public street or a mansion's court? Is it public domain or private property? Do we have the right to be here, or are we violating someone's privacy?

There is a break in function as the stair moves to the terrace. Instead of a landing, the terrace seems to be an extension of the mansion; the extended building axis organizes this outdoor space. The longer flanks (walls and balustrades) run parallel to the axis, leading the space toward the niche, a gentle concluding motif at the opposite end. The entire setting has been designed for the viewer looking out from the building. The terrace garden is intended to be a palace court, not a magnified landing.

This formal terrace garden is encompassed by geometrical structures on all sides. To the left is the mansion's main facade. On the opposite side an arched concrete fence with a niche in the middle (one must imagine the missing statue) separates the court from the wilderness behind. Facing the viewer is the upper buttressed retaining wall enriched with imitation ashlar and balustrades and softened by overgrown ivy and bushes. Two additional stairs occur at each end; they mirror the position of the arrival stairs. Behind the



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balustrade, the two upper stairs are united again, and a single stair approaches the top. Adjacent to the garden and beyond, the forest solemnly watches over the terrace.

This terrace garden has an open side to the north, from whence we arrived. Between the forest and the mansion, above the parapet, the unique San Francisco panorama rises to view. This panorama reinforces the festive quality of the terrace, which remains gentle because the overgrown balustrade and all the ornaments reduce its size to a human scale. However, the relatively small terrace garden still does not disappear in this grandiose environment. In these dark-toned surroundings, its dimensions seem to expand as the sun lights the open spot. The splendid, bright terrace garden is able to compete with the large dark forest. The terrace also gains significance from its elevated position: from here the buildings and the forest trees look relatively diminished, and the trees in the remote distance are foreshortened. Terrace, balustrades, forest—widening concentric rings—all add “dimensions” to the garden, which becomes the focal point of this impressive environment.

It is surprising to find a Renaissance terrace garden in the middle of a San Francisco street, but once we are here, one could easily imagine seeing people blithely waltzing out of the mansion. All kinds of romantic images come to mind, but nothing happens. Nobody leaves the house, nobody sits down at the niche to rest, nobody bends over the balustrade to enjoy the view.

One day, while walking down the Lyon stairway, I met an elderly man who lived in the mansion. He gave me a clue to understanding the situation of the terrace garden. The first owner, who built the mansion in 1917, was a contractor as well as a city politician. He cleverly convinced the city to build an impressive and distinguished street with the terrace garden just in front of his main entrance. The Lyon stair became San Francisco’s most exclusive street steps in a location where practically nobody except the politician needed them.

Although the stair’s landing visually belongs to the mansion, the city owns it. City street cleaners in their bright orange uniforms periodically invade the space with their brooms and noisy equipment to clean and refresh the garden street. The city politician’s influence still prevails, even from his grave.



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- 4 Lyon Stair, lower portion looking south
- 5 Lyon Stair, lower portion looking north
- 6 Stairs from Vallejo Street to terrace
- 7 Street sign below terrace
- 8 Stairs from Vallejo Street to terrace
- 9 Terrace with mansion



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III

The uppermost part of the Lyon stair, from the terrace garden to Broadway, lies on a 30 percent slope. It consists of several straight and narrow flights of stairs, which run in the middle of the street. Concrete curbs border the stair and separate it from the bushes on each side. What distinguishes this section of the Lyon stair from other long narrow sidewalk steps are the missing incidental factors. The remote course of steps is not interrupted by driveways or entrances. The stair in the middle of the street looks independent of the environment and follows its own system.



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The system is very geometric. In projection it has two symmetrical axes, a main longitudinal axis and a cross axis, which bisects it at a right angle at a wider landing, which is emphasized by a concrete bench never used by anyone. Within each bisected half the system is again symmetrical. The newly created symmetrical half can be further divided into symmetrical systems.

Walking up and down, parallel with the longitudinal axis, there is both repetition and irregularity, because diverse lengths of the landing alter the rhythm of the repeated flights and treads. It is still a system, a complex system, but not a symmetrical one. While we are walking on the stair, we do not keep the plan in our mind. Knowledge of the system differs from our personal kinesthetic and/or visual experience.

As we experience the stair with its environment the intention of the symmetry, which is formal balance, will be further lost. We see the different contour lines, colors, finishes, ornaments, and details of the surroundings. But our perception is not limited to the visual: our complete sensory system participates in the process of transmission. Sensuous impressions work collectively, but each affects us in its own way. Under all these influences, the axis of symmetry starts to dance, and the geometry, while we perceive it, lies in ruin. In this conglomeration, impressions and conceptions, reflections and notions roll into us like cumulus clouds and they cascade with us down the hill. Our conception of the stair is created within this larger context.

Conclusion

Complex architectural space, such as San Francisco's Lyon stair, provides for many kinds of emotional responses. The architectural setting is mostly static, but people may decide on their own pathways and moving patterns. The space and its experience are limited by the architectural environment, but they are not determined; the viewer has free choices too. They can walk in through the back door and leave from the main entrance; they can approach the court from below or from above; they can hesitate and wander from corner to corner in a circle or back and forth at will. The architect can hold people's hands only loosely to influence people to follow the designed choreography.

The two flights of stairs coming from the hill to the terrace are identical, but their settings are different. One stair leads people to the mansion's main entrance and directly past the formal dining room. The stair on the other side passes under branches and bushes and arrives next to the niche at the end of the terrace. The wanderer must make a choice between an urban and a natural environment.

Differences in the environment and in people's moods determine how they will experience and interpret the space. Some people may walk to the right to peek through the window, to try to spy on the secrets of the house, or to identify with the dwellers inside. Others may turn left and look at the building as a spectator from a comfortable distance or enjoy the puzzling



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- 10 Terrace, looking north
- 11 Lyon Stair, upper portion looking south from terrace
- 12 Lyon Stair, upper portion looking south



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13 Landing and bench, upper portion looking southwest

14 Lyon Stair, upper portion looking south

world of the forest. People have to decide between the two settings, two approaches, and two dissimilar atmospheres and moods in accordance with their mentality. Spatial experience is always improvisational; the building just provides opportunity.

The designers of the Lyon stair discovered the latent advantages of the form. They turned the direction of the stair more than once so that the faces and profiles could be seen simultaneously. They playfully enlarged the landings, one even became a palace court; they employed buttresses and balustrades wherever they could. The Lyon stair, owing to its length, is already dramatic, but the drama has been further intensified with the contrasting proportions of the stairs: for as its very long vertical portion is crossed at the bottom with horizontal forms, and as the

narrow flights widen into a delta, the entire staircase enhances the perspectival illusion. And at the top the "infinite" end vanishes into mystery.

The Lyon stair is in the center of a drama between the mansions and the forest, and these contrasting worlds collide above the stair. Geometry and harmony are undermined by forces stronger than Renaissance dignity. Conscious architectural planning can only be a part of a larger process where unexpected, ad hoc elements and the environment play equally important roles. The three portions of the Lyon stair, the wildly romantic, the elegant, the geometric, have their own role and character. Each makes its impact on us in a unique way. The beauty of this row of steps is that it can stimulate and indulge a very complex set of ideas within us.

To Rally Discussion

Volume 3, number 3 of *Places* arrived today; and I am shocked and outraged! In their article, “American Edens,” Charles Moore and William Mitchell write, “Frederick Law Olmsted’s Mount Auburn Cemetery in Boston, which dates from 1831, should probably be regarded as the continent’s oldest landscaped public garden. . . . For a brilliant half-century after Mount Auburn opened, Olmsted and others created the grand gardens of democracy.” The authors are correct only in that Mount Auburn was founded in 1831 and should indeed be regarded as America’s oldest landscaped public garden.

Olmsted was only three when Dr. Jacob Bigelow proposed in 1825 that Bostonians create a “rural” cemetery; and only nine in 1831 when General Henry A. S. Dearborn laid out in the grounds of Mount Auburn. By the time Olmsted *began* his design career in 1857, shifting from writing and publishing to superintend construction of Central Park, Mount Auburn was a mature landscape over a quarter century old; and many other “rural” cemeteries had been laid out by horticulturists, architects, landscape gardeners, and committees of civic leaders in American cities large and small. The public parks movement grew out of the “rural” cemetery movement, as acknowledged in the 1850s and 1860s by the likes of Andrew Jackson Downing, William Cullen Bryant, and Clarence Cook; but it did NOT begin until over a quarter century after Mount

Auburn’s founding, a significant historical gap when considering the cavalier dating of the “brilliant half century” of creation of “grand gardens of democracy” by Moore and Mitchell. These two professors have carried to a new extreme the often repeated, flippant assumption that any designed landscape of the nineteenth century must have been the work of Olmsted.

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