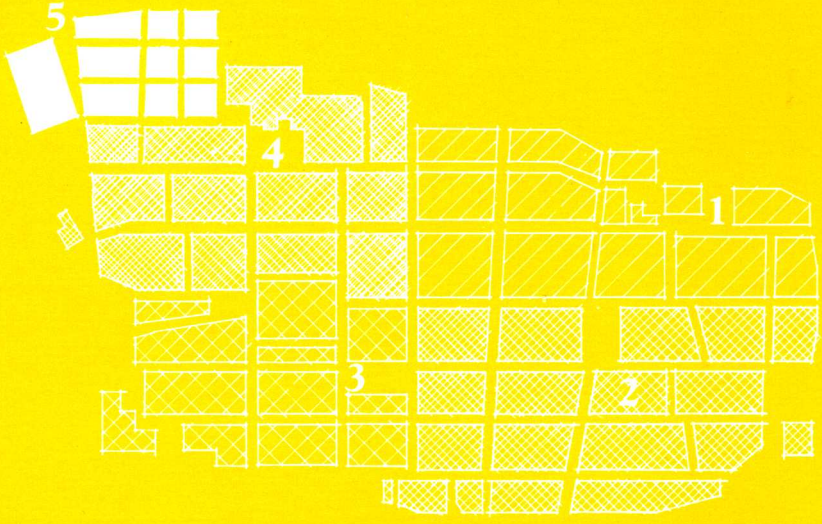
Places

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A Quarterly Journal
of Environmental Design



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Places

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Volume 5, Number 2

Caring about Places: Learning from Existing Cities

Philbrick, talking of Celie in *The Color Purple*, links her and her evolving "consciousness of her false, lost, and real selves" with the places she inhabits. She observes that ". . . at significant moments . . . people enter into possession of gardens and their houses . . . a first attempt at dreaming; a determined occupancy that celebrates self and places as the recovered parts of a whole." "Architecture and Philanthropy in a Model Company Town" tells of a place shaped from the start by the ambition, the vision, and the specific intentions of a family. It is a town that invites a reading of its human and social topography.

Places sustain or limit not just through their physical characteristics, but also through how they are perceived and conceived. "My camera clarifies my thoughts about buildings and records my designs on their existence." Wingwall's photos are durable and eloquent fragments of an intense relation between self and place.

"This circularity of artifact, intervention, and reflection is critical to the perception of place . . ." and is evoked through the literary and film images that Goring presents in relation to Los Angeles. "The perceived reality of the city comes as much from the expectations generated by pre-exposure as from the direct experience of dwelling in Los Angeles itself."

Places themselves can accurately reflect their own recent history. Helphand picks out several "events" of the 1950's that have changed the American landscape, including McDonald's and the interstate highway system. These changes to the larger landscape inevitably have their impact on our cities and their design, and they give rise to a struggle between local place character and the standardized products and logos of commercial and corporate identity.

"We usually suppose that truth in history must be dug out, uncovered, but here it is, the cover-up that tells the truth." Wilson documents how Old Sacramento no longer represents its history but "represents" it in ways that detach it from its origins. "The merely old is not fun—it must have died and been moved, and set up again for it to belong in Old Sacramento." The appearance of places may neither reveal their past nor their present.

"Four hundred lions have taken over the main street in Zurich. . . ." Joyce Lyndon tells us about how the "lions are changing the codes of the street . . ." how they "jolt the imagination onto new tracks." Ephemeral events distract, delight, and are marvelous things-in-themselves. But they also relate to the more durable aspects of the place, making them even more durable, and revealing aspects of them that might otherwise be overlooked.

The perceived reality comes as well from disciplined and codified reflection as presented in specialized words and images by Smith to explain the immensely satisfactory form of selected urban landscapes and to provide a set of tools to discipline design. Drawing from life and from art Smith establishes a strong basis for "Dimensional Self-Stability and Displacement in Field-Ordered Directional Alternations." This well-defined system of thought dictates observation in ways that anticipate design and facilitate continuity with the form of the past.

Mignucci's analysis finds "groups of elements and relationships [that] serve as a basis for establishing a vocabulary for the Ballajá Quarter [in San Juan], one with a syntax and identity of its own but one that remains continuous with the language of the city."

How does one, therefore, learn from existing cities in ways that may be helpful for design? With subtlety, recognizing that there are many layers of appearance and reality; with method, to regulate the eye and to enable abstraction; with dreams that transform what is seen into what can be meaningfully imagined; and with a measure of madness to let in humor and unpredictability. But most of all our cities should sustain life.

We are grateful to the National Endowment for the Arts which has supported in part this issue and the other three that will comprise Volume 5. Our purpose is to link design and cities. In the first issue we have looked at the Roman Forum and speculated on lessons that can be learned from antiquity. This issue concerns lessons from existing places. The third will be about futurist thinking; and the last about what is and can be done given current and conventional politics and wisdom.



William L. Porter

Reclaiming Ballajá

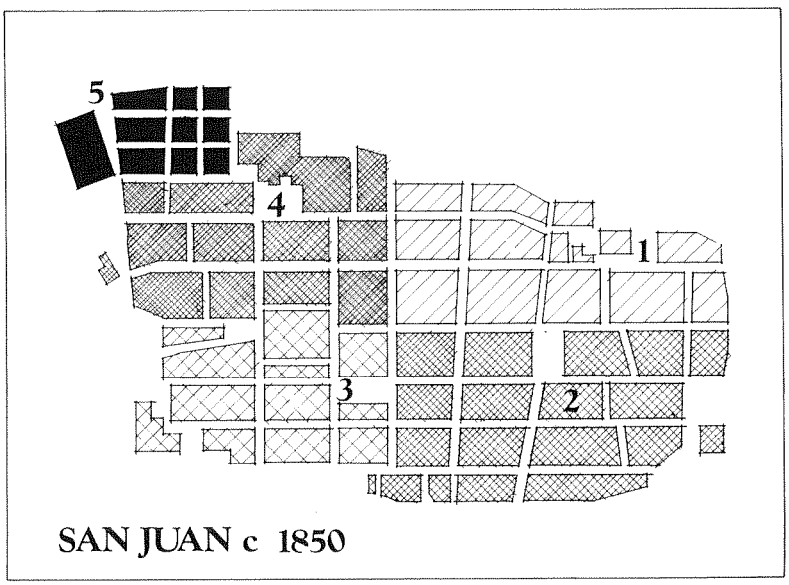
Andrés Mignucci Giannoni

With the restoration of the waterfront well under way, the Ballajá Quarter of San Juan, Puerto Rico, stands as the last large area still to be reintegrated into the historic fabric of the old city. After suffering from years of neglect and deterioration, the area has recently been targeted for redevelopment and controversy has developed around the strategies and models for its reconstruction. As defined by the government authorities, the program for the area calls for, first, the restoration and adaptive reuse of the existing monumental buildings and, second, the development on vacant lots of a five-story underground parking structure with a three-block plaza on top to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America. Contracts have already been awarded and work is under way on the design of these projects. However, the general urban design intentions for the area and the programmatic nature of its reconstruction have been developed in the absence of a clear and defined comprehensive master plan.

The study presented in this paper outlines a strategy for the reconstruction of the Ballajá Quarter as an active, living part of the city of San Juan. Its premises are illustrated through a design which reflects a vision for the area and for its connection to the rest of the city. The reconstruction of a portion of a city, especially a historically sensitive one, requires a clear understanding of two important aspects of the work: first, the political stance, which forms the primary attitudinal framework



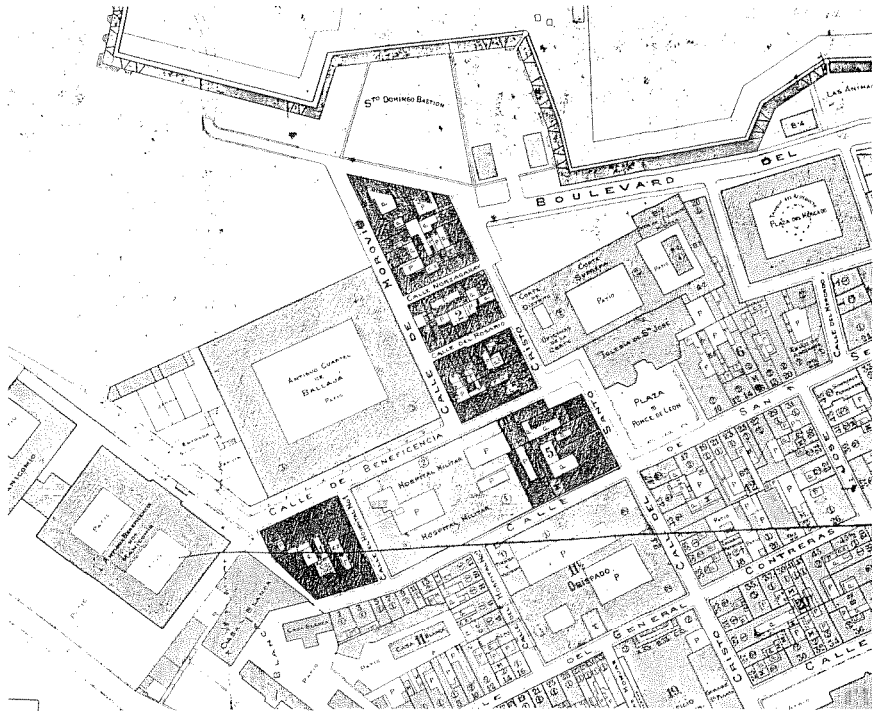
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1 Ballajá Quarter, aerial photograph

2 San Juan, ca. 1850, showing the five urban quarters of the city: 1, Santa Barbara; 2, San Francisco; 3, San Juan; 4, Santo Domingo; 5, Ballajá.


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of values from which the basic physical and programmatic decisions and priorities will be based; and second, and equally important, the methodological stance, which provides the strategic and mechnical means through which the first will be carried out. Hopefully, the positions outlined on these two grounds will contribute toward building a comprehensive image of the issues involved and point toward some possibilities for the sensitive restructuring of the area.

Development and Present State of the Quarter

The Ballajá Quarter sits on the highest point of the islet of San Juan, perched on a ridge from which one can see the ocean to the north and south. The Quarter covers approximately three acres comprising six large city blocks. Because of its key location, the Quarter serves as a gateway to the city when approached from the peripheral circuit of Boulevard del Valle. Further, it also serves as the physical link between the city and El Morro, a monumental defensive fortress whose grounds are now a large public park.

The Quarter is connected to the rest of the city primarily by Cristo and San Sebastián streets and by a series of stepped pedestrian streets formed by the Caleta de las Monjas and the Callejón del Hospital. The pedestrian streets are much narrower and quieter than those carrying automobiles and provide both a cooler and more tranquil alternative to the busy commercial Cristo Street.



5



6



7

Taking its present form in the 1850s, the area was the fifth and last of the urban quarters to be developed *intramuros*, within the city walls. From its beginnings it took on the character of an institutional district, with its buildings primarily dedicated to civic and military uses. The Hospital de la Concepción (1779), Casa de Beneficiencia—the hospice (1844), the Cuartel de Ballajá (1857), and the insane asylum (1868) form a complex of grand monumental buildings. The largest of these is the Cuartel de Ballajá, which previously housed the Spanish and later the American army. Taming the scale of these grand structures were four blocks of low residential buildings, which provided a balance of both form and use within the Quarter and integrated it with the rest of the city.

After the war of 1898, the United States Army occupied Puerto Rico and established El Morro and Ballajá as its center of operations. It renamed the area Fort Brooke. In the mid-1940s the Army tore down the residential blocks to construct a parking lot for military vehicles. A large urban vacuum was created, Plaza San José lost its definition and sense of containment, and once the military left the area, the large structures, isolated and obsolete in their uses, fell progressively into disrepair and deterioration. A whole sector of the city disappeared. Some of the larger buildings were restored in the 1970s: the insane asylum became the Instituto de Artes Plásticas, and the old military hospital (Hospital de la Concepción) was occupied by the Department of Education. But the Cuartel de Ballajá and the Casa de Beneficiencia remain abandoned,

7 San José Church and Plaza

8 Pedestrian Street, Callejón del Hospital

9 San Sebastián Street Block, illustrating the typical building type

and the sites of the old residential blocks are still being used for parking.

The Structure of Old San Juan

The platform of this study is that it is necessary to rebuild and restructure the urban fabric of the Quarter in such a way that it responds to the nature of the existing physical and social environment. An architectural intervention should be an extension of its context and an expression of the physical and associative content of its place. This cannot be accomplished by mimicking or copying its outer semblance but through a thorough understanding of the principles operating in a place. This suggests that architecture, as part of a physical context, constitutes a language. In it one can identify elements or components of the language as well as a syntax, the system of rules that regulates the relationships between the elements.

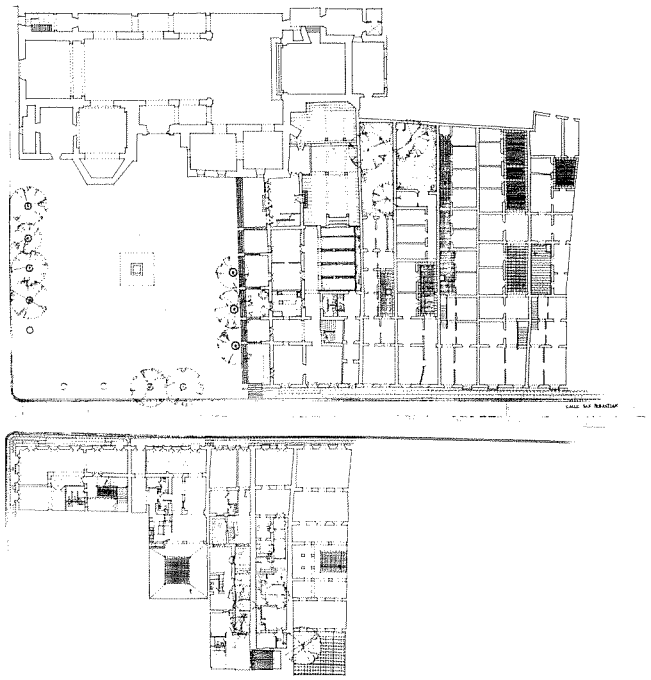
The structure of San Juan developed as a result of two types of systems. First, there was an implicit system, a whole set of "collective agreements" shared by the Spanish settlers, what Ortega called the "binding observances" of a culture. This system tempered the way they behaved and socialized individually and as a group. As part of this system, they brought the associations of their motherland, their towns, the forms and materials of their houses, the colors of their walls, the smells of their city, the gatherings in their plazas,



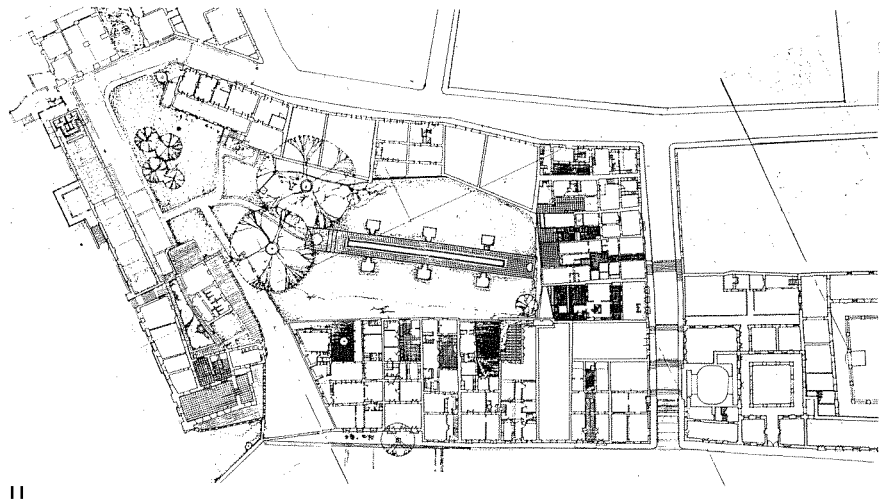
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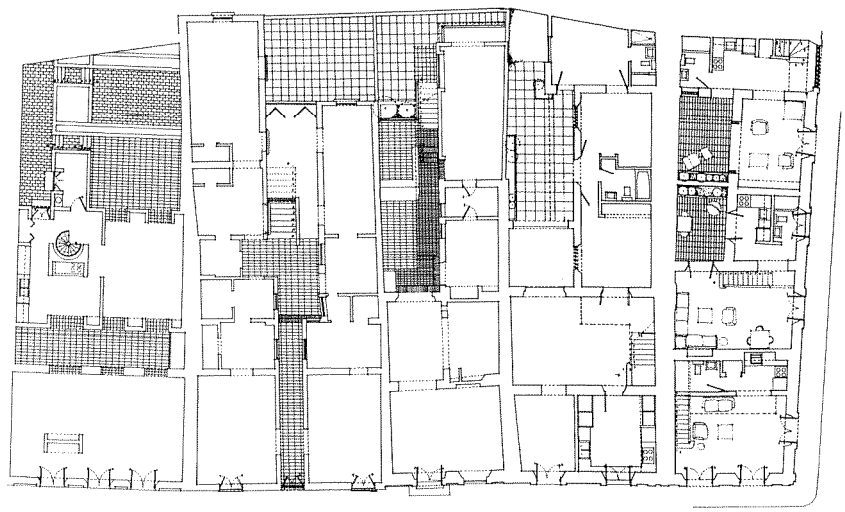
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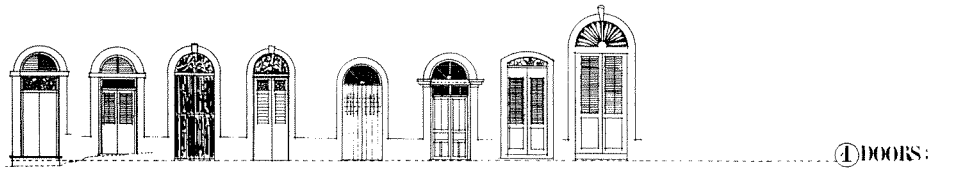
10 Observation #1: Plaza, showing the buildings around the public square, Plaza San José

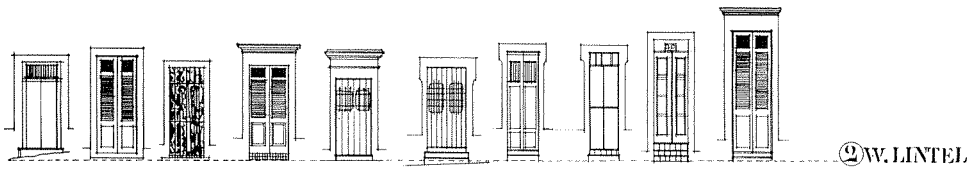
11 Observation #2: Street, Plan of the buildings along a pedestrian street, Callejón del Hospital. Casa Blanca is to the left and San Sebastián Street is at the top.

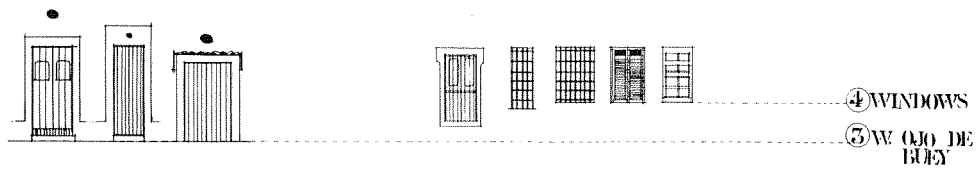
12 Observation #3: Block Unit, detail of the plan in observation #2 showing the aggregation of the units and the elements of the San Juan house



13



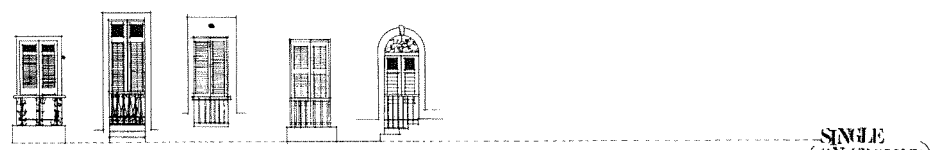


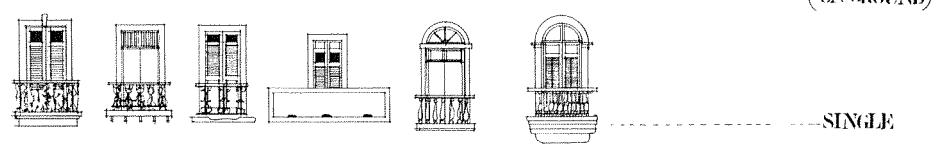


DOOR ..... Ⓐ
WINDOW ..... Ⓑ

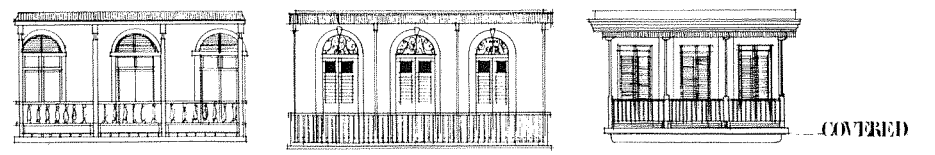
ELEMENTS

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FRENCH WINDOW ..... Ⓐ
BALCONY ..... Ⓑ

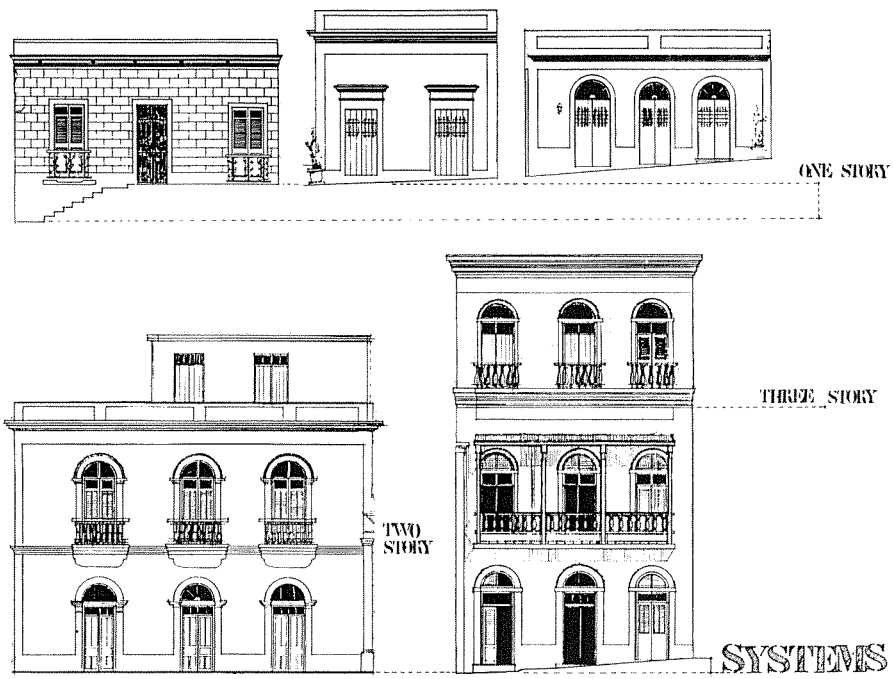
SUB-SYSTEMS

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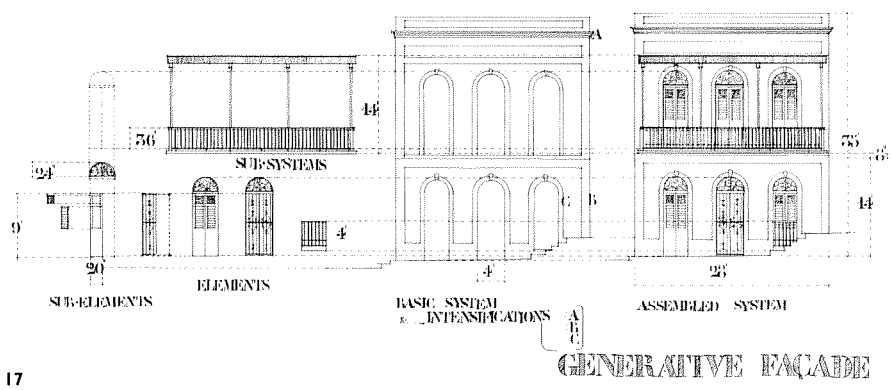
13 San Sebastián Street, elevation

14 Facade Elements

15 Facade subsystems



16



17

16 Facade system

17 Generative Facade, showing the elements and subsystems as they aggregate into the larger facade system

18 Entry study, showing the position and uses of the front zone of the San Juan house

19 Levels of permanency and change. The top drawing shows the progressive inhabitation of the unit, from the most permanent, least tractable elements, the basic structure, to the least permanent, the furniture. The bottom drawing shows how the basic unit has been subdivided to accommodate three apartments

20 Patio study, showing the formal range of positions and directions of the interior patios

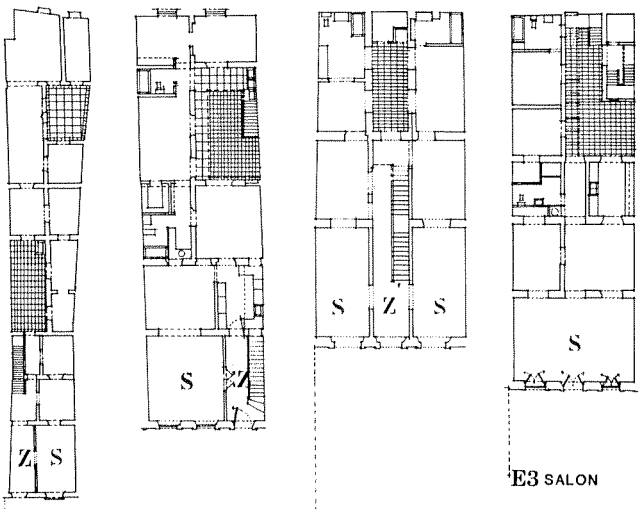
and the whole set of qualities that made their place theirs. They brought their way of seeing.

Superimposed on this system was one of a different sort, still with elements and components and a syntax to govern them but one handed down by the State, the Spanish crown. This explicit system, the Laws of the Indies, regulated the layout and development of the new settlements in the Spanish colonies. It identified its three main urban elements, the building block, street, and plaza, and outlined, in very clear terms, the rules for their position, direction, and dimensions as they were to be deployed in the landscape.

The combination of the implicit and explicit systems made the urban structure and the character of San Juan as a place cohere. They articulated common laws of structure and growth that established visual, physical, and social affinities within the city. The city's outer forms are never the same—each unit is slightly different from the next—yet each holds the same principles in common. The resulting theme and variations keep the balance between the larger collective understanding of the place and the individual's identification with its components.

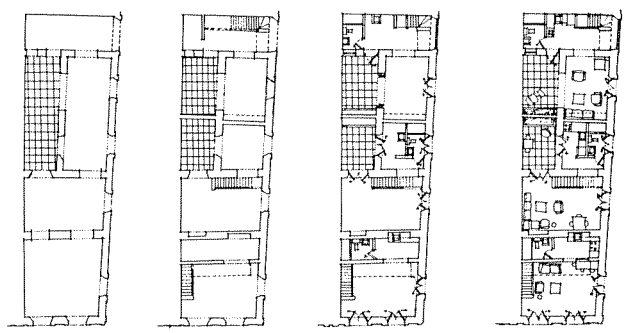
The Methodology for the Reconstruction of the Quarter

In being sensitive to the nature of the place, the model for the reconstruction of the Ballajá Quarter should come directly from

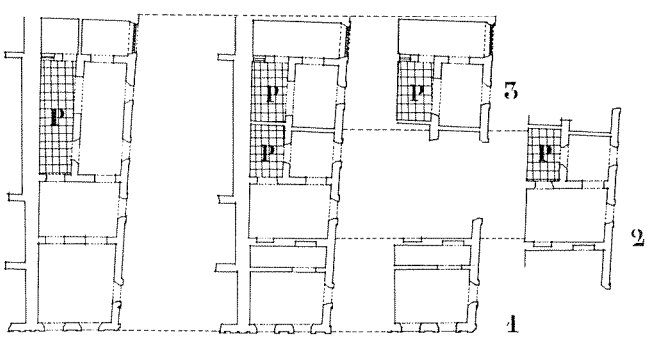


ENTRY

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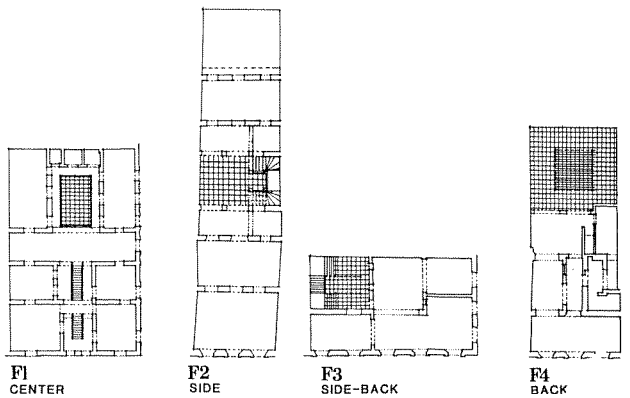


LEVELS OF PERMANENCY

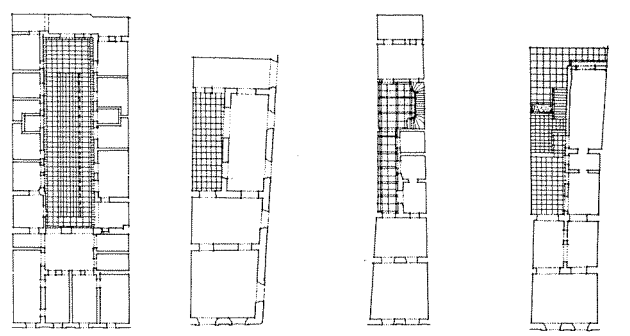


CHANGE

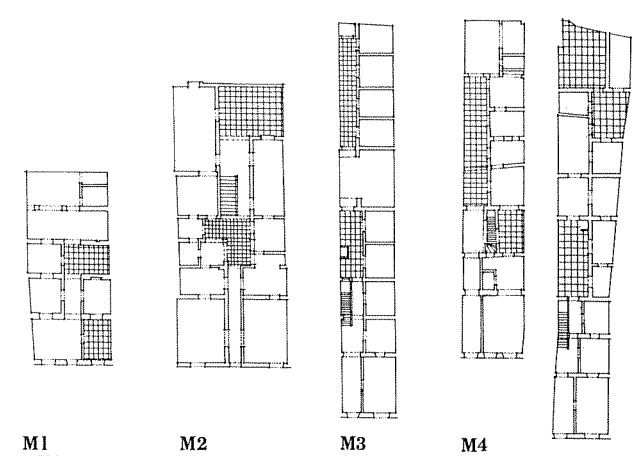
19



FOCUSED



DIRECTIONAL



MULTIPLE

PATIOS

20

the structure and identity of San Juan as a city. Three studies underpin the design for the Quarter and provide a framework from which to project the new design as an extension of the principles present in the city. The first involves measured, systematic observations and recordings of four different areas in, or adjacent to, the Ballajá Quarter:[1] Plaza San José, San Sebastián and Sol streets, Callejón del Hospital, and the block bounded by Luna, Cruz, Sol, and San José streets. These observations are directed toward bringing out the "structure" of the basic components of the city and the basic San Juan building type as it changes with different conditions of topography, use, access, form definition and containment, and location within the city fabric.

The second study examines the forces acting on the Quarter and its relationship with the rest of the city's structure. From it a set of urban design intentions is generated.

The third study analyzes the observations and the general urban design intentions and develops from them a set of new elements to be deployed and used in reconstructing the Quarter. These elements form the vocabulary for the design.

Observations: Looking at the City

The urban structure of San Juan, its growth and form, developed as a response to a number of forces. Constrained physically by its location on an islet and constrained further by being a walled city, the city did not expand gradually and parallel to its growth in population. Instead a dense environment was generated, which is complex and rich in its multiplicity of functions yet manageable in size and scale.

The narrow main streets provide the general framework for movement within the city fabric. The even narrower secondary streets were originally formed by the spaces between the houses, fulfilling the sole function of providing access to the units. These streets were later paved and integrated with the city structure. Their narrow width coupled with the heights of the buildings provide much needed shelter from the fierce tropical sun.

Another response to both density and climate was the construction of inward-looking dwellings with interior patios. These were already part of the settlers' implicit system, since most of them came from Andalusia, which inherited the patios from the Moors. The interior patios insure the privacy of the family, while the balconies in the facades provide the connection to the life that takes place outside.

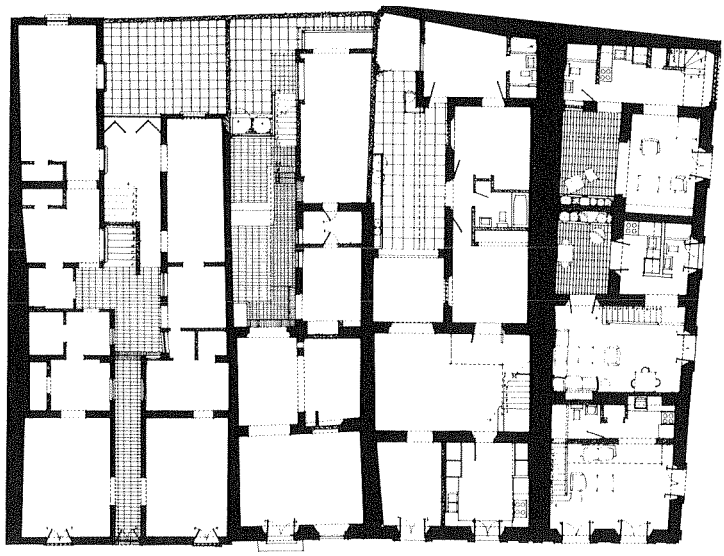
The public plazas are the most important element of the urban system. They are the setting where the city's most important social, commercial, and cultural activities take place. The plazas are both a gathering place and an orientation landmark within the fabric.

The public plazas and the private patios together are the lungs of the city. Their trees allow the city to breathe. A beautiful stability exists between these two elements, since the patio is really a plaza at the level of the house and the plaza is a patio at the level of the city.

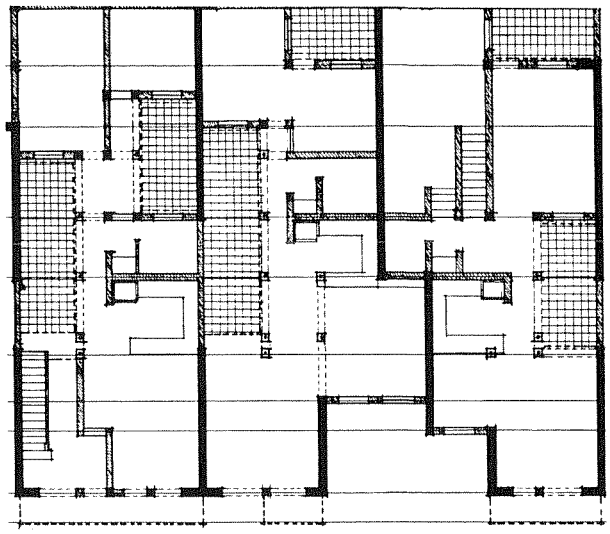
San Juan is then an assemblage of public elements—the plazas, streets, and public buildings—and private elements—the urban blocks and individual buildings and units.

The houses in San Juan also possess both public and private elements. The patio, salon, kitchen, and work areas constitute the collective, public quarters, and the sleeping chambers and bathrooms make up the private areas. Another area that plays a crucial role in the house is the *zaguán*, a narrow passageway that leads from the street to the entry of the house. The opening provides an instant glance at the activity taking place in the patio. It is also fundamental in ventilating the space within, which would otherwise be a trough of stagnant air. If a house has different tenants on each floor the stairs are usually located in the *zaguán*. When the dwelling is occupied by one family, the stairs are usually located in the patio or in the middle zone of the house.

The elements of the facades are also extremely important in shaping the identity of San Juan. The balconies, projecting beyond the face of the building, are extensions of the interior realm of the house into the exterior realm of the city. Entering-leaving, inside-outside, individual-collective, public-private are all associations embodied within the facade. The face of the building is



EXISTING STRUCTURE
21



PROJECTED STRUCTURE
22

then not a plane but a zone, a collection of spatially defined territories that articulate the threshold between inside and outside. The projecting balconies, the arcades, and the *zaguán* form part of this vocabulary. Common to all these elements is the dual role of delineating what is public and what is private and taming as much as possible the tropical climate. Elements such as the *medios puntos* (arched cast iron transoms placed above doors and openings), the *ojos de buey* (small circular openings on the facade), and the ever present cast iron grills and gates are all specifically designed to facilitate the ventilation of the units while insuring protection.

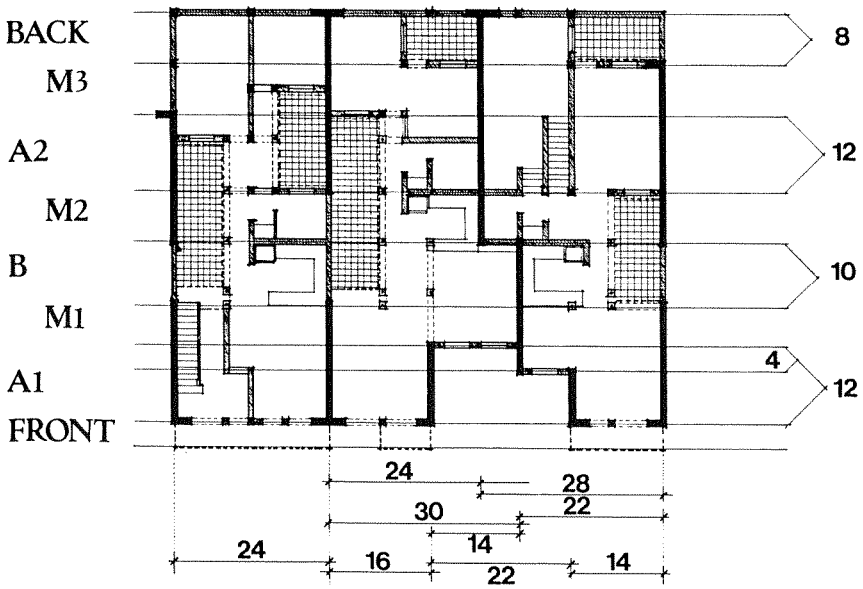
From recording and analyzing these areas, groups of elements and relationships emerge. These serve as a basis for establishing a vocabulary for the Ballajá Quarter, one with a syntax and identity of its own but one that remains continuous with the language of the city.

Continuity of Ballajá with the City

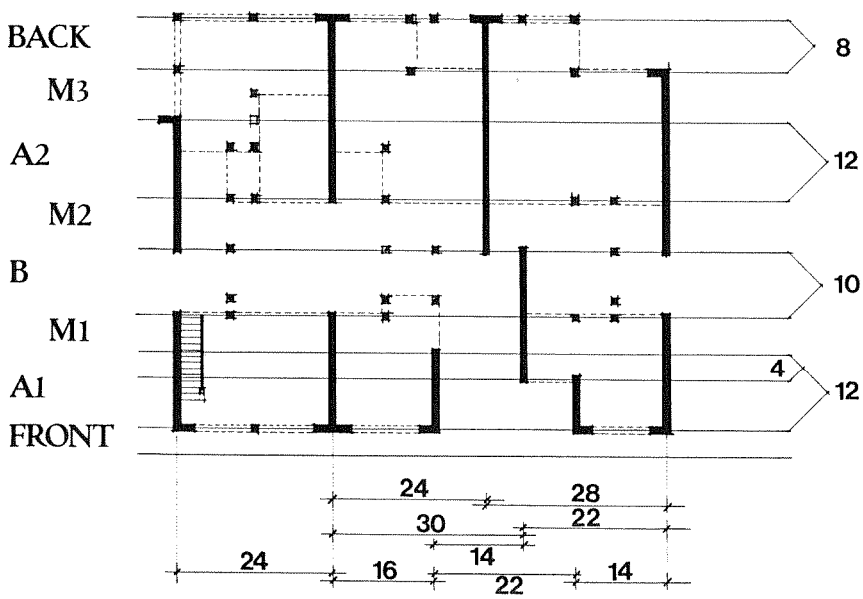
A number of issues are apparent when observations are made about the relationship of Ballajá to San Juan proper. First, a look at the position of Ballajá within the city immediately makes clear the importance and significance of its location. By taking advantage of its proximity to El Morro and its park, to the Plaza San José, to the Institute of Culture and other monumental buildings, and its position as a gateway to Cristo Street from the north, the severed relationship between these urban components could be mended.

A crucial part of this urban design strategy is to reintroduce the scale of the residential blocks destroyed in the 1940s. This accomplishes two important goals. First, it creates a new balance between the projected institutional and governmental uses for the large buildings and the residential units, commercial and office spaces, and other small-scale supporting uses. This will bring a renewed activity and vitality to the area. Second, it regains the physical definition and containment that was lost when the buildings were torn down. The issue of containment is particularly critical for that portion of the vacant lots fronting Plaza San José. The proposed three-block urban plaza is not an appropriate alternative for such a large site. The

21, 22 Existing and projected structure. These drawings compare the existing building fabric with the new projected building units



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23 Support system, the basic structure of the building units, showing the margins for the position of elements and spaces and their dimensions

24 Inhabited support system

25 Site plan of the design for the vacant lots

present spatial vacuum will continue to exist as long as the lots are still used as open space. Rather, a smaller plaza, one comparable in size to those already existing in the city, would be appropriate, particularly at the meeting point of Boulevard del Valle, the entrance gate to El Morro, and the entrance to the city at Cristo Street.

Parking for both residents and visitors is a serious problem within the old city, and traffic congestion, with all its detrimental side effects (pollution, noise, heat), is becoming worse each day. A possible solution might include the design of a parking structure beneath the plaza of the Cuartel de Ballajá building, the largest single space in the city. This project could be integrated into the planned restoration of the building. A study of the parking facility under Madrid's Plaza Mayor, already in use, could be useful as a precedent for Ballajá.

With these general issues in mind, the following urban design intentions were delineated for the reconstruction of the Quarter:

- Extend the north-south pedestrian network defined by the Callejón del Hospital and the Caleta de las Monjas to link the core of the city with the public grounds of the El Morro fortress.
- Design a new plaza at the intersection of the Boulevard del Valle and Cristo Street to function as a gateway to the city as well as to the park.
- Design a parking structure beneath the existing vacant lots

on Cristo Street or the large interior patio of the Cuartel de Ballajá building.

Design two new city blocks on the vacant lots along Cristo Street in order to mend the city fabric. These new blocks would be primarily residential, with their ground floor devoted to commercial or office use on those buildings fronting the new plaza. Build one of these blocks, located on the west edge of Plaza San José, so as to eliminate the urban vacuum created by the existing empty lots and restore the plaza to its proper degree of definition and containment.

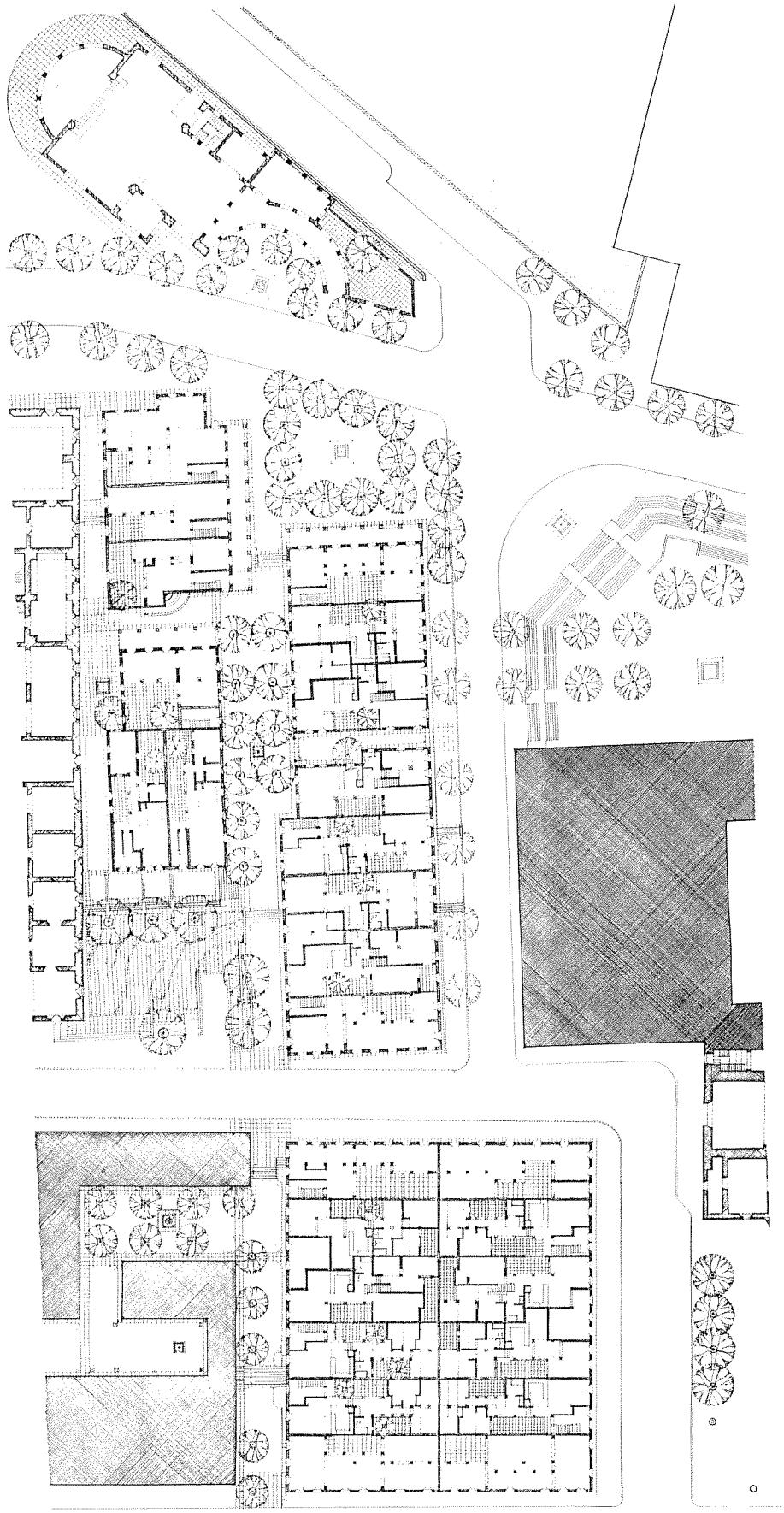
Restore the existing vacant/abandoned buildings in the Quarter, specifically the Ballajá and Beneficiencia buildings. The interior courtyard of the Ballajá building, the largest open space in the city, should be made a usable and accessible public urban element.

Design a new building on the Boulevard del Valle to house the Institute of Spanish Lexicography, replacing the existing dilapidated 1950s building on the same site.

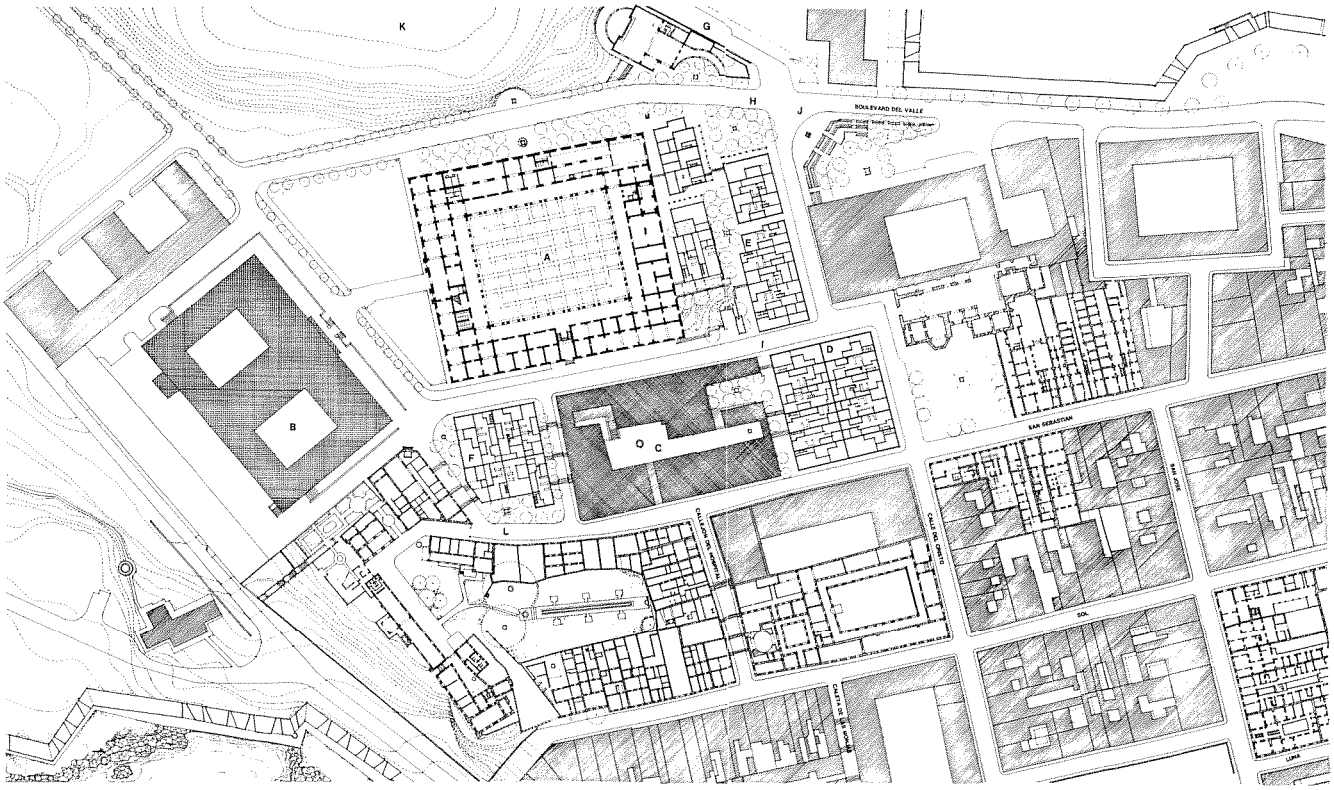
Design and build a new block and *plazuela* on San Sebastián Street at the entry of the Casa Blanca Complex on what presently is a vacant lot.

A Vocabulary and a Plan for Ballajá

Form elements have meaning. The physical characteristics of these elements, such as balconies, *medios puntos*, and doors or the city's



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patios and plazas, tell us how these places are inhabited. But, for different people and under different conditions and circumstances, they give rise to different associations and meanings. The design of a form vocabulary for Ballajá is intended to reinforce the collective understanding of the place as a whole yet allow for the individual's interpretation and identification with its parts.

Since the sites in the Ballajá Quarter are already predefined by the city structure, the block takes on the role of the building unit for the Quarter. The initial step in the design of the blocks is the development of a "support structure." John Habraken defines a support structure as a primary physical definition in which a number of units can be built and which permits the construction, modification, or demolition of each dwelling separately, without involving other dwellings in the same support structure. For Ballajá these support structures are based on the principal rules of position and dimension reported in the earlier observations and analyses: two- and three-story concrete infrastructures with openings for the interior patios. The design accommodates the possibility of multiple patios and two positions for stairs. Where a unit was to have a single owner, the stairs are positioned in the *zaguán* (zone A1). In a duplex unit, the stairs are positioned in the interior of the unit (zone A2).

Different tests were conducted to study the support structure's capacity to accept a variety of arrangements and dispositions of secondary and tertiary elements, such as partitions, closures, fixtures, and, of course, furniture. The result was a support structure composed of six elements: two corner supports, parallel bearing party walls, a displaced party wall, and the resulting territory of this displacement. This territory can accommodate a studio apartment; a shop, office or workshop; or an

26 Ballajá Quarter reconstructed:
A. Restored Cuartel de Ballajá building; B. Restored Beneficiencia building; C. Restored Hospital de la Concepción building; D. New housing block 1; E. New housing block 2; F. New housing block 3; G. New Instituto de Lexicografía building and Theater Hall; H. New Plaza del Descubrimiento; I. New pedestrian street linking the city with El Morro; J. New steps and plaza of the Institute of Culture; K. El Morro grounds; L. New *plazuela* at the end of San Sebastián Street

outside open place, either claimed by the street or shared by two units as a common courtyard.

One major change was made to the existing housing typology. While the existing residential structures are primarily organized through the subdivision and compartmentalization of the unit into discrete rooms, the new units are designed with an open and continuous plan in the collective quarters, utilizing the interior patio as the major organizing element in the house. The private quarters, however, are still separate rooms, but each opens to a patio or a gallery, facilitating cross-ventilation and natural light.

Use, human scale, and context dimensions for floor heights determine the support system's vertical zones and regulate the position of the elements in the facade. Elements and openings are designed in relation to the width of the support types. Similar to the tests described for the support system's plan, the facade zone was tested for its capacity to hold a variety of arrangements. The facades in San Juan constitute a language with four levels, listed from smallest to largest:

Subelements, comprising doors, *medios puntos, ojos de buey,* and transoms;

Elements, such as door and window assemblages, which are discrete collections of subelements;

Subsystems, such as balconies, *antepechos,* and verandas, which are formed by the aggregation of elements;

Facade/Site Systems, which are composed of subsystems and whose arrangement and characteristics change depending on the number of stories.

Ballajá Reclaimed

The reconstructed fabric of the Ballajá Quarter brings to San Juan a renewed vitality and physical character that has been lost for more than half a century. The strategy outlined in this paper envisions sixty new residential units and ten commercial and office spaces to complement the restoration of the Quarter's grand buildings, Beneficiencia and Ballajá, for institutional, governmental, and cultural uses. Two new plazas, one paved and the other one a green park, create new places for people to meet and relax. The paved plaza, with an arcade of commerce and restaurants, serves as a gate to the city and to El Morro. Across the street, a new building houses the Instituto de Lexicografía. Its new auditorium, used for lectures, concerts, and other public functions, brings new cultural life to the Quarter. To the side of the plaza, the overpowering retaining wall that bordered the Instituto de Cultura has been restructured. While keeping its 17th century segment, a series of new monumental steps lead to the old convent. Two new pedestrian streets complete the system defined by the Caleta de las Monjas and the Callejón del Hospital, providing uninterrupted pedestrian access to the green grounds of El Morro. The old fortress is finally made part of the city. A city has finally recovered a piece of itself.

Note

1 The documentation for this study was commissioned and partially funded by the Institute of Culture and the Office for Cultural Affairs of the Puerto Rican government.

Looking, Designing, Looking

Alice Wingwall



1

Looking at buildings; looking twice, five times, ten times. Not only do I like such looking, I am obsessed with haunting the premises. I photograph buildings' relationships to each other, I photograph the way people use them or pass them by. I ask what secrets their windows conceal, reveal, or reflect. I wonder where their openings lead. Which buildings attract each other? Which buildings hug each other, the street, or the landscape? My camera clarifies my thoughts about buildings and records my designs on their existence.

Yes, designs on their existence. The photographic image is a special, perhaps mysterious, surrogate for the building itself, the place itself. We may no longer know whether the building is here, with us, or there, from us. All the photographs we have ever seen, or taken, begin to form a collective memory. In our search for a certain building, we may stop at a photographic image. In other words, photographs breed photographs.

In Rome, I was on the trail of a building I had first seen as a photograph in a book on eighteenth-century Roman architecture. Christian Elling's photograph of San Biagio (which appears in my article "Travel Documents," *Places* 3:2) showed the church against a wide street with no cars and one person. The image depicted an isolation of building and person in a large space, a wall with shimmering light, an idea of a long walk, a kind of elation before the facade.

Now that space exists only in the image Elling formulated more than 40 years ago. The road in front of San Biagio was closed to allow for

more excavations around the amphitheater of Marcellus. The evocative space of the photograph is now filled with cars, parked; and the new road, moved closer around the base of the Capitoline Hill, is filled with cars, moving at high speed. So I am pushed up against the building, along a narrow street. I look up. If I am adept at not getting run over, I can keep looking up. The message seems to be in the sky. San Biagio seems to grasp its neighbor in a special sky room.

In Florence, beautiful volutes are a kind of architectural cloud attached just about where Santo Spirito meets the sky, hinting at other designs within the structure and beyond. Just beyond the edge, just inside the door, just around the corner, are other architectural dreams.

A photograph is the design of a dream. That dream may be a composite of many visits and memories. How many times did I actually walk the long path to the Flavian Amphitheater? On what day was the monument stark against the sky? On what other days was it hidden in scaffolding from the intensity of my gaze and the lens of my camera? The dream, the photographic image, is designed to collect and house all the layers of memory, all the looking.

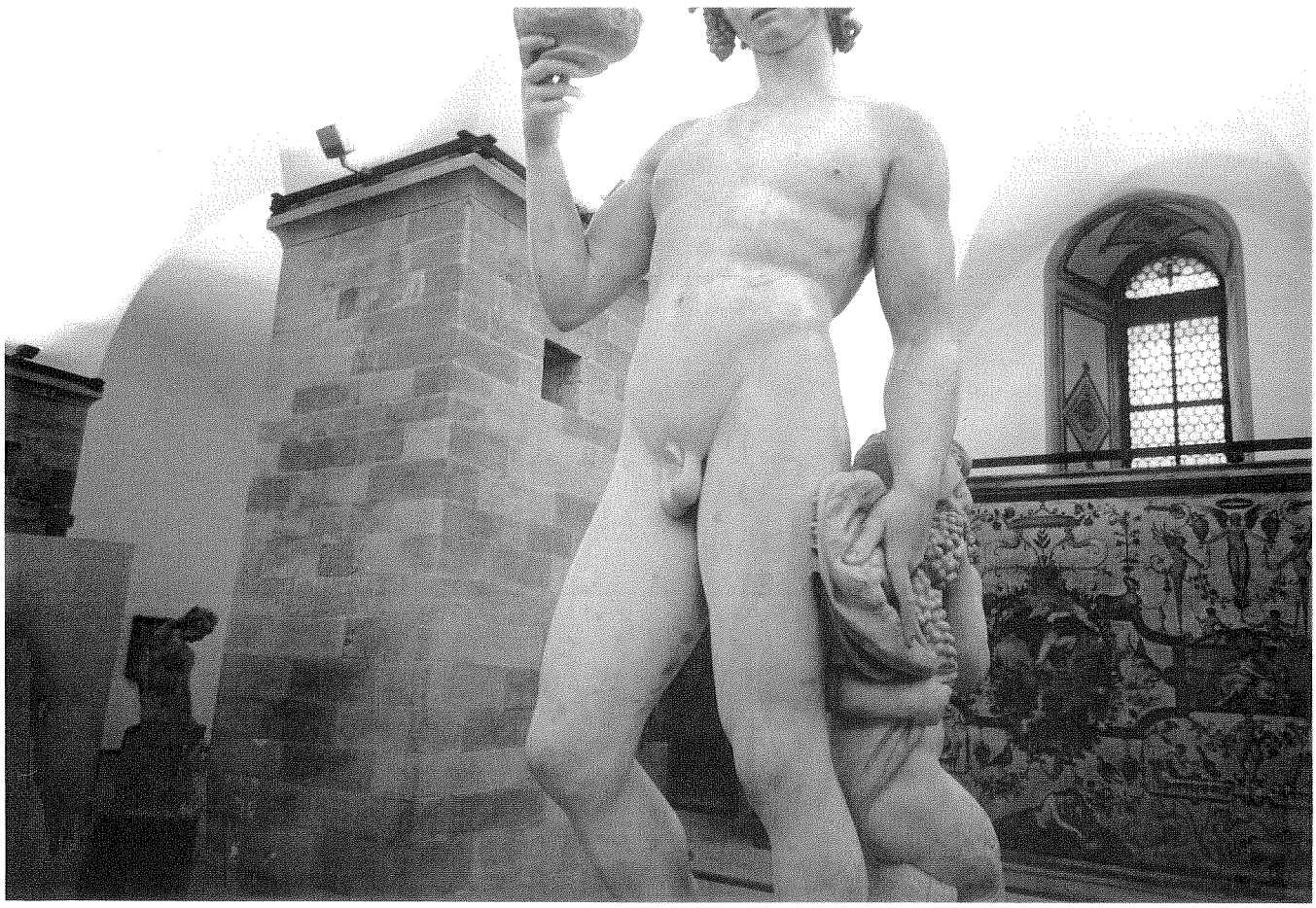


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1 San Biagio, Rome, 1986.

All photographs by Alice Wingwall

2 Flavian Amphitheater, Rome, 1986.



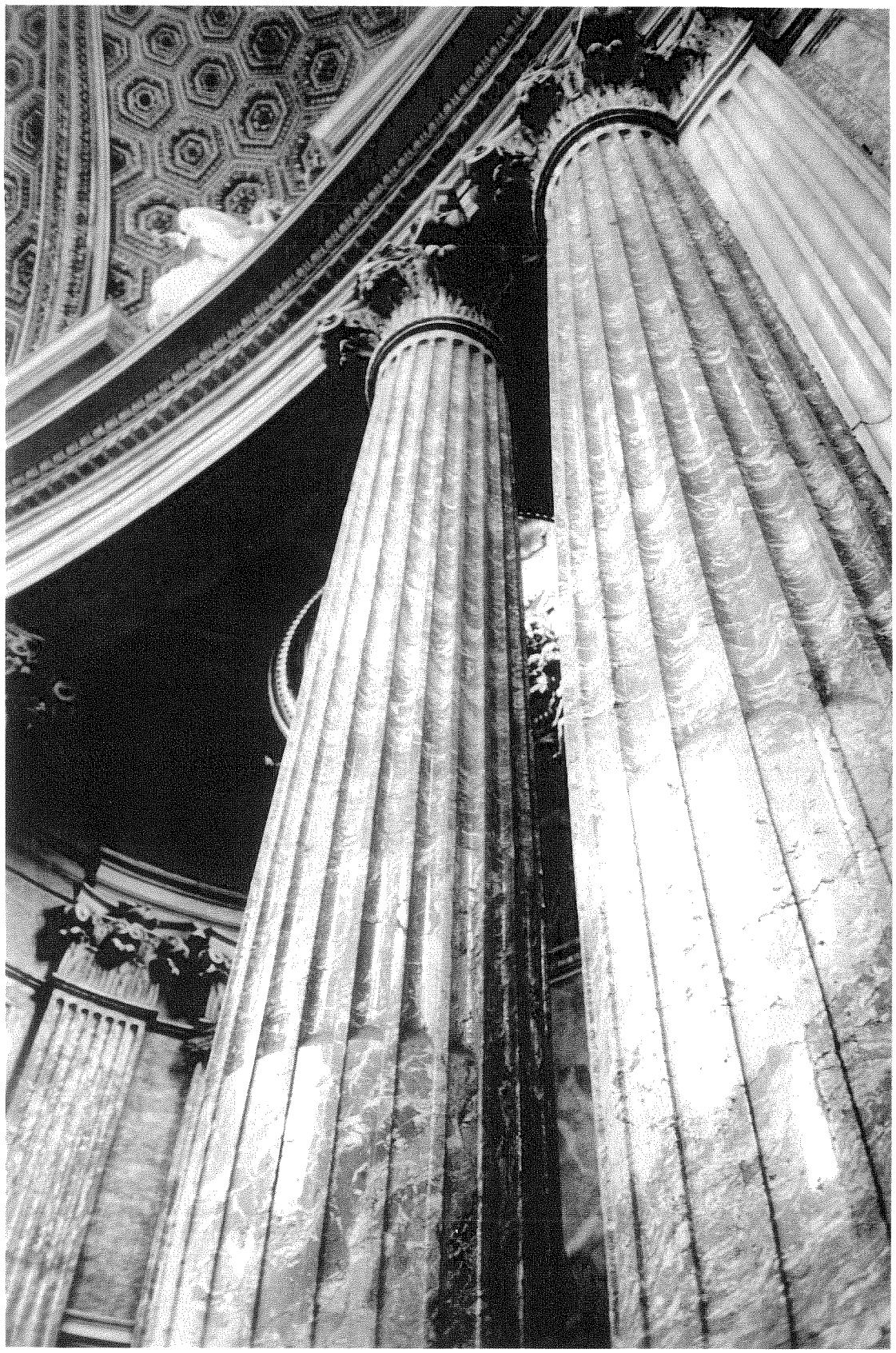
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3 Bargello, Michelangelo Bacchus, Florence, 1986.

4 Santo Spirito, Florence, 1986.



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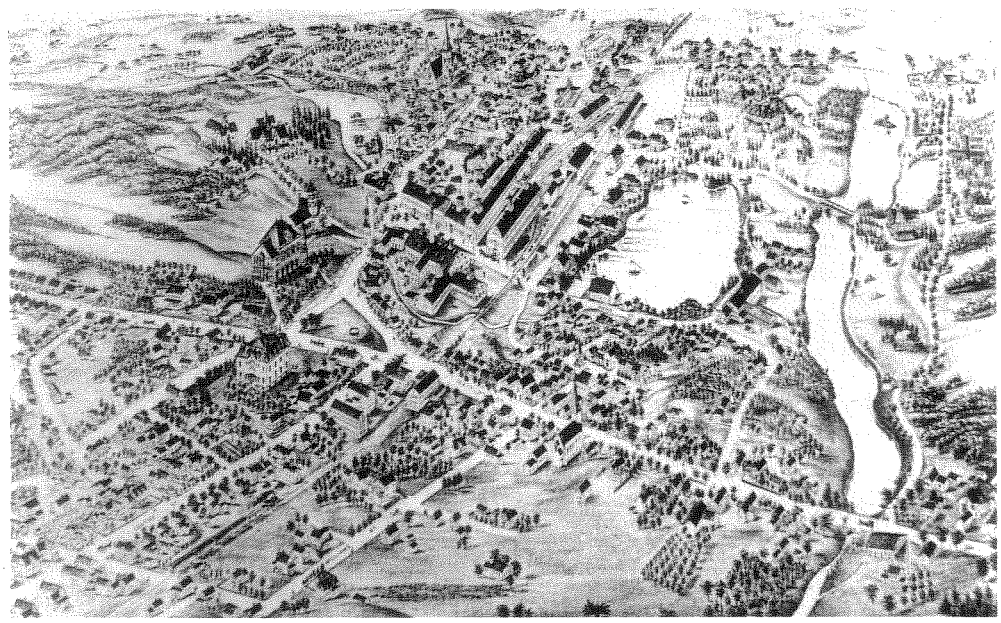
5 S. Andrea al Quirinale, Rome, 1986.

Architecture and Philanthropy in a Model Company Town

John Garner

The Ames family industrial settlement at North Easton, Massachusetts, operated for nearly a century as a "model company town." A single enterprise owned the site, operated the factories, and rented the housing. North Easton demonstrated the benefits of a free enterprise economy, where Yankee ingenuity and capital investment were successfully combined. Labor was also an ingredient, and its accommodation figured prominently in company housing and other buildings. Like Hopedale and Ludlow, Massachusetts; South Manchester, Connecticut; Peace Dale, Rhode Island; and Fairbanks Village, Vermont, other model company towns in New England, North Easton's industrial dynasty, whose resident members owned much of the town and directed its growth, took a benevolent and paternal interest in the welfare of their workers. The town's appearance, in architecture, and landscaping, contrasted favorably with other industrial settlements.[1]

The bestowal of philanthropy accounts for this difference. What distinguishes North Easton and other towns of its type are the manner and extent to which philanthropy was used. Gifts in the form of buildings, statues, and parks gave them an unusual and sometimes attractive aspect. However seigniorial or emblematic of one family's



1 Bird's-eye view of North Easton, Massachusetts, showing factories at center, 1881. Courtesy of the Easton Historical Society.

wealth, these gifts had a salutary effect in that they provided a useful service for the public at large. Between the last decades of the nineteenth century and the onset of taxation on corporate and individual income after 1913, expressions of philanthropy became commonplace. They represented the denouement of America's great industrial fortunes. Though the "Robber Barons" rarely gave back in proportion to what they took away, many of them felt compelled to leave some lasting reminder of their wealth for the betterment of those less fortunate. Andrew Carnegie suggested a "doctrine of stewardship," encouraging his fellow millionaires to share their fortunes.[2] But even with Carnegie's magnificent bequest, the construction of a single library or museum was but a minor addition to the wholesale building of a town or city. For a small place like North Easton, whose founders were hardly in league with the Carnegies, Fricks, or Rockefellers, the concentration of one family's philanthropy in one location could appear overwhelming. The Ames's gifts, for example, included two schools, a library, town hall, railroad station, Unitarian church, Methodist church, landscaped town square, and cemetery, not to mention the scholarships and endowments given in support of these facilities. Tastefully chosen and impeccably maintained, their benefactions were even more striking when compared to the grim reality of most industrial towns.

The two best known designers of the period, H. H. Richardson and Frederick Law Olmsted, collaborated on projects commissioned by the Ames family for North Easton. Richardson was the architect of Boston's celebrated Trinity Church and other distinctive buildings in the Northeast and Midwest. He also designed the monument near Sherman, Wyoming, commemorating the participation of the Ames family in building the Union Pacific Railroad. Olmsted had won acclaim for his metropolitan parks in New York, Boston, and Montreal. That two such talented figures should collaborate on the buildings and grounds of such a small town was unusual, and it indicates the lengths to which the Ameses were willing to go to bring the best minds to bear on the design of North Easton.[3]

Located twenty-three miles south of Boston and bounded by the intersections of Routes 123, 138, and 106, North Easton presently serves as a residential satellite to the larger city. As a division of the unincorporated town of Easton, it is home to fewer than two thousand people, settled within an area of a half-mile square. Were it not for a cluster of vacant factories, the town might be mistaken for a farming community adapted to the needs of a few wealthy families as a place of retreat. Upon entering the town from the east, one cannot help but notice the large, parklike estates of the proprietors. After turning onto Main Street, the Unitarian church comes into view, exhibiting in its appearance the patronage of generous subscribers. This Victorian response to a fashionable retreat is dispelled, however, by the factories and nearby workers' cottages, suggesting that the community's wealth derived from local industry and was not imported. Yet North Easton was never a typical industrial town. No regular grid of streets divides the town into rectangular blocks. Topographic features would have hindered such a layout, had such been desired. Instead, North Easton developed slowly, one street at a time, without the benefit of land speculation. Today, in spite of its industrial past, the town has acquired an attractive and well-cared-for landscape, reminiscent of a "picturesque" suburb.

But less than a century ago, North Easton remained isolated and self-supporting, inclusive and self-regulatory. This independence came directly from the Ames family and their shovel and tool company. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the company greatly expanded, and, beginning in the 1850s, new factories built of stone provided a substantial addition to the town. Later, in the 1880s, when the Memorial hall, library, and railroad station were completed, a certain dignity and refinement accompanied the bustling factories to draw attention to the center of town. On a small scale, North Easton symbolized the virtues of American industrialism by demonstrating that manufacturing with proper supervision could be undertaken without spoiling the environment.

What attracted Oliver Ames (1779–1863) to North Easton was an abundance of water. Starting in 1803, he began purchasing rights to the Queset River, enlarging a millrace and reservoir and improving an earlier dam. Water was important to industry and of utmost necessity to the Ames development. Water operated the great tilt-hammers that tempered and forged the shovel blades and other implements manufactured by the Ames Iron Works, later renamed Oliver Ames and Sons. It added to the visual amenity of the site as an inviting topographic feature seen in the contours of the river and mill pond, about which the first factories and houses were located. Water also contributed to the distinctive bend in the handles of Ames shovels. When the straight hickory handles were placed in

holders above the dam, they acquired a bend from the force of the spilling water that added tensile strength to the neck of the tools where the blades were fitted. The curve became a trademark and contributed to the durability and resilience of the product.[4]

In time, Ames tools set a standard for quality and garnered awards at national trade fairs. During the Gold Rush of 1849, Ames shovels were supposedly in such demand and so highly prized that they were traded in gold dust. Twelve years later, the Civil War brought President Lincoln to call upon the Ameses, personally, to furnish shovels for the Union cause. It is a tribute to the company that the great quantity of shovels made then and after apparently did not affect the high quality of workmanship that went into their manufacture; for in both the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia of 1876 and the Columbian Exposition in Chicago of 1893, Ames shovels received first prizes for excellence.[5]

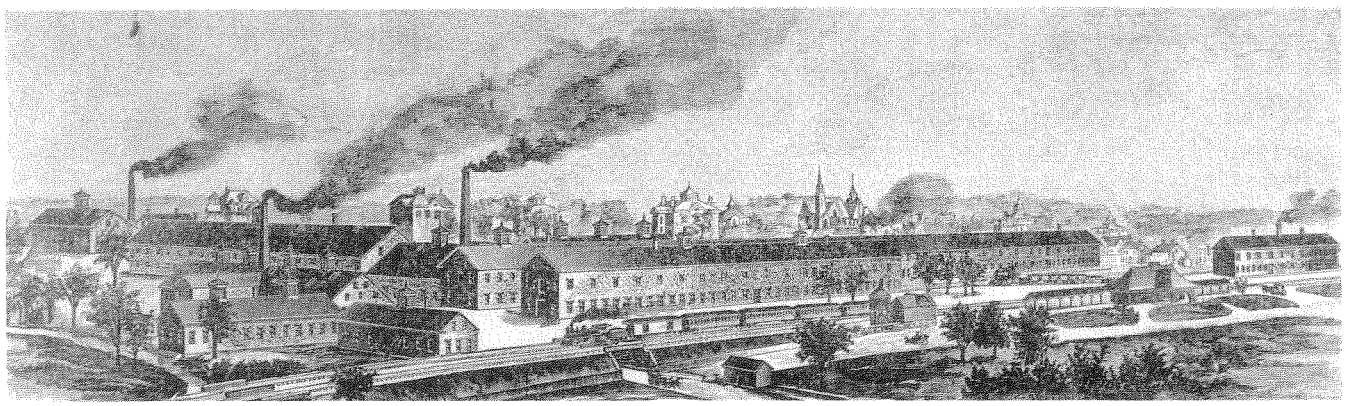
In 1844, Oakes (1804–1873) and Oliver Jr. (1807–1877) were brought into partnership with their father, and what had been a small, regional business began to grow and prosper. A census of Massachusetts industry for 1845 listed Oliver Ames and Sons as having manufactured shovels, spades, forks, and hoes valued at $136,000; having an operating capital of $40,000; and employing seventy-two workers. By 1855 production had soared to $600,000 a year, and ten years later, profiting as a supplier to the Union, the figure had risen to $982,500. In 1875 the value of products sold amounted to $1,500,000[6]. Oliver Ames and Sons followed the pattern of other New England manufacturers, such as those making textiles and textile machinery, which realized sizable profits following industrial expansion during the second half of the century. Such success had considerable impact on North Easton, as profits were plowed back into the town with the construction of new buildings.

The importance of the company in proportion to its surroundings can be judged by comparing property assessments. In 1853, Oliver Ames and Sons was appraised at $75,610. Twenty years later, its valuation had escalated to $1,879,886 and represented nearly 82 percent of the total valuation of Easton township, including the nearby villages of South Easton and Easton Center. Though the Ameses did not own everything, their holdings were extensive, and their improvements were everywhere in evidence.[7]

The factories of Oliver Ames and Sons were strategically located to take advantage of the resources of the Queset River. At the outset, the operation was largely handled in two shops at the lower end of the reservoir. In March of 1852 a fire destroyed the original frame buildings, and to replace them the Long Shop was built. Located near Main Street, west of the reservoir, it established what soon became the heart of the town. Rising two stories high and extending 539 feet in length, this great stone building dominated the industrial site, and it determined the material and style of the added wing and the surrounding shops, which were erected in 1857. The factories were structurally designed with load bearing walls thirty inches thick. The interior frame was timber post and beam, spanning twelve feet on center.[8] The only adornment to these simple, massive buildings were the bell cotes placed atop the long saddle roofs. These stalwart granite structures prefigure in a way Richardson's handsome buildings that were erected nearby.

At ten minutes before five o'clock each morning, six days a week, the bell in the cupola of the Long Shop wing would announce the beginning of a new day. At seven o'clock work commenced and continued until the bell rang again at six.[9] For those who labored in the factories, the work day lasted ten hours with an hour off for lunch. But despite the pervasiveness of the routine and the long hours and arduous work, one employee testified: "In all my long service in the shovel factory, a period of 36 years, I never knew Oliver Ames to give his workmen a rough or uncivil answer or to treat them otherwise than with kindness and respect."[10] The industrial environment of North Easton and the fact that the Ameses were resident landlords may have had a mitigating effect.

Paramount to the image of a company town is the housing of its employees. Oliver Ames and Sons constructed houses for their growing work force. By 1855 at least twenty-eight double-family dwellings were owned by the company. There were also tenements for single men. That year the number of workers employed was 330. Because the majority of the workers were native to the area, they lived in private housing or in neighboring villages. But thirty years later, the number of dwellings had increased to approximately sixty-four and the work force expanded to 500. Who lived in the company housing? Most likely, the newcomers, the foreign born, who by 1885 made up a quarter of the population. Of the immigrants, half were Irish; the remainder came from Sweden, England, Canada (Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island), and other countries. After the turn of the century, a few emi-



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2 Factories of Oliver Ames and Sons at North Easton, Massachusetts, with the Old Colony Railroad Station on the right. From Shovel Shop letterhead, ca. 1885.

grated from Lithuania and Portugal.[11]

The earliest tracts of company houses were located on the east side of Mechanic Street and the south side of Pond Street. These units were erected between 1844 and 1855. Some of the oldest are still standing and can be identified by their narrow cross gable roofs. In appearance they resemble inexpensive versions of Carpenter Gothic cottages, minus the ornamentation. Others are equally plain, though all were well constructed. After the fire of 1852, carpenters were brought in from other towns to construct the new shops, and it seems reasonable that a part of their labor may have been diverted to the construction of houses. It was during the winter of 1852 that the two houses now on Oliver Street, just east of the tracks, were moved across the ice-covered reservoir and used for the families of company foremen. They remain today in surprisingly good condition. Oliver Street was completed in 1857, and a number of units were placed there. Mechanic, Lincoln, and Elm streets were also developed for company housing, and the tract along Elm was once known as "Battle Row." According to a lifelong resident who lived in one of the houses, the name derived from fights that periodically broke out between the families. Reportedly, the Irish were often at fault. Battle Row still remains, though its occupants are no longer company employees.[12]

Success in business stimulated other interests as the family fortune began to mount. Because of their wealth, the family assumed greater responsibility for those who came under their purview, while taking a hand in local affairs. Eventually, this sense of obligation led to politics and notoriety. Oakes represented his district in the U.S. Congress in 1862, and, in 1864, through the persuasion of friends in Washington, including the President, he undertook to help build the Union Pacific Railroad. This historically famous commission is a story in itself, one that deeply involved both sons and had political repercussions in the Credit Mobilier scandal of the 1870s. Their interest in railroads stemmed from a need for shipping goods from North Easton. At first, this entailed the completion of a spur from North Easton to Stoughton, Massachusetts in 1855. Until then, Oliver Ames and Sons had to rely on wagons and teams to deliver their goods to the nearest freight depots of the Boston and Providence Railroad. Oliver Jr. became president of the Easton Branch Railroad Company; in 1866, he was named president of the Union Pacific, and he continued to work actively in North Easton while also serving as

state senator. However, it was his brother Oakes who promoted the Union Pacific through the sale of debentures in the Credit Mobilier construction company, some of which may have been used to purchase votes from fellow congressmen. Following an investigation, he received a Congressional censure. All the while, both brothers maintained residences in North Easton, where Oliver Jr. managed the railroads and Oakes reigned as "King of Spades."[13]

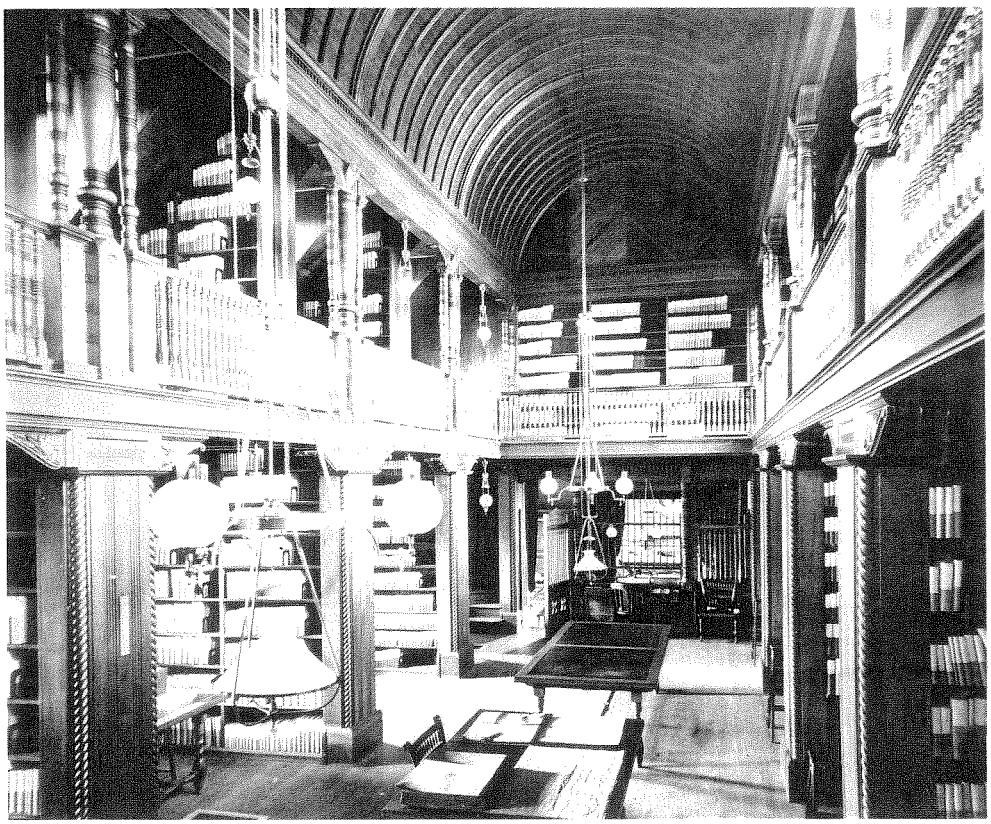
The third generation of Ameses, Oliver Jr.'s son, Frederick Lothrop (1835–1893), and Oakes's sons, Oakes Angier (1829–1892) and Oliver III (1831–1895), represents the beginning of a change in the family's relationship to the town. The founder and his sons were men of humble beginnings who were accustomed to hard work. They labored alongside their employees, albeit in a supervisory capacity. Even their first houses were simple frame structures similar to those of their employees. But with the sons of Oliver Jr. and Oakes, a gradual distancing from the workers became evident, as the scions of a now wealthy family prepared for lives as capitalists and not mechanics. They made the most of their new social standing. Frederick L. and his cousins were the first of the family to graduate from college. While Oliver Jr. did attend North Andover Academy for a year, his son, Frederick L., graduated from Harvard. There was also a difference in deportment among the employees. When Oliver Jr. died, the workmen felt his loss personally:

> The town was silent when he died, March 9, 1877. The shops and schools were closed. A special train from Boston brought about forty business and railroad men of national importance, but it was to the employees of twenty-five to fifty years' standing that his remains were confided to be carried to the grave.[14]

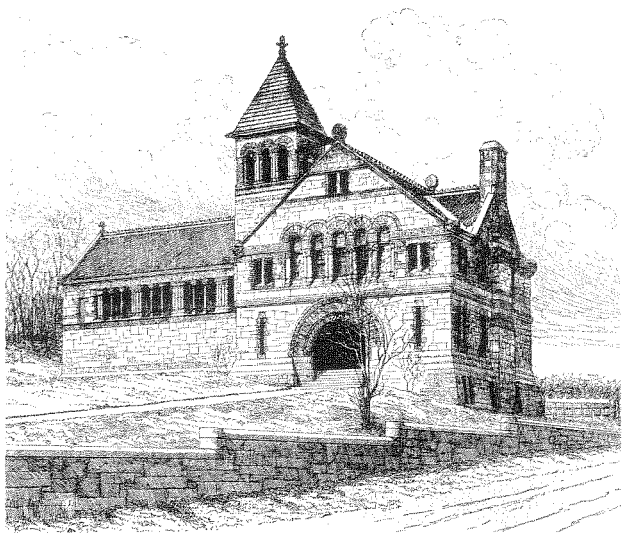
By contrast, no workman served as pallbearer to his son, whose body was conveyed in an elegant hearse and whose funeral was attended only by immediate family.[15] While the old hands were respected and occasionally honored, the newer employees—largely immigrants—were patronized and subordinated. Though by the 1880s the relationship had changed between the Ameses and those they employed, the philanthropy of the family became more evident.

Since 1844, a part of the town's responsibility lay in support of an alms house. Only a portion of the cost of maintenance was funded by public tax; the remainder came from gifts by local families, usually in the form of groceries and other necessities. A ward of the town was not entitled to much, but the Ameses apparently made life bearable for a half or more of these dependents. An account of each was annually recorded with Oliver Ames and Sons, more often than not, cited as benefactor. To what extent the Ameses considered their charity a matter of noblesse oblige poses an interesting question. It may have been done to curry political favor. However, that would seem unnecessary when so many in North Easton relied on the family anyway for their livelihood. More likely, they considered their support of the poor a business responsibility, since some undoubtedly were former employees, their widows, or children. By the time the third generation assumed their responsibilities, this sense of obligation on the part of Frederick L. Ames extended from local matters to a regional commitment. As president of the Home for Incurables, an officer in the Massachusetts School for the Blind, the Perkins Institute, McLean Insane Asylum, and Children's Hospital, and a benefactor of the Unitarian Society, he accepted charitable service as a social obligation by members of his class.[16]

Another form of philanthropy practiced by the Ameses, one prominently displayed, though characteristic of model company towns, took substance in the architecture of North Easton. Several prominent buildings were completed within a five-year period. Although the erection and subsequent administration of these structures were supervised by Frederick L., Oakes A., and Oliver Ames III, the building bequests either came from their fathers or were made in their name. The year for the first of these gifts, 1877, is significant for marking the date that Oliver Ames and Sons, having already achieved industrial success, began a program of town improvement. In sharing its wealth with North Easton, the family offered the town not only valuable and much needed cultural resources but lasting reminders of their benevolence. Occupying a prominent site and handsomely designed in the most fashionable style, the Romanesque Revival, the Ames Free Library was no mere repository; it was a monument, and it was the result of careful study not in just architecture but as regards the purpose it was designed to serve. The fact that a library was first among the buildings given to North Easton is significant. The reason no doubt was influenced by the third generation's insistence on the importance of education. That public libraries provided an answer to cultural improvement for the masses was popularly discussed among leading industrialists and educators of the period. Only twenty years before, in 1854, the Boston Public



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Library had opened its doors. Though by the turn of the century, Carnegie's great bequest would make possible the construction of libraries throughout America.[17]

The gift of a library did not come as a sudden philanthropic gesture. Rather, it was a deliberate benefaction on the part of Oliver Ames, Jr. The terms were carefully spelled-out in his will:

> I give and bequeath to my executors hereinafter named, the sum of $50,000 in trust, for the construction of a library building, . . . for the benefit of the inhabitants of the town. . . . Not more than $25,000 of the above sum of $50,000 shall be expended in the purchase of the land and in erecting the library building, and $10,000 only shall be in the first place expended for books, maps, and furniture for the library, and the remaining $15,000 shall constitute a permanent fund.[18]

The final expenditure, however, may have amounted to $80,000 or more. The care with which the library was erected and maintained is a testament to the family's resolve to faithfully execute his wishes. To oversee the library, its appropriations, and staffing, a library committee was designated and headed by an Ames. The first library catalog, compiled in 1883, suggets that the first volumes purchased were

intended to help readers with learning or improving a skill. The library thus encouraged self-improvement with a practical application as a goal and in this way promoted the assimilation of middle-class, Protestant values. The Bancroft Library in Hopedale, Cheney Hall in South Manchester, and the Hazzard Memorial Hall in Peace Dale, also founded during this period through the philanthropy of resident industrialists, operated at first with similar motives.[19]

The architect was H. H. Richardson (1838–1886). Frederick L. Ames approached Richardson in September of 1877 about the commission. The recently completed Trinity Church and the attention accorded its architect probably determined his choice. By this date, more than other members of the family, Frederick L. was busy in Boston managing investments in banks, securities, and real estate. Surely he rubbed elbows with Richardson and other young professionals, probably through social contacts. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, author of a monograph on Richardson's architecture, mentions that "F. L. Ames . . . was one of his [Richardson's] immediate circle of friends," and by 1880 the two were "close friends."[20] Both attended Harvard, but five years separates their dates of graduation, so it is unlikely that they met in college. It

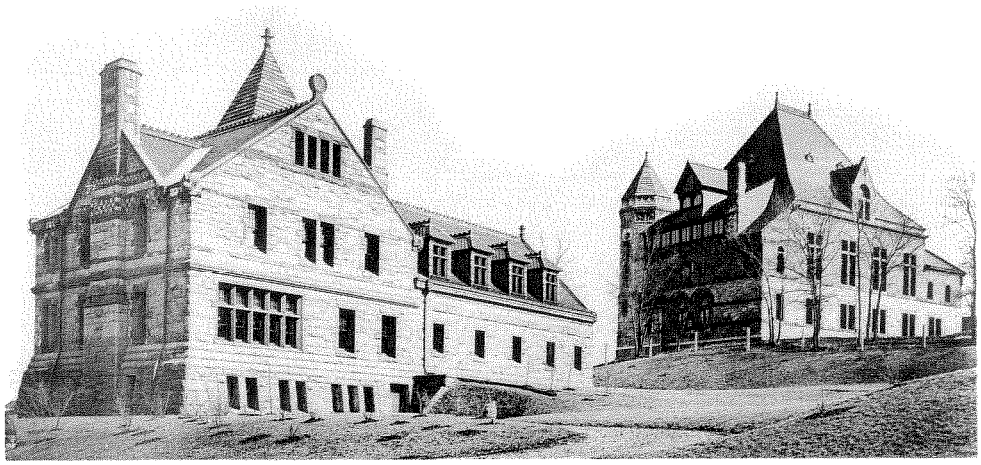


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3 Interior of Ames Free Library. From *Ames Memorial Buildings*, Monographs of American Architecture, 1886.

4 Ames Free Library (1877–1879), designed by H. H. Richardson, from the driveway off Main Street. From *Harper's Weekly*, 1884.

5 Oakes Ames Memorial Hall, designed by H. H. Richardson. From *Ames Memorial Buildings*, Monographs of American Architecture, 1886.



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may be that Frederick L. selected Richardson solely on the basis of aesthetic appreciation for his work. Whatever the reason, this first commission subsequently brought eight more.

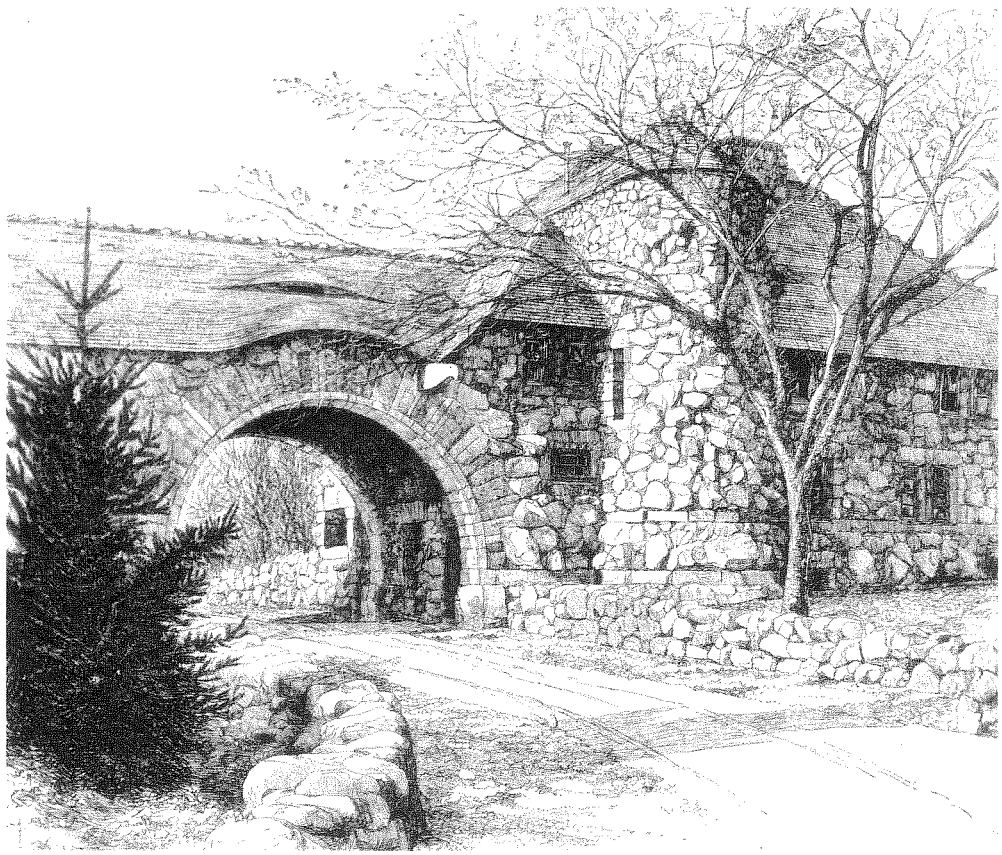
Although Frederick L. initiated relations between the family and Richardson, his cousin, Oliver III, later governor of Massachusetts (1886–1890), also commissioned Richardson. As the library was nearing completion, the architect was engaged to design the Oakes Ames Memorial Hall. On March 15, 1879, he wrote in his diary that he had taken Richardson to visit the proposed site and that the architect thought it "was superb" and would be sending along some sketches. Although Oakes Ames bequeathed a sum of money to be used for the improvement of North Easton, claims on his will delayed action. Oakes A. and Oliver III initiated the idea of a memorial hall and then paid for the structure with approximately $40,000 of their own money. This act of filial piety came at a time when attempts were made to vindicate their father's name. Outside of North Easton, the family had suffered abuse from the Credit Mobilier investigations. But by 1880 the air had begun to clear as the family made good its debts to shareholders of the Union Pacific Railroad. More recently, an investigation of the affair indicates

6 Ames Free Library (foreground) and Oakes Ames Memorial Hall (from the rear). From *Ames Memorial Buildings,* Monographs of American Architecture, 1886.

7 Rockery on Main Street. Photograph by John Garner.

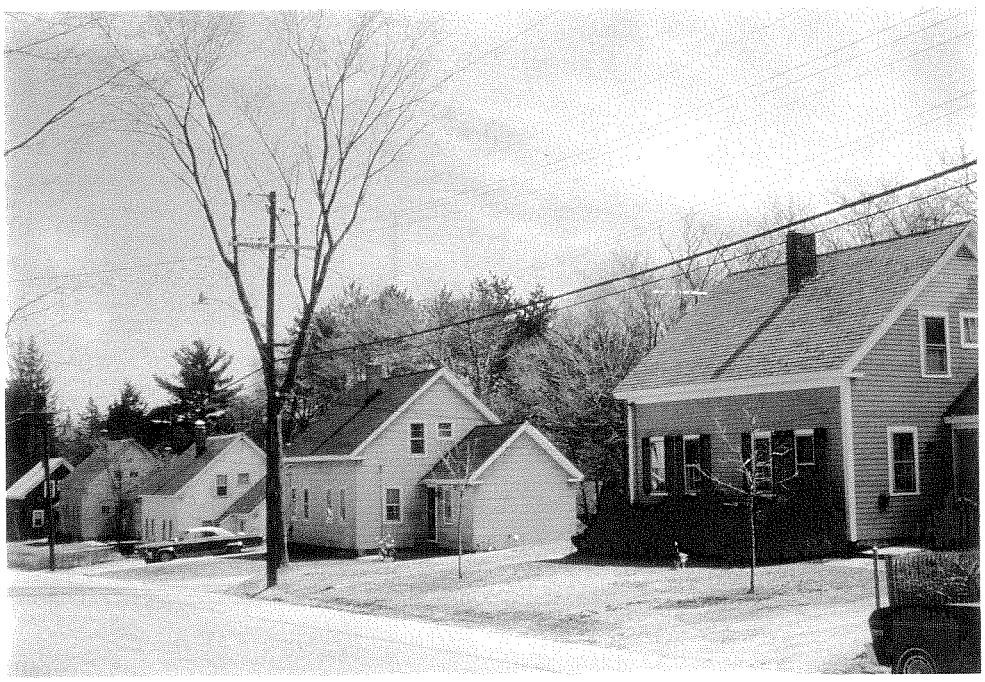
that Oakes Ames may have been an unwitting scapegoat, receiving more blame than deserved. Apparently, those who knew him thought highly of him and helped his sons rectify his image. At the dedication of the memorial hall, four to five hundred people traveled from Boston to North Easton by special trains, and such dignitaries as Governor John Long, Senator George S. Boutwell, Judge Thomas Russell, and the Reverend Edward Everett Hale were among those who spoke. Letters were received from many of the late Mr. Ames's friends, including a number of state and federal legislators. So overwhelming was the turnout that within two years time a "Resolution" passed the Massachusetts Legislature, absolving Oakes Ames of misconduct.[21]

Again, as in the example of the Ames Free Library, the family established a committee, known as the Oakes Ames Memorial Hall Association, to oversee the management of the building. Unfortunately, the building never fulfilled the promise for which it was intended. Easton Center had built a town hall just a few years before, and the selectmen and town officers hesitated using the new facility. The association did manage, however, to make money through private rentals; for the *Town Reports* of the 1880s record an average income of approximately



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8 Ames Gate Lodge (1880–1881), designed by H. H. Richardson, facing Elm Street. *Harper's Weekly*, 1884.



9

9 Company housing on Elm Street. Photograph by John Garner.

$650 a year for the use of the hall. Because of the building's proximity to the library and the Oliver Ames High School, it also served as lecture hall. Oliver III, who had long been a member of the school board, funded an annual lecture series held in the hall to supplement instruction at the school. Scholars from Cambridge and elsewhere were brought down to North Easton to share their knowledge with the students. The memorial hall was intended to serve two purposes: first, it offered a forum for popular speakers, and, second, it provided a place where town officers could deliberate. If it succeeded in the first, and for a time it did, it failed in the second. For most of its history, the building has sat vacant.[22]

What the Oakes Ames Memorial Hall has continued to provide is an impressive starting point for Frederick Law Olmsted's (1822–1903) brilliant landscape ensemble, extending from the rock ledge of the building's foundation across Main Street to the "Rockery," a romantic cairn on a triangular piece of land at the center of town. What had previously been an irregular and undistinguished site was transformed into a visually pleasing, well-integrated composition of building and ground through the artificial placement of stone and plant materials. Olmsted's involvement with

North Easton continued throughout the 1880s, since he also was retained to landscape the grounds of the railroad station designed by Richardson, located just south of the factories. And in 1888 he was engaged to make improvements to the estate of Frederick L., where Richardson had earlier built the Ames Gate Lodge and Gardener's Cottage.[23]

The Ames Free Library, the Oakes Ames Memorial Hall, and the Oliver Ames High School represent the family's building philanthropy and, together with the railroad station and residences, contribute to the special character of North Easton. With the exception of a new high school built in 1896, the architectural program at North Easton was largely completed by 1885. The town continued to grow and prosper until the Great Depression. The economic crisis forced the company to reorganize in 1931 and combine with other plants to form the Ames-Baldwin-Wyoming Co.; in the following year, its headquarters were moved to Parkersburg, West Virginia. In June of 1930, an auction was held to dispose of the forty-one remaining double-family houses owned by the company. The reason given for the sale was published in a pamphlet describing the properties:

> To live in one place and work in another is com-



10

10 Company house off Elm Street. Photograph by John Garner.

mon practice. Many of the occupants of the Company's dwellings are employed elsewhere. Many of the company employees live elsewhere. Men are anxious to own their own homes.[24]

During the thirties, many company towns, especially in New England, sold their housing to get out from under the burden of maintaining unproductive investments.

Life in company housing was not as grim as one might think; the units were painted and otherwise maintained. "The houses of the hands," though similar to those in other factory towns, were enhanced "by the dispensation of olive and Indian red, which has succeeded the vivid glare of 'white with green blinds,'" reported *Harper's Weekly* in 1884. Inducements were made by the Ameses to keep the grounds tidy and attractive, and Oliver III provided from his private funds $2,000 annually for the planting of shade trees. Across Main Street from the library was the Oliver Ames and Sons' Store, a company store that operated solely on a cash basis. The family was careful in seeing that the religious denominations of their employees were represented by giving generous donations for the construction of churches. If an employee became ill and needed special attention, the "Ames Bed" was provided free of charge at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston.[25]

Nevertheless, the question remains to what extent the workers actually participated as members of the community. Much of the housing remained with the company until operations ceased, denying to many the social and political privileges of property ownership. Management of the factories was a family affair, and apparently none of the mechanics rose to positions of authority. The town hall was a monument—a memorial—not a chamber for addressing democratic principles. Even the children of the employees occasionally rebelled against the "superior" though alien education afforded them by acting disrespectfully.[26] For them and their families, the attractive surroundings represented, at best, a passive environment. Despite the philanthropy of the younger Ameses, their tenants were largely bystanders, caretakers, and not participants.

Much of nineteenth-century North Easton remains today. The present image of the town, what one sees when driving along Main and Elm streets, has changed little in appearance. What is missed is the activity that once surrounded the shops and depot. The hammering of iron and the tooting of train whistles are sounds that have long since been silenced. Instead, there is a quiet such as experienced in remote and exclusive suburbs, interrupted only by the tumbling waters of the Queset River. Though the company divested its real estate many years ago, this former company town retains a pleasant environment, having avoided the scars of industrial abuse. A balance was early struck between the demands of a growing industry and the maintenance of a pleasant landscape. The responsibility for keeping this balance lay with the Ames family.

Each generation of the family contributed to North Easton. The first Oliver acquired the site, made improvements, and established the reputation of the company. The second generation, Oakes and Oliver Jr., expanded the operation and became involved in local and national affairs. The family fortune was made during their lifetimes. Their sons, Frederick L., Oakes A., and Oliver III completed the task of building North Easton. Their philanthropy was pragmatic and took substance in the architecture and landscaping of Richardson and Olmsted. The memorial buildings were more than examples of personal indulgence or self-righteousness. The money invested in them might easily have gone elsewhere. Though named in honor of the Ameses, the buildings were intended to serve the workers and their families, to educate and inspire them, regardless of the outcome. The philanthropy displayed in North Easton represented in a small way an attempt to mitigate the negative image of industrial development during the "Age of Enterprise."

Notes

1 Descriptions of North Easton during the nineteenth century do not refer to it as a "company town," a phrase usually associated with extractive industries until the strike at Pullman, Illinois in 1894. See John S. Garner, *The Model Company Town: Urban Design Through Private Enterprise in 19th-century New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), ch. 1.

2 See Robert H. Bremner, *American Philanthropy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), ch. 7; Andrew Carnegie, "Wealth," *North American Review* (June 1889), pp. 653–64; Merle Curti et al., "Anatomy of Giving: Millionaires in the Late 19th Century," *American Quarterly* (Fall 1963), p. 419.

3 Richardson's architecture at North Easton has been carefully examined by Larry J. Homolka in "Henry Hobson Richardson and the Ames Memorial Buildings" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1976) and by Robert F. Brown in "The Aesthetic Transformation of an Industrial Community," *Winterthur Portfolio,* No. 12 (1977), pp. 35–64. Descriptions of the Richardson buildings at North Easton are also included in the reprint of Marianna Griswold Van Rensselaer, *Henry Hobson Richardson and His Works* (New York: Dover, 1969),

Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *The Architecture of H. H. Richardson and His Times* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1966), and Jeffrey Karl Ochsner, *H. H. Richardson: Complete Architectural Works* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982).

4 See William L. Chaffin, *History of Easton, Massachusetts* (Cambridge: John Wilson and Son, 1886); "Ames Shovel and Tool Company History Since 1774" (a typewritten chronology of the company's achievements reproduced by the Southeastern Technical Vocational High School, 1968); Brown, op. cit., p. 35.

5 *Ames Shovel and Tool Co., Catalog No. 152* (Boston: privately printed, 1926), p. 3.

6 Francis De Witt, *Statistics on Information Relating to Certain Branches of Industry in Massachusetts* (Boston: Wm. White, 1855), p. 75; Oliver Warner, *Statistics on . . . Branches of Industry in Massachusetts* (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1866), p. 67; Carroll D. Wright, *The Census of Massachusetts, 1875, Vol. 2, Manufacturers and Occupations* (Boston: Albert J. Wright, 1877), p. 85.

7 *Valuation of the Real & Personal Estates in the Town of Easton as taken by the Assessors, May 1, 1853* (Taunton, MA: C. A. Hack, 1853), schedule 2; *Reports of the Selectmen, Treasurer, and Assessors, of the Town of Easton, Mass.* (Taunton, MA: C. A. Hack & Son, 1874), schedule 2 (referred to hereafter as *Annual Reports*).

8 Chaffin, op. cit., p. 595. A field survey conducted by the author indicates the interior supports are 8-by-8-inch posts with 6-by-14-inch beams.

9 Winthrop Ames, *The Ames Family of Easton, Massachusetts* (Boston: privately printed, 1938), p. 129.

10 "Oliver Ames at North Easton—A Gentleman who knows by Experience what Hard Work is," *Boston Journal* (Oct. 28, 1886), p. 11.

11 H. F. Walling, *Map of the Town of Easton, Bristol County, Massachusetts* (Boston: Dept. of State Maps, 1855); De Witt, op. cit., p. 75; *Annual Reports*, 1856, 1886; Chaffin, op. cit., pp. 666–667.

12 Chaffin, p. 595; interview between Katherine Gustafson and John S. Garner, Ames Memorial Library, North Easton, March 8, 1972.

13 Carl L. Smith, "Chronological History of the Steam Railroads in the Easton Area," (unpublished paper delivered to the Easton Historical Society, September, 1969, Ames Memorial Library, North Easton). The classic study of the Union Pacific is John P. Davis, *The Union Pacific Railway: A Study of Railway Politics, History, and Economics* (Chicago: S. C. Griggs and Co., 1894); see also Charles Edgar Ames, *Pioneering the Union Pacific, A Reappraisal of the Builders of the Railroad* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969), ch. 11–12.

14 *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. 1, Allen Johnson, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), p. 254.

15 "Obituary, Frederick Lothrop Ames," *Harper's Weekly* (September 1893), p. 915.

16 Leverett Saltonstall, "Memoir of the Hon. Frederick Lothrop Ames, A.B.," *The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Transactions, Vol. 1* (Boston: Colonial Society, 1895), p. 261.

17 Michael H. Harris, "The Role of the Public Library in American Life: A Speculative Essay," *University of Illinois Graduate School of Library Science, Occasional Papers*, No. 117 (January 1975), pp. 3–21.

18 *Annual Reports*, 1879, p. 83.

19 Ochsner, op. cit., p. 68; Harriet H. Ames, ed., *Ames Free Library, North Easton, Massachusetts, catalogue with compilation* (Boston: privately printed, 1883); Garner, op. cit., ch. 3.

20 Hitchcock, op. cit., pp. 197, 202.

21 Winthrop Ames, op. cit., p. 48; Charles Edgar Ames, op. cit., p. 541, 551; *Oakes Ames 1804–1873, A memoir, with an account of the dedication of the Oakes Ames Memorial Hall, at North Easton, Mass., Nov. 17, 1881* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1883).

22 Hubert Howe Bancroft, *Chronicles of the Builders of the Commonwealth* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1891), pp. 680–681; "Report of the Oakes Ames Memorial Hall Association," *Annual Reports*, 1886–1889; Richard A. Powers, "Easton Grew with Ames Family through the Years," *Boston Globe* (November 29, 1964), p. 35.

23 Chaffin, op. cit., p. 688; Brown, op. cit., pp. 44–48, 55; also see Walter L. Creese, *The Crowning of the American Landscape: Eight Great Spaces and Their Buildings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 195–196.

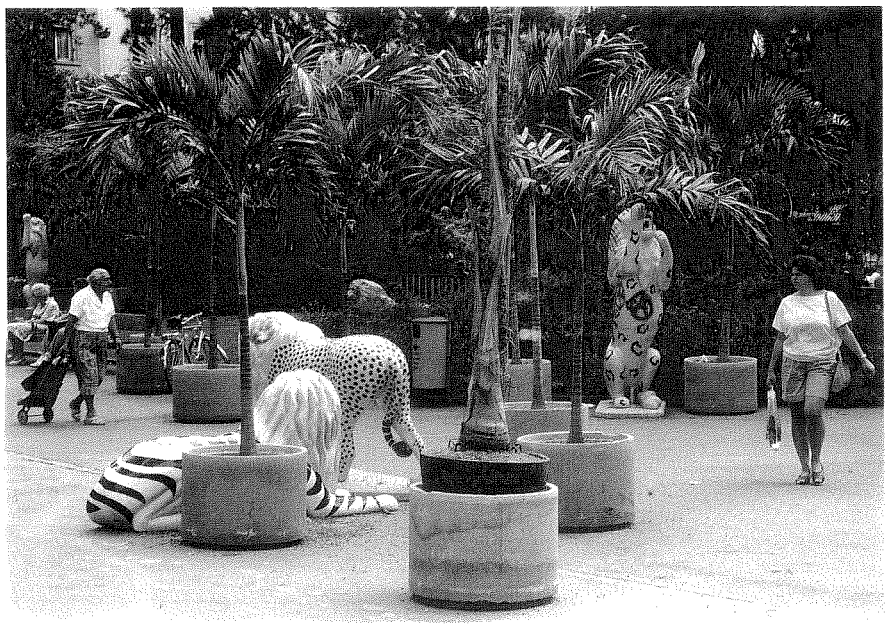
24 *Forty-one Desirable Properties–In a Very Attractive Village, at North Easton, Mass.: To be sold on the Premises, Thursday, June 19, 1930, at 11:00 a.m.* (Boston: Samuel T. Freeman & Co., Auctioneers, 1930).

25 "A Picturesque Village," *Harper's Weekly* (February 2, 1884), p. 73; "Oliver Ames at North Easton . . . ," op. cit., p. 11.

26 *Annual Reports*, 1877, p. 9.

Lion Street

Joyce Earley Lyndon



Four hundred lions have taken over the main street in Zürich, the Bahnhofstrasse. Famous for its luxury shops, its banks, and its avenue of lime trees, the Bahnhofstrasse, built 1867–1885, runs from the central railway station to the lake, is 1300 meters long, on average 25 meters wide. It is contained by five-story facades (with receding penthouses), ninteenth-century to postwar modern.

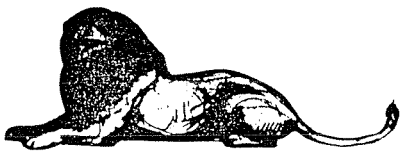
Early in June 1986, a visitor leaving the railway station by the southwest entrance is surprised to meet a lion coming in. The lion is the city's emblem, and there are stone lions on some of its buildings, but this one is life-size, grey, with white ribs; and he was not there last week.

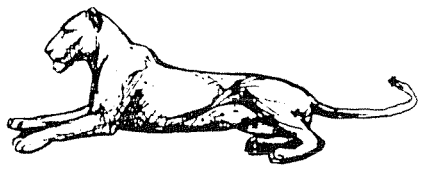
Down in Shopville, a busy underground center beneath the taxis, trams, and cars that swirl around the south front of the station, two lions are romping around the popcorn stand. A few days later, they are replaced by a soft-ice queue.

Continuing up the escalator into the pedestrian street, the visitor meets lions strolling in patches of shade under the lime trees, sitting up, cat-like, on two-story telephone boxes, leaping through freestanding poster boards, posing on ledges over classical entrances.

Outside a department store that sets back one block from the Bahnhofstrasse behind a small park with pine trees, lion families are playing under potted palms. Others

All photographs by Joyce Earley Lyndon





leap through hoops, along the upper stories of business houses, balcony to balcony. A lion has adopted a family on a corner (sculptor EM'77; parents in dark angular metal, 1½ times life size; child with "12" on his backpack).



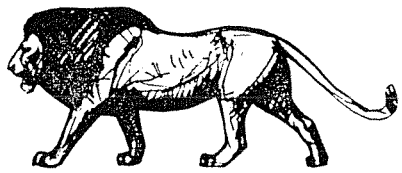
Four school children sit on the ground in the street with a teacher to draw lions, diverting the foot traffic. Patrolling in Max Bill's granite frames are three public lions—all red, all yellow, all blue, no logos. Small children are tentatively scratching and patting them; one boy sits underneath, growling through the front legs.

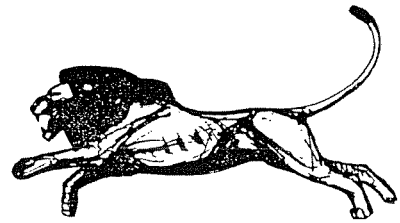
Some animals have their sponsor's name and reference number written inconspicuously on them, postage-stamp-size. One has "MAO." One has large brown spots, like coffee beans. Outside a photographer's shop, a lion has a cameraman up a tree; the man, head down under a cloth, is aiming an old movie camera for a close-up. Travel bureau cats are landscape-painted; a jeweller's cat is gold-plated; another has a gold watch and chain; a red lion is guarding Credit Suisse with a hammer and sickle.

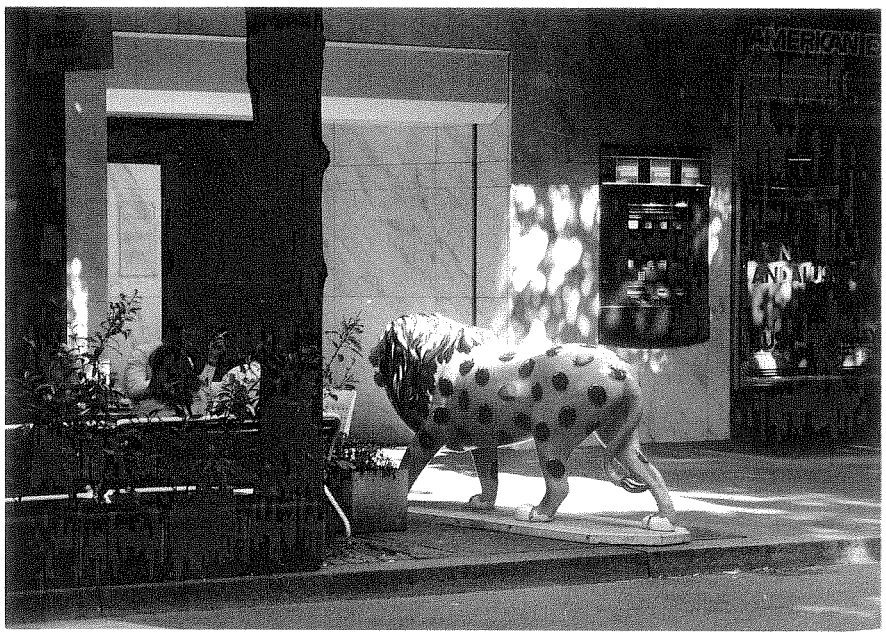


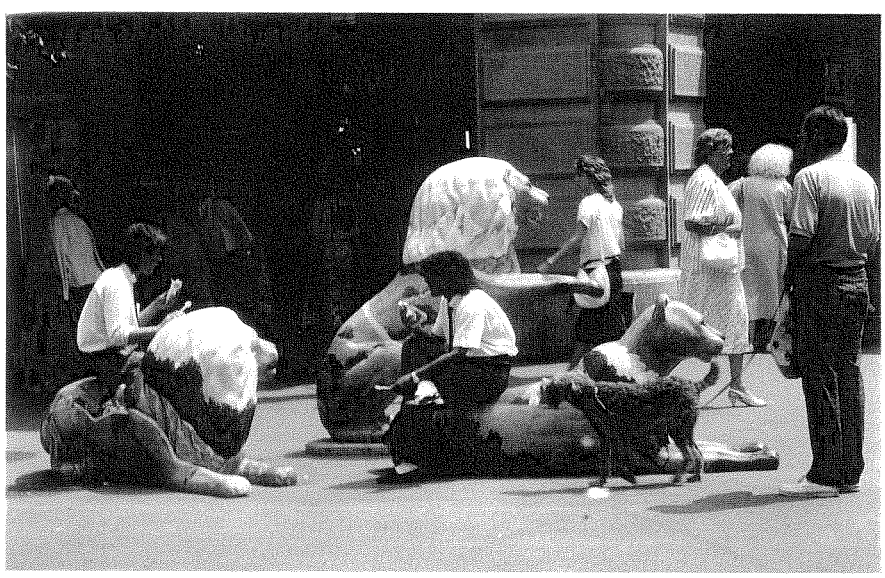
Outside a famous café, proclaiming "hand-made chocolates," a dandy, vanilla-yellow coat with curly cream wig and a cherry on top, holds out his right paw (the Swiss are meticulous hand shakers). A woman alone, in a beige coat, stops and studies him, decides not, and walks seriously on.

The lions are changing the codes of the street. People are less restrained,





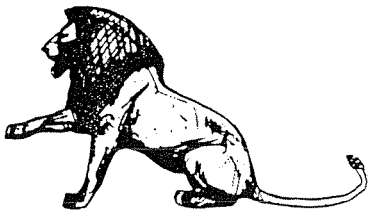




less guarded (which could be dangerous; there are trams running three-quarters of the street's length, in both directions, and a few cars easing out of underground lots or crossing at lights). The scale has changed. Instead of the usual streams of persons leading small dogs, there are streams of smaller persons. Lions jolt the imagination onto new tracks. Suppose, for instance, there were real lions and no humans in the street; all those carefully planned shop windows would be wasted. From everyone's point of view, it is the humans who make the street lively and successful.

A week later, the lions have been adopted. Absent-minded humans pat them in passing. The noise level has gone up. The higher pitch of young voices is noticeable, and there are many more children, not walking as usual with their parents, figuratively on leads, but riding, three at a time, on lions, lying along the manes, putting their hands into toothy mouths. (Some dental repairs have been required). Adults, patient, amused, standing around a five-lion carousel turned by child power; pushing your favorite animal is as popular as riding him.

At intervals along the street, many groups of three or four older children (numbers limited by request) are sitting on the ground, drawing. Some passers-by, men more often than women, stop to look at the drawings and exchange comments, delaying the work but adding to a general bonhomie.





At the street cafés, watching humans looking at lions seems to be as popular as watching humans looking at each other. Tourists line up to take photographs of their favorites from prime spots; the view of the ace in striped T-shirt and sunglasses is from the center of the tramlines.

The lions are the Bahnhofstrasse's contribution to Zürich's 2000th anniversary. The project was initiated and financed by the Zürich Bahnhofstrasse Association and its 157 members, representing owners and business interests in the street. Their chief display designers put forward the idea of using decorated lions.

Research, design, and execution of the lions was by Fabrik Atelier am Wasser, Zürich. They are made of Polystyrol, in six postures. After painting, each animal is unique, so that visitors in the street have a sense of expectation and are drawn along from one incident to the next. The most popular are those where the designer had accepted the lion as a creature and worked with his form and character. In contrast, the public tends to pass by with barely a glance those where the form has been used as a mere block for artwork. The small amount of damage done by the public to the lions is repaired immediately by FAW, on site or at its factory.

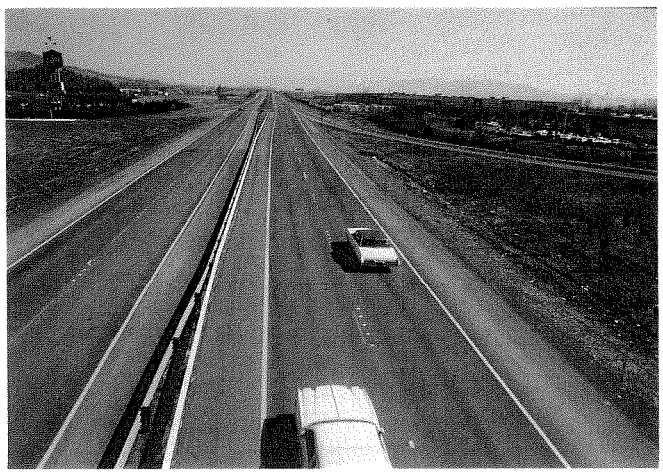
The lions add something for everyone. Small children especially enjoy short play experiments, with parents nearby. And as there are so many lions, there are only a few children at each play area; the children add to the liveliness of the street without taking it over.



When the celebration is over, at the end of August, those lions not privately owned, or reserved for purchase, are to be auctioned. Then what?

McUrbia: The 1950s and the Birth of the Contemporary American Landscape

Kenneth I. Helphand



1

In the film *Back to the Future* (1985), Marty McFly takes an automotive time-machine trip back 30 years to 1955. His journey began in the parking lot of Twin Pines Shopping Center. He arrives in the barn of Twin Pines farm. He discovers his suburban neighborhood, Lyons Estates, just under construction, in an open field. Downtown has first-run movie theaters and is thriving. The film recounts his struggles to return home to the future. Richard Corliss of *Time* says, "The choice of year is canny, for 1955 is close to the historical moment when television, rock 'n' roll and kids mounted their takeover of American culture."[1] In the mid-1950s our physical as well as our social environment changed: the contemporary American landscape was born.

Landscapes are the products of the aspirations of previous generations. We live within the dreams and desires of our ancestors. In order to understand landscape change and evolution, it is instructive to look at their formative periods. For it is then that options are present, ideas are crystallized, and precedent is set. The recent past has been a time of acceleration in the rate, scale, and scope of environmental transformation. We live much of our lives in a landscape created by the generation immediately preceding our own. The legacy of those changes now structures the character of much of the modern American landscape.

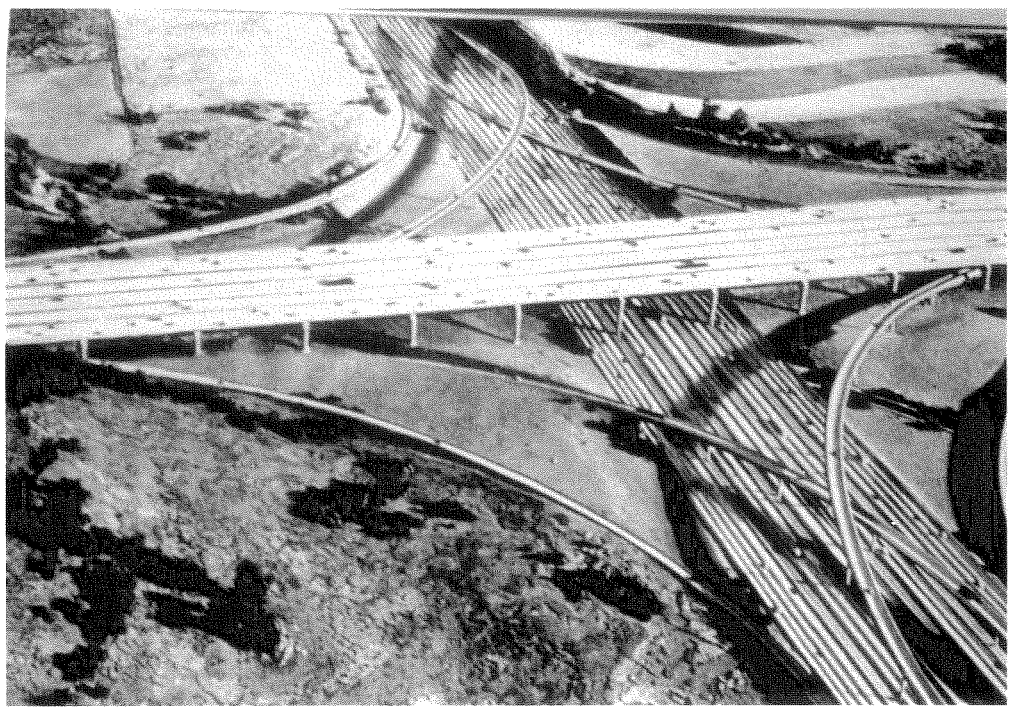
In the 1950s there was a confluence of events that were the harbingers of dramatic changes to the American scene. I have chosen to describe here seven phenomena, which date between 1954 and 1957, that symbolize our contemporary environment and affect us daily: (1) the interstate highway system, (2) McDonald's, (3) Disneyland, (4) the architecture of Victor Gruen, (5) the Boeing 707, (6) the westward migration of the Dodgers and Giants, and (7) the growth of suburbia. (My descriptions of the last two are more personal, but they are still real cultural landmarks.)

These phenomena have contributed to our comfort and convenience, but often with dramatic and unanticipated adverse effects. They are a product of our affluence, but might our riches have been better spent? They are modern, but are extensions of deep-seated cultural concerns and imperatives: individualism, mobility, and a quest for the diverse desires of the American dream. They are all immediately identifiable, yet symbolic of a modern placelessness. These are emblems of Daniel Boorstin's "everywhere community," those aspects of our society which unite us by their ubiquitous presence and a common bond of

1 **Freeway,** Springfield, Oregon.

shared experience.[2] This is the baby-boomer's landscape. These are not the elements that make a Utica, Eugene, Tucson, or Tampa distinctive, but the elements that link them in cultural bondage.

These developments are part of the postwar world. They have been much copied and have spawned their own changes. A decade after World War II and at the conclusion of the Korean War, America's affluence and productivity were redirected toward a consumer society. A generation deprived by economic depression and war was seeking a life for which it had paid its dues. It deserved the comforts which were coming. A nation which turned out tanks and even whole ships in assembly-line fashion could certainly do the same for television sets, washing machines, even houses.



2

1956: Interstate Highway System

The interstate system is the final stage of American highway development. As the automobile became more prevalent, faster, and ultimately essential to our way of life, the landscape was modified to accommodate this new necessity. The automotive highway was built on a foundation of paths, tracks, pikes, and roads of a horse and pedestrian era. In the early period of automobile usage there were few environmental changes. The automobilist was an adventurer challenging territory and terrain. But soon changes came to the road itself: surfaces were made smooth and hard, roadbeds wider, curves broader. There was a whole set of accoutrements to accommodate the needs and desires of drivers, passengers, automobiles, and the road itself. Any stretch of road came to contain information for orientation, direction, and traffic management. Its signs, lights, and stripes became second nature. There were places to service the car and to serve the mobile populace. The landscape—urban, suburban, rural—became an automotive one.

The National System of Interstate and Defense Highways was the culmination of those efforts. The system is based on visions of a highway system first proposed as early as 1915 by the National Highway Association. The NHA compared its system proposal to the Panama Canal as a more economical and equally significant engineering achievement and source of national pride.[3] In 1925 a system of national highways was instituted, largely following this scheme and incorporating the system of national "trails" which had developed. The nation was made ready for the visions of Norman Bel

2 "The Crossing Point of Two Future Motorways," General Motors Futurama Exhibit, 1939 New York World's Fair, Designed by Norman Bel Geddes.

Geddes. His design for the General Motors futurama exhibit, displayed at the 1939 New York World's Fair, showed a nation in which the automobile was the dominant force.[4] It was a landscape of high-speed travel between dense towering urban clusters surrounded by suburban communities. The model was vivid and evocative and touched a resonant chord. Years later, while traveling on the highway, my mother told of visiting the fair; and, yes, the futurama, which was to be America in 1960, had in fact come to pass.

The highway system is now virtually complete. It is over 45,000 miles long, links every major city in the country, and with its appendages of beltways and beltlines is as dominant in the modern landscape as the railroad was in the nineteenth century. Stilgoe's metropolitan corridor was bypassed by what Peirce Lewis has called the "Galactic Metropolis."[5]

In 90 years the automotive landscape has become an increasingly autonomous environment, with its own character and culture. The interstate is the apogee of this trend. It is a self-contained system. When you are on it you are *on the road*. It has limited access, with its own visual character and infrastructure, and is developing its own culture of high-speed long-distance travel. There is now a national system of super-highways-freeways. This system is bigger, better, and faster, and it is free—without tolls, open, and unrestrained.

The interstate changed national and local transportation patterns. It made or broke towns as they were passed through, bypassed, or passed by. It radically transformed urban areas in building access on and off the system. Much of the urban trauma of the past decades has been with trying to come to terms with this dilemma. The interstate—the "I"—is now the "eye" through which we see much of the nation.

1955: McDonald's

In 1955 Ray Kroc's fast-food empire was inaugurated. It now has over 9,000 units in the United States and dozens of countries. One-third of all American meals are eaten out of the home, almost 20 percent of these at McDonald's. McDonald's is the single largest consumer of virtually all the products it purchases: beef, rolls, potatoes, mustard, ketchup, pickles, straws, even fish.

In its brief history McDonald's has gone through a series of stages representative of a transition from a roadside restaurant to a community institution and cultural symbol. McDonald's has been the industry leader, but its history also stands for that of other national fast-food franchises: Burger King, Wendy's, A&W, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Taco Bell, and Pizza Hut.

In its formative period McDonald's was exclusively a drive-in restaurant where food was bought to take out and consume in the parking lot. Seating was soon added. These early units have now become historic landmarks. The dual arches and tiled exteriors gave way in styling to the mansard roof prototype of a suburban community design. These places had ample seating, the benefit of television advertising, and a product rapidly becoming as American as apple pie. Ray Kroc has been called the Henry Ford of fast food, the entrepreneurial innovator who created an industry.[6]

By the late 1960s McDonald's had become a suburban community institution. In an interview in *Nation's Business*[7] in 1968, Kroc said, "We aim at the local family trade. When we look for a site, we count church steeples, rather than autos, signs of substantial family neighborhoods. That's where we get 90 percent of our business." Children's birthday parties began to be celebrated at McDonald's, and soldiers in Vietnam told of yearning for Big Macs.

The company diversified. The location of restaurants expanded. McDonald's International was organized to export the food and concept, its restaurants becoming embassies of the American way of life. Townhouse units, urban, often inner-city restaurants were built, and other new locations were added: shopping centers, hospitals, even toll roads. The American populace now expects to see arches on the horizon wherever it travels. They are a sign of predictability and even the comforts of home. As Boorstin has noted, America has created a novel environmental democracy, an "equalizing of times and places." McDonald's represents an extension of a standardized product into a standardized landscape, one which is mechanized, interchangeable, comfortable, convenient, and predictable.[8]

McDonald's has become an icon and international symbol of American culture as dramatic as Coke or blue jeans. The prefix "Mc" has entered our language as a symbol of the instant and inexpensive, the packaged and the pervasive.

1955: Disneyland

W. E. Disney's Magic Kingdom has been called America's "Main Street," "Mecca," "National Capital," "Versailles," a "Technological Cathedral," "The Town Square of Los Angeles," a "Potemkin Village," and "Utopia."[9] It is our key symbolic landmark, perhaps *the* site which represents modern America.

Disney was a media pioneer, first in film and later in television. Most of us under 40 watched Disneyland, the theme park in Anaheim, California, being built on

Disneyland, the television show. Each week the construction was featured: the steady rise of Sleeping Beauty's castle, the robot animals of Adventureland, the buildings of Main Street. Disney called his designers "imagineers." The designers of Disneyland were those who had worked on his films. Architects only came in later to make it all stand up.

Disneyland (and now Florida's Disney World) has become a place we are expected to take ourselves and especially our children. It has joined Washington, D.C., and the National Parks as a pilgrimage destination. Disney's "lands" are succinct representations of American ideals. At Disney World you arrive via a hi-tech futuristic monorail. You exit at a Victorian train station to walk down Main Street, USA. It is a small town in America's heartland in 1905, modeled on Marceline, Missouri, Disney's hometown.[10] This is an idealized Main Street, pristine, innocent, problem free. We are in a commercial version of an American pastoral. This is literally "the stage set for the American Dream," as Harold Rosenberg has described Main Street.[11] The time is just before we leaped into an era of technological development, when an automobile was still for joyrides, like traveling with toad in *Wind and the Willows*.

At the end of Main Street the choice of "lands" is open.



3



4

3 McDonald's—Classic Golden Arches.

4 McDonald's—Mansard Roof Design.



5

Looming over all is Sleeping Beauty's Castle, the crown of fantasyland and the emblem of the Magic Kingdom. Fantasyland is a nostalgic childhood world, cast largely with Disney characters or ones that he had made his own. Frontierland pays homage to America's Western ideal. History is still played out in mythic and idealized terms. Adventureland is a safe and manufactured excursion through an ersatz jungle. It is a journey where you can travel the world without leaving home. Tomorrowland is the land of the future, which will be bigger, better, more spectacular, where technology will solve any and all of our problems.

An advertisement for the opening of the Magic Kingdom in Florida said, "You get the feeling that nothing bad could ever happen here"—that was Disney's innocent utopian dream. His final concept was EPCOT, which opened after his death in much truncated form. It was originally conceived as an Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow—a place for people to live now, in Tomorrowland.

Disney*land* spawned Disney *World*. Their appeal is universal. They are America's most popular tourist sites. Even Khrushchev wanted to visit, and this prototype of theme parks was duplicated in Central Florida and has now been replicated in Japan. The dedication plaque

5 Disneyland's Main Street.

in the town square reads, "Disneyland is dedicated to the ideals, dreams and hard facts that have created America . . . we hope that it will be a source of inspiration to all the world."

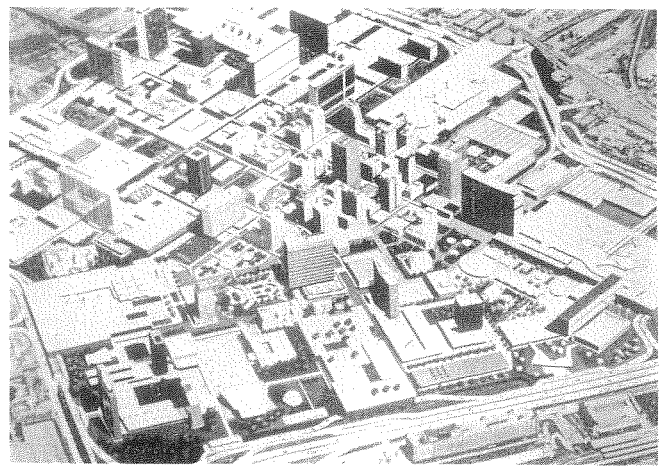
1956: Gruen

In the mid-1950s the Detroit architect Victor Gruen designed two landmark projects which became national models.[12] The first was Northland Shopping Mall, which when it opened in 1954 was the world's largest shopping center. The second was the 1956 plan for the central business district of Fort Worth, Texas, a plan characterized by an auto-free pedestrian core. Both projects were harbingers of things to come. They represented a growing suburbanization of the city and a corresponding urbanization of burgeoning suburbs.

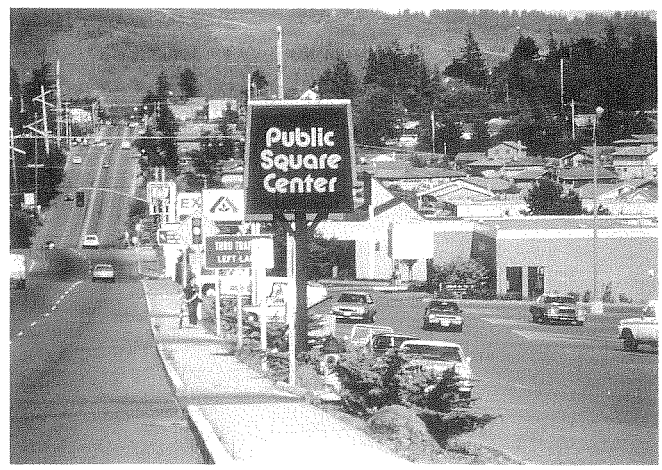
The suburban shopping center and the downtown mall are logically paired, although too often they are looked at in simplistic, criminal terms, one "stealing" business from the other. They respond to two forces. On the one hand are forces of decentralization, elements which scatter people and events in the landscape: television, telephone, computers, automobiles, single-family housing. On the other hand are forces of concentration, which intensify development in a single place, the economies of clustering and shared space. We end up with new concentrated complexes dispersed across the landscape. Of course neither is completely new, but they became commonplace in the mid-1950s and subsequently they have come to dominate our communities.

The suburban shopping mall sits within a pyramidal hierarchy. At the bottom are neighborhood shopping centers containing supermarkets, drugstores, and video rental outlets, while at the apex are mega-malls with hundreds of stores, places that are striving to be new suburban town centers. In these environments most of the shopping that takes place is recreational, a leisure-time activity. In addition to shops these places have food bazaars, commercial recreation, multiplex movie theaters, programmed events, and the *image* of urban diversity, but now in a safe, sanitized, climate controlled, and socially regulated environment.

What of course made these places possible was the automobile and the development of suburban communities. They also have a connection to the Fort Worth plan. In that plan Gruen proposed a center-city revitalization based on urban renewal—tearing down the old and obsolete city core and transforming it into a modern pedestrian environment. Cars were to be stored in giant garages at the periphery of the pedestrian zone with direct access from a freeway ring road. This did



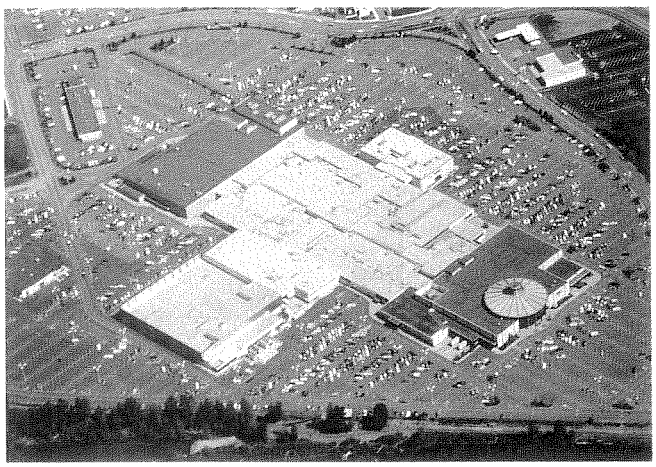
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6 "Revitalization Project Plan for Core of Fort Worth, Texas," Fort Worth Plan, Victor Gruen, 1956.

7 Public Square Center, Shopping Center, Coos Bay, Oregon, 1985.



8



9

8 **Valley River Center,** Regional Shopping Center, Eugene, Oregon.

9 **Waikiki,** Honolulu, Hawaii.

not actually happen in Fort Worth, but it did become the reality for hundreds of cities. There were several models for this change including the postwar reconstruction of European cities *and* the suburban shopping center. It has been often asked what happened to Main Street, and as Francaviglia has noted, Main Street is alive and well—inside suburban shopping centers, where we can still stroll past a rich diversity of stores and shops, see people we know, and feel a sense of community.

1957: The Boeing 707

In 1957 transatlantic jet service was introduced by Pan Am to the United States. The following year domestic jet travel began. (In 1952 the British had begun jet service between London and Johannesburg.) What is the significance of this development? Think of what it made possible. It brought most of the world into "home range." It became possible to travel almost anywhere within a day.

The exotic and remote had the opportunity of becoming familiar and accessible. Look at Hawaii, which had been an elite resort for those with sufficient time and money to cruise to the islands. No longer. An elite haven became a mass resort. The tropical isles were added to the mountains and the seashore as vacation possibilities for the masses. This has happened to hundreds of places. Combined with expanded automobile, bus, and truck traffic, this was the final nail in the coffin of the American railroad—particularly its passenger business.

1957: Dodgers and Giants Move West

In 1957 Walter O'Malley moved what was then the most profitable team in professional sports from its ancestral home at Ebbets Field in Brooklyn, New York, to Los Angeles, California. The New York Giants soon followed suit, emigrating to San Francisco. New York baseball fans were devastated by this betrayal. They were the first professional sports teams to be located outside of the Northeast and Midwest. It was a dramatic symbol of a shifting cultural dominance from the industrial east to the west and to the as yet uncoined sunbelt. The new metropolises of the west and south were on the rise: Phoenix, Dallas, Atlanta, Denver, Los Angeles, Seattle, Houston, Miami, and more would soon sport teams and domed stadia to house them.

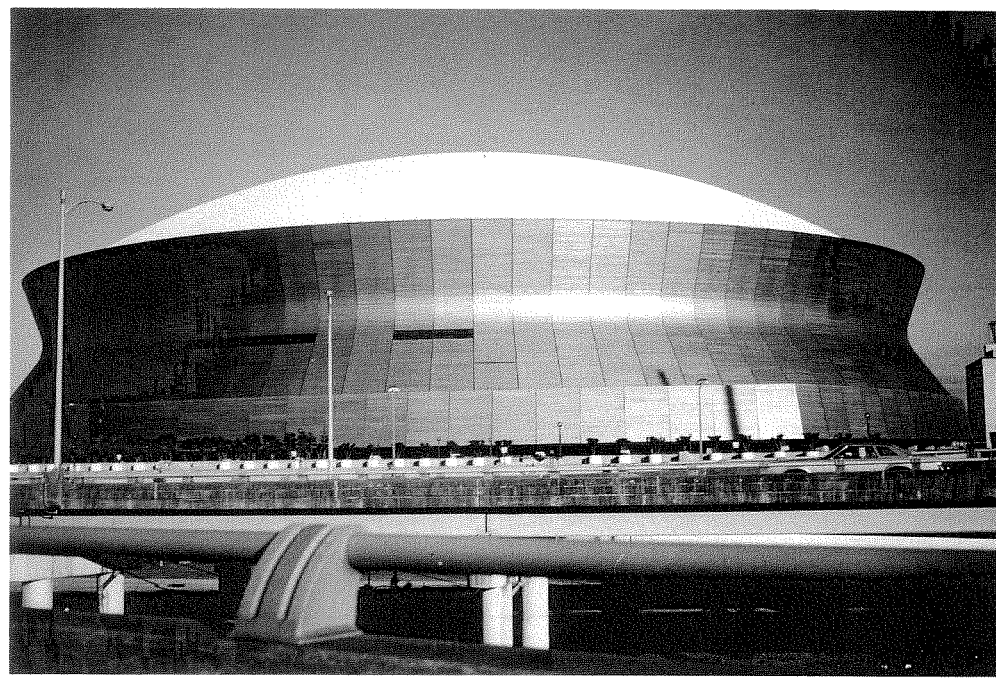
I was a child in Brooklyn at the time, living in a neighborhood that counted its fame by the number of Dodger homes.

1956: The Growth of Suburbia

One cannot affix an exact date to the postwar suburban explosion (although

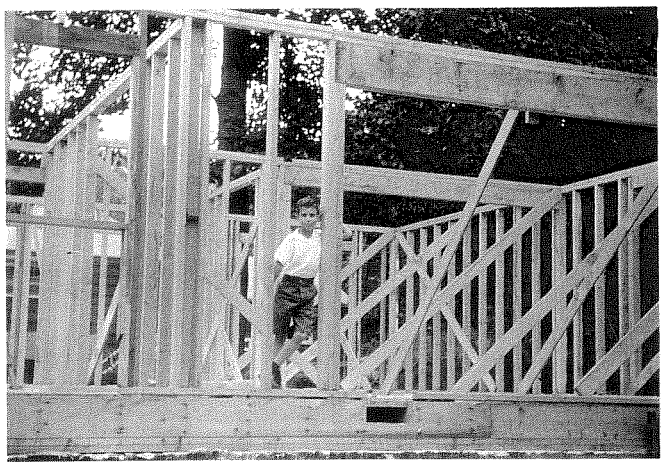
one should consider the mortgage and housing loans of the Federal Housing Administration and the Veterans Administration). But the 1950s was a decade of suburbanization. In 1956, after a year of "house-hunting," my family also abandoned Brooklyn. It was the end of a quest. On Friday and especially Saturday nights my father would go out for the paper, bring it home, and begin the perusal of the book-size real estate section. We had a nice apartment in a nice, safe neighborhood, and I was in a good school. But like most of the neighborhood we were seeking something else: the ideal location, the proper home, the best schools, the easiest commute.

On the weekend we ventured forth. As a nine year old I learned the nuances of model homes, and my eyes were seeking the signs which announced "Open for inspection." There were numerous walks through raw landscapes with bull-dozer tracks still visible, careful treks across planks over lawns just seeded. We learned to look for indicators. Were there any trees left? Were all the houses the same? Was the house made of brick? At an early age I knew the difference between Sheetrock and plaster, oil, gas, and electric heat. I learned an entire building taxonomy of recreation rooms, family rooms, dens, baths, half-

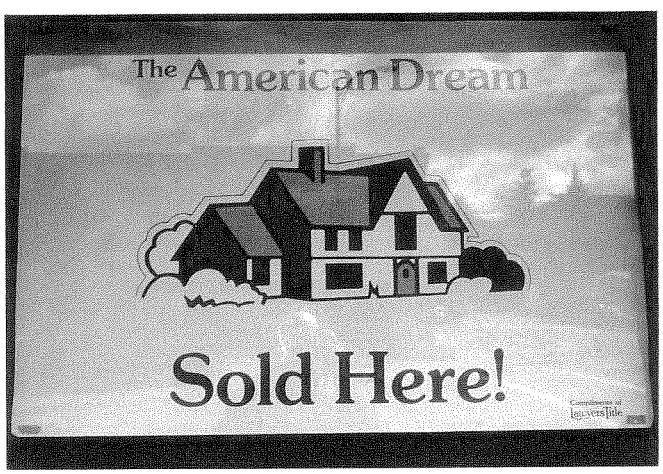


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10 Superdome, New Orleans, Louisiana.



11



12

baths, studies, master bedrooms, and bedrooms. Most importantly—would I get *my own?* I didn't. I climbed around basements and up into attics and played in the streets. I learned about school systems and about what "kind" of neighborhood it was and what "kind" of people lived there (or would live there). When it became serious, my grandfather and uncle, both carpenters, would join us for final inspections and comments.

Years later these sites would bring instant recall when I passed by them: Briarcliff Manor, Edgewood, Ardsley, Eisenhower Drive. Eventually we settled in Colonial Heights, on Longvue Terrace, and sought the golden mean. We had a house built for us, but it was without benefit of architect. It was a tract house without a tract, located in an older neighborhood. It was complete with a two-car garage, family room, basement, patio, three bedrooms (my father used one as a study), a brick bay window, and lots of trees on its quarter-acre. We regularly drove to the site, as house-hunting gave way to a weekend ritual visit to watch the house grow. It began as our "hole" and the name stuck. We counted trees that would be saved and watched the progress from foundation through framing. We came, brought family, imagined our lives, and documented the progress in photographs. Slowly the rooms and our places materialized. It was a joy. On my first day at the new school I was awed by immense desks that weren't bolted to the floor, an auditorium that converted into the gym and cafeteria, and the expanse of lawn that fringed the low-slung school.

We had joined the mass suburban exodus, leaving apartment house for private home, forsaking the subway for the car, the street for the yard, the old neighborhood for the future. We were just one family of millions. Eventually my brother and I would forsake the east as well and follow the Dodgers west.

All of these seven events and phenomena are still with us, the interstate, McDonald's, Disneylands and six flags over everywhere, the malls of city and suburb, jet travel, the boomtowns and cities of the west, and suburbia. The events, the places, and the people I have described in these seven phenomena were the vanguard. It is now all commonplace. Do we now dwell in "McUrbia"?

Notes

1 Richard Corliss, "This Way to the Children's Crusade," *Time* (July 1, 1985), p. 62.

2 Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York: Random House, 1973).

3 "Panama Canal vs. the National Highways," National Highways Association (June 1912).

11 **The author,** age 9, Yonkers, New York, 1956.

12 **Advertisement in Real Estate Office,** Ashland, Oregon, 1985.

4 Norman Bel Geddes, *Magic Motorways* (New York: Random House, 1940).

5 John R. Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor: Railroads and the American Scene* (New Haven: Yale, 1983) and Peirce Lewis, "The Galactic Metropolis," in *Beyond the Urban Fringe, Land-Use Issues of Non-Metropolitan America*, ed. by Rutherford H. Platt and George Macinko (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), pp. 23–49.

6 George Will, "The Art of the Hamburger," *Newsweek* (February 20, 1978), p. 96.

7 Ray Kroc, "Appealing to a Mass Market" (Lessons of Leadership, Part 38), *Nation's Business* (July 1968), pp. 71–74.

8 Kenneth I. Helphand, "The Landscape of McDonald's," in *The World of Ronald McDonald*, ed. by Marshall Fishwick (Bowling Green, OH: Popular Culture Press), pp. 357–362.

9 William Irwin Thompson, *At the Edge of History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971); Paul Goldberger, "Mickey Mouse Teaches the Architects," *New York Times Magazine* (October 22, 1972), pp. 40ff; Margaret King, "Disneyland and Walt Disney World: Traditional Values in Futuristic Form" (unpublished paper, 1975); Christopher Finch, *The Art of Walt Disney from Mickey Mouse to the Magic Kingdom* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1973); Millicent Hall, "Theme Parks: Around the World in 80 Minutes," *Landscape* (Autumn 1976), pp. 3–8; Michael Harrington, "To the Disney Station," *Harpers* (January 1979), pp. 35ff.

10 Richard Francaviglia, "Main Street USA: The Creation of a Popular Image," *Landscape* (Spring-Summer 1977), pp. 18–22.

11 Harold Rosenberg, *Discovering the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 29; originally published in *Partisan Review* 25(4), Fall 1958.

12 Victor Gruen, *The Heart of Our Cities* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1964).

Minding the Store in Eden: Gardens and Houses in *The Color Purple*

Ann Leone Philbrick

When Alice Walker writes about a garden in the title essay of *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, it is earth as well as metaphor. Her mother's garden is a space that her mother conceives and digs into existence; it is not simply a psychic refuge. Furthermore, it is the source of two political voices: Walker's mother defies the society that denies her right or capacity to create; thus she presents her daughter with a legacy that she is free to decode into a written language. Walker's mother and others like her "handed on the creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see."[1]

In *The Color Purple* the garden (and its house) assumes more complex dimensions. This fictitious space, at once an Eden, a political platform, and the setting for narrative closure, contributes far more to the text than Walker's mother's garden, which is finally no more than a symbol for creativity and spiritual courage.

The Color Purple is an epistolary novel, a series of letters that the unloved and unlovely Celie writes to God and later to her sister Nettie. When Nettie goes to Africa as a missionary, she writes to Celie, who finds these letters after her husband, Mr. ——, has been intercepting and hiding them for years. Celie leaves a family bedeviled by incest to marry a man who brutalizes her. She is freed by Shug, a singer and her husband's lover. With each new start, Celie moves to a new house; and as she gains enough self-awareness to risk imagining and even planning a future, she encounters dwellings that seem as unlikely as her dreams. Eventually, her world is righted and she triumphs in a seemingly miraculous reconstitution of family, fortune, and self. Deliberately forgotten shacks that harbored incest and abuse, real and imagined houses in Memphis, and an Edenic homestead are the indicators of her progress.

Gardens and houses are linked here to make mythic and architectural entities. They appear only five times, always briefly, and twice, seemingly, as fantasies. No building or garden is presented with many details of its design. How are these places more than descriptive punctuation in the text? What is their structural importance? They provide an interpretation of events; the story that these places tell constitutes a subtext that grounds the fabulous events of the novel in human experience.

What at first seems fantastic—beyond Celie's hopes and dreams—turns out to be the other side of the loss and ignorance that she has always known. Walker tells how oppression can be subverted: fantasies of freedom and power prove to be real, and crushing realities have in fact been faked. At significant moments during these reversals, people enter into possession of gardens and their houses. This possession is an apprehension of space in varying forms and contexts: the outsider's wishful observation, a first attempt at dreaming; a determined occupancy that celebrates self and place as the recovered parts of a whole. The garden and its house are a historical and a feminist place, a dreamed-of space and a real one. The development of this domestic space—house and garden—in the novel appears at first to be uneven, even incidental; but in fact it accompanies Celie's growing consciousness of her false, lost, and real selves.

House and garden (not to mention field, pasture, piney woods) are at first notable for their absence from Walker's descriptions. This is startling in a novel about the black, rural poor, isolated among nothing else. But when Walker finally uncovers Celie's real family—not constituted at all as the reader or Celie had thought—a homestead is its setting, source, and future.

Celie's articulation of her condition can be schematized as an answering pair of correspondences: absences beget a sort of exile; and, later, with a sense of plenitude comes a reentry, and a possession of place. Celie seems to have been born in exile; her past is a series of deaths, abuses, and sordid shelters that she barely acknowledges. She seems singularly lost, with no childhood idyll to regain, or adult paradise to which she could reasonably aspire. In fact, a real Eden—horticultural as well as spiritual—is at the center of her experience of place and of her self, and when she reaches it, an exile reversed, she learns that it has always been there.

The first mention of place is the shack belonging to Celie's stepson Harpo and his bride Sofia. Theirs is a marriage for love, the first happy union of the novel. Out of context,

Celie's description of the shack seems peremptory: "Mr. —— daddy used it for a shed. But it sound. Got windows now, a porch, back door. Plus it cool and green down by the creek."[2] This small observation is significant because of its abstraction. The absent and abstract topography is affected by Celie's life, its horrors so repressed that the physical world itself is edited away. Celie believes that her mother's legacy, her own incestuous children, her sister Nettie, and any chance for love are all lost to her. Harpo's and Sofia's violent but passionate marriage, their tiny shaded house, constitute a space filled with life in a world defined largely by absences. Celie's family is truncated, perverted, and dispersed. Celie herself is abstracted: She will not look at men, including her husband, whom she names only Mr. ——; she can only dream of Shug, whom she never expects to see. Indeed, we discover that until she has met, nursed, and loved Shug, and found herself amazingly united with her and Mr. —— against a surly brother-in-law, she has refused any sense of place for herself:

> First time I think about the world.
> What the world got to do with anything, I think. Then I see myself sitting there quilting tween Shug Avery and Mr. ——. We three set together against Tobias and his fly speck box of chocolate. For the first time in my life, I feel just right. (p. 61)

Until now, Celie's world has not borne thinking about; now she learns, bit by bit, that the absences, losses, and deformations of her life are all false. Shug recovers Nettie's African letters from Mr. ——, and Celie learns that her "father," who raped her, is only a stepfather, and that her redeemed children are not lost but with Nettie in Africa. All the family she *thought* she had is undone:

> My daddy lynch. My mama crazy. All my little half-brothers and sisters no kin to me. My children not my sister and brother. Pa not pa. (p. 163)

They are replaced for now by her life with Shug and her hopes of reunion with Nettie and the children.

Now that Celie knows what *is not,* she wants to see what *is;* she begins by visiting her stepfather, with Shug. It is a new start, Celie's third deliberate act for herself, after loving Shug and designing the pants that allow her to work and move more freely. This Easter visit to her childhood home is a pivotal moment in the novel, a fantastic interlude when mythic and quotidian visions bloom together. Celie and Shug are as unprepared as the reader for what they find:

> The first thing us notice soon as we turn into the lane is how green everything is, like even though the ground everywhere else not warmed up good, Pa's land is warm and ready to go. Then all along the road there's Easter lilies and jonquils and daffodils and all kinds of little early wildflowers. Then us notice all the birds singing they little cans off, all up and down the hedge, that itself is putting out little yellow flowers smell like Virginia creeper. It all so different from the rest of the country us drive through, it make us real quiet. I know this sound funny, Nettie, but even the sun seemed to stand a little longer over our heads. (pp. 164–165)

Celie remembers none of this from her childhood, only that at Easter everything flooded, everyone was sick, and that the house "ain't so hot." But it, too, is altogether other than she knew it to be, on a hill she cannot remember, "a big yellow two story house with green shutters and a steep green shingle roof," like "some white person's house" (p. 165). It is surrounded by flowering fruit trees, lilies, jonquils, covered with roses, plunged into birdsong. This is no black man's prison, but a white man's kingdom—that is, with no inherent humility or humiliation—on a hill, with lordly and flood-free perspectives. And it is an Eden, apart from the rest of the land topographically and meteorologically, blooming and singing while all the land around it has only begun to emerge from winter.

Here is the Eden myth inverted: Celie, the chosen one, long abandoned in an outer world where her family, home, and even her mate are abstracted or nameless, chooses to come to the garden. From the outside, not after leaving but before entering, she recognizes it as other, as Eden. It is new, for she has no memory of it, and yet it is the place of her wretched childhood.

It is important to remember that Nettie's letters have redefined Celie's childhood, dismantling its remembered horrors, if not its real brutality. So, in a sense, her family—like the house and garden—is new, other than she has always known it to be, and yet it has always been hers. Is the reconstitution of Celie's and others' selves immanent in this fantastic place, at once Eden and a black laborer's homestead? All that precedes Celie's and Shug's first visit to the childhood home can be perceived as pre-light, pre-self, pre-place. Although Celie cannot imagine her past amid this bloom and beauty, she has at last dared to try to place herself in a context. And, indeed, other contexts that seem more likely and appropriate present themselves after she and Shug leave. Celie describes her visit in a letter addressed for the first time not to God—whom she has imagined old, towering, and white—but to Nettie, who she now knows is alive. She leaves Mr. —— and moves to Memphis to live with Shug; she has thus freed herself to love and to act in the world. She recognizes context—environment and circumstances that affect her and that she, in turn, influences—by *choosing* a place, a job, a lover, rather than simply enduring them. This is a new engagement between character and place within the text. Celie the writer (rather than Walker the writer) begins to perceive that her interactions with places are one of the ways she is telling her own story as it unfolds to her.

Celie's life takes on new form and weight. She can love: she has Shug. And she can do: her pants become a thriving business. Celie describes Shug's house for us: barn-like, pink, dotted inside and outside with statues of people, elephants, and turtles. She no longer denies her place in the world by refusing to name it, as she did for her childhood and her married homes. This matter-of-fact description is not like the wondering, outsider's appraisal that she gave of her stepfather's house and garden. To describe is to claim a distance; Celie shows a new emotional independence here. Indeed, she is firmly enough planted in her life in Memphis to elaborate on Shug's own plans for her dream house.

This architectural fantasy is a feminist archetype, politically and aesthetically charged. Two women, lovers, partners, and friends, conceive it together; it is an exercise in the accord of vision and needs. What emerges is at once lurid and affecting. The building will be of mud or concrete, "a big round pink house, look sort of like some kind of fruit" (p. 188), a womb, belly, or breast. When Celie balks, Shug asserts that link between her place and her body: "I just feel funny living in a square. If I was square, then I could take it better" (p. 189). It is Celie who provides a context, extends the house/body into the world:

> I sit down on the bed and start to draw a kind of wood skirt around her concrete house. You can sit on this, I say, when you get tired of being in the house. (p. 189)

Together, they add signs of their particular presences: flowers, Shug's signature elephants and turtles. Shug wonders where Celie is in all of this, and Celie at last produces a sign of herself, even though it is a whimsical response to Shug's own animals:

> And how us know you live here too? she ast. *Ducks!* I say. (p. 189)

The house is not an escapist fantasy, but a place where act and pleasure are synonymous: "Us talk about houses a lot . . . Talk about how to make the outside around your house something you can use" (p. 189). The space they have shaped and filled is animate, empowered to transcend its quotidian functions: "By the time us finish our house look like it can swim or fly" (p. 189). It is the first epiphany for Celie, the manifestation of her new, joyful initiative as a woman and a worker.

For all their appeal, neither Shug's house nor their shared dream house is Celie's home; she must find and restore that particular place around her newly found self. The space that is finally hers—her stepfather's property—seems at first the least probable of the possible homes. Why not the houses of her childhood and marriage, or Celie's Memphis house, or even the fantasy house that they could surely afford to build? The Edenic place actually holds the formative and lasting elements of all of those relinquished homes. Her stepfather dies, and Celie—not his young wife—inherits his house on the hill. This is the last of the seemingly miraculous revelations that restore Celie: she finds her family reconstituted through Nettie's letters; and she discovers her sexuality in her love

for Shug. Finally, it seems that a homestead is bestowed upon her almost as gratuitously as if the fantasy round house had sprung from its piece of paper.

Over and over in this novel, particulars are left unnamed and unaccounted for. This abstraction is appropriate to Celie's separation from the world and from a sense of self, and it sets a mythic tone: monstrous men are unnamed, monstrous children disappear, squalid homes and labors are implicit but never detailed. The two places that Celie describes with engagement—the dream house and the stepfather's farm—are both, in her mind, fantasies. The house on the hill marks the ultimate mythification of the particular; it is an inverted Eden where recognition welcomes rather than banishes. Here, too, is Walker's final demythification. The property is an organic part of Celie's life: just as she has always had a family and the capacity to love, it has always been hers and Nettie's through their mother's will. Their stepfather had torn down the original shack, rebuilt on the hill, and appropriated the new house, with its land and small store, until his death.

Although there are now simple explanations for a feminine dynasty and the lordly homestead that Celie could not connect to her remembered childhood, the tone of the novel is nonetheless mythic. It ends in a cluster of feminist and mythic images. The last scene of discovery and reunion plays itself out in a circular pattern that extends from Celie at its center, outward to Shug, children, and Nettie, and at last to the men at the periphery, redeemed by their learning to love on Celie's terms. All are in turn embraced by the house at the center of its remarkable garden and orchards, on a hill that dominates and centers the surrounding countryside.

Lest we float out of the book with this beatific and static vision, I wish to remark that there is a dynamo that powers the fairy-tale ending: this Eden is no downtrodden laborer's fantasy, but substantial, a white man's house, as Celie herself noticed at her first view of it. It comes to her with her dreams of family and love, and with its promise of a life completely other than what she has known, certainly; but, beyond the gardens and Edenic climate, she acquires worldly power: property that includes good farm land and a store where she can establish her business.

Celie is no longer an observer of Eden; she is at its center, affirming the power of continuity in family, place, and work. You *can* go home again, and it will not be as you thought it was or thought it had to be. It will be immanent, an extension of what you have become, a context for a new and recovered self. Celie's last letter begins in exaltation, an embrace of all the world:

> Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear everything. Dear God. (p. 251)

But we should notice that her very last words are wry, almost breezy, the sort of tiny, particular mythmaking that is part of ordinary, contented moments of a day: "Matter of fact, I think this the youngest us ever felt" (p. 251).

In this story hopes for love, unity, and power are not dreams, but the illuminated side of oppression, loss, and absence. The human harmonies at the end of the novel are accompanied by the architectural harmonies of the site on the hill, which had held and witnessed Celie's dreadful past, and seemingly vanished with it. Her new life is as much a result of changed perspectives as good fortune. The house on the hill has been rebuilt, this time to dominate its surroundings in form and perspective. The revelation of place accompanies the revealed and revised truth; Celie's original place, once hellish and now Edenic, precisely frames the fact and potential of her new life.

Notes

1 Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), p. 240. All further page references will be given in the text.

2 Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York: Washington Square Press, Pocket Books, 1983), p. 40. All further page references will be given in the text.

Old Sacramento: Place as Presence, Palimpsest, and Performance

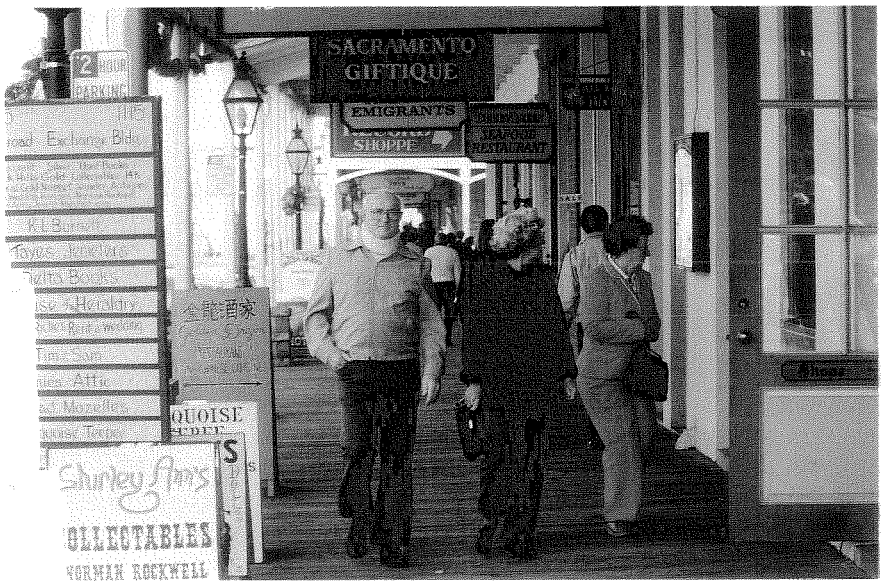
David Scofield Wilson

On the surface, Old Sacramento is a familiar sort of American place, an "Old Town"—a once-depressed and now-restored urban area made to look old-fashioned but designed to serve moderns and to work well. Its parking ramp, for example, is made to look *like* a converted warehouse with its arched windows and brick facade, but in fact it is modern. As is the whole development, which pulls together the modern California Railroad Museum and Sacramento History Center complex on the north, restored and renovated old buildings now turned to use as shops and restaurants and saloons at the core, and, more recently, the excursion concession down on the river. Old Sacramento neither "just grew" as vernacular developments commonly do nor was it authored in any way that rewards "reading" the way more formal landscapes do.

Rather, Old Sacramento exemplifies that contemporary kind of place denominated Landscape Three by J. B. Jackson in his recent *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape.*[1] Whereas the authored landscape, Landscape Two, clues in a visitor about how to read the meaning of the place and how to respond aesthetically, Old Sacramento more commonly miscues the visitor. And while the vernacular Landscape One realizes the everyday needs and purposes of its users, the meaning of Landscape Three abides neither in its use, alone, nor in its design, but in the performance of the place by visitors and staff moving about in the landscape. It does not make sense apart from its people and their mix of purposes and expectations. We must enter these places cautiously, as reflexive ethnographers and geographers, alert both to the instances of meaningful interaction we see in others and to our own imported aversions to what seems muddled.

One way to enter the Landscape Three of Old Sacramento is through its self-interpretation in the cartoony map-mural that hung in the Visitors' Center when I first began to study the place. In it, Old Sacramento appears as no workaday place but as an escape from ordinary duties. The map portrays an urban fabric of places alternative to the everyday infrastructure of commerce and government: a zoo, a shopping mall, two museums, a convention center, Sutter's Fort, and even, Lake Tahoe and Reno over 100 miles to the east and San Francisco just as far to the west. Interstates 880, 80, and 5 assure simple access and easy exit. Old Sacramento draws tourists during the day and diners or theatergoers at night. Annual jazz and blues festivals draw visitors from greater distances. And local boosters continue to aim for spin-off business from tourists coming to San Francisco and willing to take secondary excursions to the wine country, the Mother Lode, or the Capital and Old Sacramento.

Old Sacramento is really an island now, skirted by everyday automobile traffic and skipped even by boats, though this once was a busy port and plans are afoot to



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1 **Old Sacramento.** Photograph by David Scofield Wilson.

2 **Map of Old Sacramento, Visitor's Center.** Photograph by David Scofield Wilson.

reestablish a pleasure wharf at the levee. It has become a kind of refuge, a siding for retired steam engines and a wax museum-of-work instead of a working embarcadero. In short, it is a Point of Interest on AAA maps—a riverside Historical Park just off the freeway and cut off from the city by sunken I-5.

What is now a cultural cul-de-sac once was among the liveliest crossroads in the West, a thriving biocultural nexus of waterways and landlife. The river was the lifeline of the Sacramento Valley and an avenue to the sea downstream and to the ranches and mines upstream. Later, roads and railroads converged on Sacramento, the capital, and wove it into a network that went east through the mountain passes to the rest of the United States and west to San Francisco, the ocean, and the Orient.

Reminders of this earlier, bustling time remain in the concrete levees, which once had warehouses on top of them and railroad loading docks beside them. Now native sycamore trees in redwood planter boxes testify to the taming of the port of Sacramento. But over the levee walls wild riparian willows still bloom in the spring; box elder trees and Fremont cottonwoods harbor birds out of sight of the tourists, and abandoned wharves shelter swallows and rats and human transients in rainy, winter weather. This is all outside the Historical Park. Within the Park itself, the immigrant ailanthus, a native of China and the tree that "grew in Brooklyn," shoots up out of neglected alleyways and vacant lots and cellar holes. When I first began studying Old Sacramento in 1979, I sketched an ailanthus growing beyond a fence that the State Department of Parks and Recreation had erected around a hole in the ground it planned to develop soon. So far, it was only a dump, strewn with bricks, bottles, and nameless junk and inhabited by cats and rats. I was struck by the way the fence stood between two worlds of meaning and two systems of worth. What is fenced in and fenced out told a great deal about the nature of this and other Old-Town restorations, about the values and beliefs, and the fears and fantasies which lurked just beneath the surface of such restorations as Old Sacramento and helped explain the tenor of the tourist attraction built over the old town.

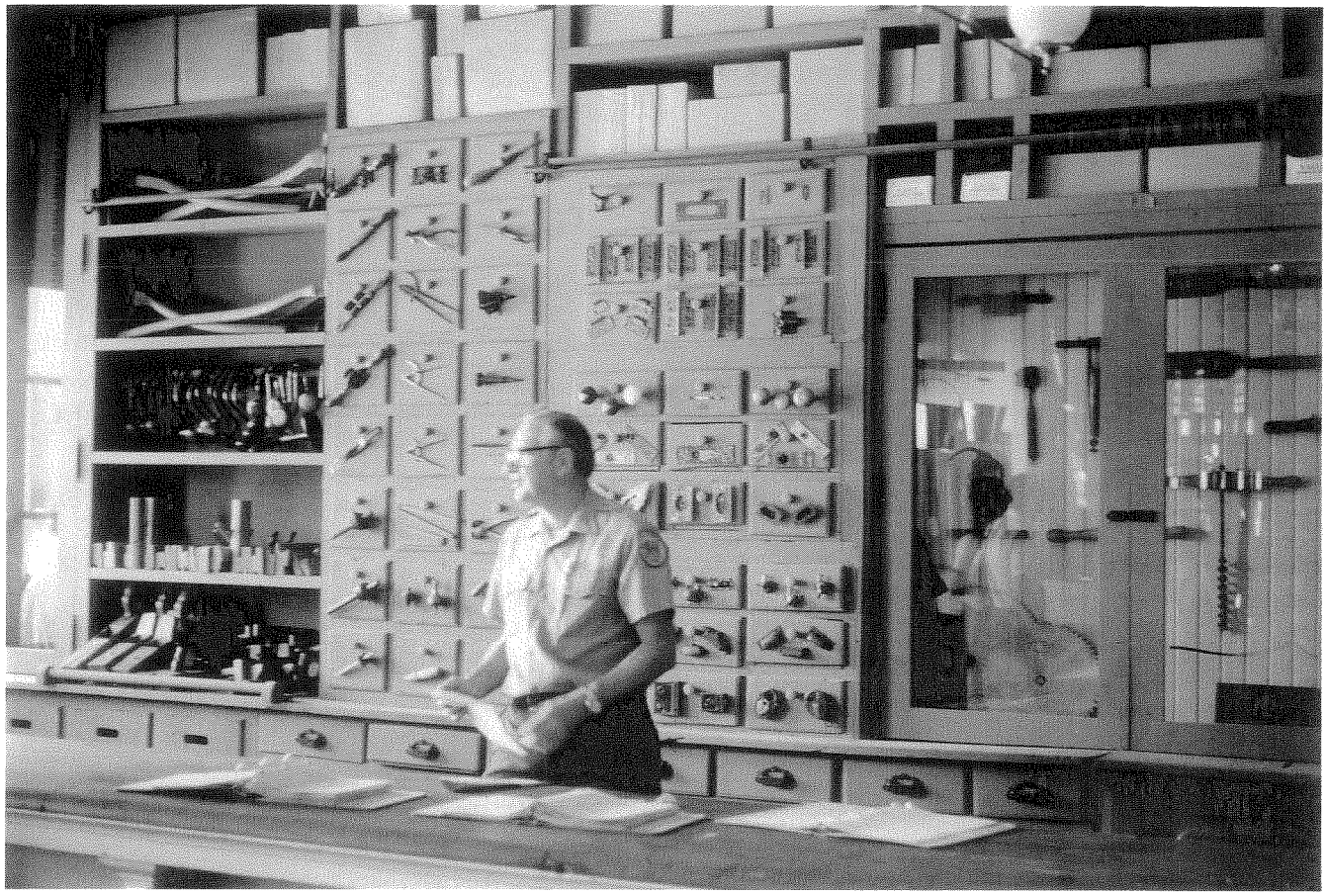
A text from 1925 helps us see just what has been fenced out. Tourists to Front Street are warned by Fremont Rider that:

> This . . . riverfront is a sordid, depressing neighborhood, thronged with a motley cosmopolitan crew, and largely given over to employment bureaus, pawn shops, cheap lunch rooms and cheaper lodging houses. In the wide variety of racial types there is a conspicuous percentage of overflow (a telling choice of words in this flood-prone place) from the adjacent Mexican, Chinese and Japanese quarters.[2]

In other words, it was not the sort of place a family of tourists would go as a rule. Cheapness in lunch rooms and lodgings is suspect—probably a sign of dirt, and maybe disease. The motley crew of mixed racial types and riverfront proletarians suggests danger. Tales of Shanghai-ing, brawls, and bawdy houses fill the imagination, making the physical dirt and danger and decay an omen of moral dirt and danger.

So why go at all? Rider tells us: "Historically the district deserves a visit, since it is here that the first nucleus of the present state Capital started." Apparently dirt and decay that is historic uplifts instead of endangering, so we suffer the one to get at the other. But why suffer if you can help it, the single-minded tourist might well ask. The tension between history and hysteria so evident in Rider's riverfront has been dissolved in Old Sacramento by banishing the slums and presenting the past as colorful and meaningful regional history. In the Railroad Museum a restored locomotive rests on mirrors that reflect its glory, and the display leads our eye down the hall to Thomas Hill's painting, *The Last Spike,* which celebrates the opening of the West to the railroad. The past is dusted off and painted up here. Outside, the trash cans are framed by tasteful wooden boxes. And even the middens of old double today as archeological digs, a poster advises us.

The transients who used to live here have been driven out and now squat across the river under cottonwoods and take their lunch, while inside the Railroad Museum waxwork



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hobos "speak" (on tape) of hobo life but never confront us quite face-to-face. The manikins are very life-like, having been cast from docents who work in the museum. They are accurate down to the fingerprints. One wonders what sort of Dorian Gray experience awaits the models as they grow older and the statues cast from them remain frozen in period settings and costumes. The main point, however, is that here in the museum replicas stand in for the dirty, and maybe even dangerous, real bums of our nightmares. Old Sacramento has been made safe by putting some distance between us and the object.

The hardware store once owned by Huntington of the Big Four of the Southern Pacific has been cleaned up, cataloged, restocked with correct goods, and transported from its historic location on J Street to a site nearer the museum. It is as neat as the tourist map that presents Old Sacramento as a kind of menu of gift shops, restaurants, and antique stores, expensive replacements of the cheap lunch-rooms and pawn shops of Rider's riverfront. Old Sacramento is now a clean, costly, and safe place instead of a falling down, dirty, cheap, and motley slum. The place has been edited—is being edited even now. Facades have been re-stored to pre-slum conditions and plenty of parking supplied. History without the dirt and death is the logic here. The aim is to re-present and represent the past, to *do* local history.

But once that logic is clear, what are we to make of the pretend cable cars on rubber wheels that plied the K Street Mall until recently and ran shoppers into and out of Old Sac? They do not fit with the place at all. It is a runaway symbol. If, as Clifford Geertz argues in his

3 Huntington Hardware. Photograph by David Scofield Wilson.

Interpretation of Cultures, we human beings hang suspended in webs of words and feeling which we ourselves have spun out and woven into patterns of meaning, and if our task here is to read and to interpret the meaning of such items in context, then what stories must we learn or remember in order to be able to "get *this* right" and see it for what it is and see how it fits?[3] Is this an anomaly, a kind of freak? Is it a revelation? It is clearly out of place historically, but it is out of place in Sacramento in much the same way as the Showboat Bus which sports a smokestack and riverboat trimmings but carries riders on rubber wheels along paved streets to nine special tourist "landing stations" in Memphis, Tennessee. And it is out of place the way the stuffed and mounted rhino head is over the doorway at Fanny Ann's, a popular bar jammed with curios and customers and one of Old Sacramento's most popular spots. Outlandishness sells, it seems, and fakery is fun. But it goes even deeper than that, I believe; right to the heart of American culture.

Consider the fine wooden doors of the Wells-Fargo building and the bench, railing, and woodwork upstairs in the chambers of the first Supreme Court of California. They are not oak at all as they seem, but north-coast redwood painted and then "combed" to look like oak. This is no modern-day shortcut, no inexpensive substitute for quality, but an expensive illusion. And it was meant, a century ago when it was first done, to enhance the quality of the abundant but pedestrian redwood by lending it the prestige of sturdy eastern oak. We usually suppose that truth in history must be dug out, uncovered, but here it is, the cover-up that tells the truth.

Suppose the people who disguised these doors and the people who ordered them disguised were no more muddled than those who brought the "cable car" tram to Sacramento or put the Showboat Bus up on wheels in Memphis, or than those who ride them. Is there some proposition we can fabricate which would explain their preference for oak, even faked oak, over redwood? Is there some way in which it is not mad but only modern to stick rhino heads on doorways and feathers on a white cowboy hat worn by a woman who is no cowgirl but a jazz fan eating an ice-cream cone in broad daylight and sitting on a folding chair listening to Dixieland in California one Memorial Day seven years ago? Is there an "aesthetic" behind that or underlying the fancy of one E. A. Armstrong, who used to join patriotic and pop symbols on a white dress jacket and then go to Old Sacramento because, as he said when interviewed, his hobby was "just to goof off and make people happy." And he did. Symbols have been loosed from any necessary regional or conventional context and made into commodities here, affordable, portable adornments, whose meaning resides not in one button or slogan but in the underlying proposition: discontinuity delights. The very

4 Jazz Festival, Old Sacramento.
Photograph by Myrna Johnston.

out-of-place-ness, the evident made-up-ness, the denial of natural and historical predestination amuses us and reassures us somehow.

We are close now to our answer to Geertz. Behind Armstrong and the cable car and oaken doors lies an American myth which holds that nature and heritage and social station are not predestined but are conditions to be overcome, to be conquered, improved upon, redeemed. Whatever is given may be and should be put to better use, cleaned up, ordered, cataloged, and, most important, treated somehow, handled and transformed, but never left simply as received. The merely old is no fun—it must have died and been moved, and set up again for it to belong in Old Sacramento.

Old Sacramento is not unique in this sense. Memphis has been "restoring" its famous Beale Street for years now, tearing out old buildings and ripping up the road, while erecting attractions for tourists. But here there is one business that has held on through the transition. Abraham Schwab's dry-goods store has stood 112 years in the same spot and fought off a series of attempts by those who would improve the area by removing the last living enterprise with genuine roots in the vernacular neighborhood. It sells dry goods and notions and potions to locals, including size 70 overalls and size 60 dresses. To tourists the proprietors offer friendly talk, and at any sign of interest in the place they will break routine to show the visitor through the store, through



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the A. Schwab Beale Street Museum on the mezzanine, and through the basement framed in timbers salvaged from old river rafts. Down there Abraham Schwab gives a visitor a salvaged, glazed paving brick unearthed from the original Beale Street when the more modern surface was torn up. Shoppers carry their purchases away in bags decorated with the store's logo and now familiar motto: "If you can't find it at Schwab's, you are better off without it." But for all the promotional savvy, Schwab's remains a remnant of an earlier ambience and of an ongoing community, however depressed. This is no Huntington's Hardware, restored and restocked, but an original peopled-place still in situ and run by a family rather than State Park Rangers. Schwab's is both its own text and context. Its museum on the second floor puts it in historical perspective and makes a kind of commentary on Beale Street, which is itself a commentary on the Mid-South, which in turn may be taken as a commentary on America, and so on: the kind of "thick description" Clifford Geertz would relish unpacking, and so would I, but that is another project.[4]

A thinner layering of personality and artifact and commerce and community characterizes Old Sacramento for the most part. What commerce there is serves visitors from outside the area, tourists or shoppers and lunchers from the city. An exception is the mural painted half-a-dozen years ago on the cement levee wall facing the river and away from the development. Tom Raley, who owns the marina across the river, got "damn tired of looking at the blank wall" and commissioned local artist, Horst Leissel, to decorate it. Most of this has since been half-erased by floods and

5 Mural, Horst Leissel. Photograph by David Scofield Wilson.

obscured by recent work on the wall, but when fresh it contributed an "affecting presence" embodying an aesthetic that values a discontinuousness appropriate to the place, on the one hand, and a kind of sardonic commentary on the goings-on above and behind the mural, on the other; I draw here upon the work of anthropologist and aesthetic theorist Robert Plant Armstrong (no relation to the man in the dinner jacket).[5] What Leissel created was an array of stylized, outsized birds in the Egyptian manner, as if incised in concrete. They ignore Old Sacramento above and the riparian, natural flora and fauna at their feet. But best of all, the mural comically undercuts itself and comments upon its own text even while making fun of Old Sacramento and commenting upon its pretensions. Two black blotches on the belly of the crane turn out, on close inspection through binoculars from across the river, to be realistic renderings of crows, as if perched on the trompe l'oeil "carving" and casting shadows on the wall behind. The piece presents an awareness and commentary of understated but ironic wit that in large part denies the more earnest enterprise being worked out above.

On the other hand, this levee presents an intriguing palimpsest, an entirely un-ironic text. According to my *American Heritage Dictionary* a palimpsest is a "document . . . that has been written upon several times, often with remnants of earlier, imperfectly erased writing still visible," as in the nooks in the concrete levee where timbers used to fit to hold up warehouses, or in the vertical layering of Old Sacramento itself. The whole city raised its buildings 10 feet up on jacks and built buttressed foundations under them a century ago to escape the repeated floodings. Some left their first floors as basements, making one-story structures where there once had been two-story ones. The present waterfront rests on top of a half-erased, half-entombed old waterfront.

Palimpsests are useful to scholars who look *through* and *past* the latest inscription in order to read old autographs beneath and recover lost texts. But I am encouraged by Leissel's mural also to look *at* the present palimpsests of Old Sacramento and to find that they please with their patterns as well as inform. The flanks of buildings exposed when adjacent buildings fell to the wreckers display patterns of plaster, paper, and paint never arranged for effect but pleasing nevertheless. And unlike the faked-oak door, this dialectic between underlying materials and overlays of paint suggests a continuity with the past and a natural sedimentation akin to geological deposition or cultural accretion.

Palimpsests break the aesthetic distance and both declare their composite nature and invite us to savor them as compositions as well as accidents. In one particular find amidst the reconstruction, fragments of stairway on a wall whisper of patterns lost or forgotten; bricked up, ground-level doors and windows tell of the city's razing a century ago. And dumpsters and a cyclone fence in the foreground do not so much exclude us from the scene as second the bricked up doors and the stairway to nowhere.

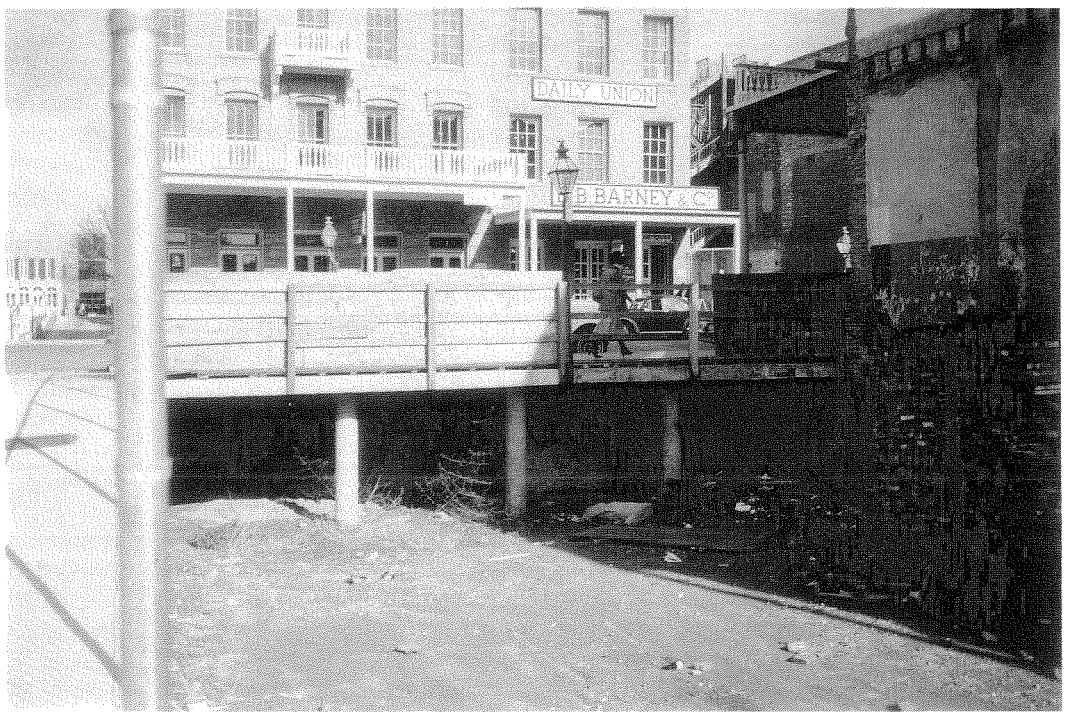
Down the block a minimalist's sort of palimpsest (or perhaps pentimento) makes of a fairly ordinary, poured concrete wall a kind of lyric to overlays. Its silver-painted wall suits, somehow, the shiny cars parked beside it by diners at a nearby restaurant. Palimpsests tell a different sort of tale about Old Sacramento than the cutesy map-mural at the Visitors' Center that makes everything over.

Truer visions offer themselves where we are least led by the design of the place to find them, beneath sidewalks, between buildings, in alleys and other framed-out phenomena. What the merchants and redevelopers guide us to see within the framework of their Old Sacramento Historical Park inclines toward the freshly turned out souvenirs or collected antiques, not the overlooked or not yet redone.

One such find are the ruins beneath a raised sidewalk near the silver parking-lot wall. The present clearly rests upon the past, this find declares; it does not repeal it. Accidental trash and unpredictable disintegrations add strands to the fabric. And yet the feeling and mentality incarnate in this place qua palimpsest are sedimentary only, the underground remains of earlier actions and artistry. But meaning is an ongoing, living project enacted daily by ordinary as



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well as artistic types of people. Again, I think of Schwab's.

Coming upon two women downing fast food in the alley behind The Cracker Company restaurant's dumpsters while other shoppers walk by with cold drinks reminds us that some palimpsests may link artifacts, architecture, official signs, "naturalized" trees such as the ailanthus, and casual human use all at once. This particular moment-in-place may be taken as a kind of upbeat anecdote, a sort of living palimpsest which is a thicker and richer commentary on place than any designed by the planners of Old Sacramento. The people make their own sense of place, sometimes to the despair of planners, by strolling or lunching where they please. And their liking and using enliven the text as no amount of detached analysis, or even engaged savoring, of abstract patterns of meaning can by itself. Old-Town restorations are done by people bent on making money or making parks to attract people, and so the text must finally be taken as performed. It must be understood within its envelope of everyday, actual use.

My favorite palimpsest, then, is an ephemeral anecdote; a moment-in-place my camera caught of shoppers walking by on a sidewalk above the dump left in a vacant lot not yet ready for reconstruction. Here apparent discontinuity and the virtual composition are joined. The view speaks eloquently of the above- and below-groundness of this place, of the dead and discarded overlooked by the matter-of-fact fun-seekers, of the taking-surface-for-granted and the inattentiveness to infrastructure that characterizes so much of American life. This is the Old Sacramento that draws me back, and back again. And it is in unplanned palimpsests such as these that Old Sacramento tells the fullest truth about itself. The last time I stopped by to say hello, as it were, to this old acquaintance, the lower level was filled with pallets of used brick destined for some reconstruction project, and so the text I loved had been erased. The palimpsest continues to be performed.

Notes

1 John Brinkerhoff Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 154–155.

2 Fremont Rider, *Rider's California* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925), pp. 201–202.

3 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 5.

4 Geertz, pp. 6–7, 9–10.

5 Robert Plant Armstrong, *The Affecting Presence: An Essay in Humanistic Anthropology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971); in developing a structuralist model of the feeling incarnate in works of what he preferred to call "affecting presences" instead of "art," Armstrong helps us see that feeling and power may inhere in works out of a kind of harmonious unity but also out of featured discontinuities and rather in-turning surfaces. In the case of Leissel's wall, the discontinuities which witness his membership among modern artists complement those commercial and popular discontinuities found in the shop above.

6 Palimpsest, Firehouse Alley. Photograph by David Scofield Wilson.

7 Vacant Lot, Old Sacramento. Photograph by David Scofield Wilson.

The Fictive Sense of Place: Los Angeles in Word and Image

James A. Goring

Preconception is critical to how we perceive the character of place. Pre-exposure to a place can come about through many channels. Among them are word-of-mouth, written correspondence, the various news media, and perhaps most poignantly the fictions of literature and film.

This fictional vision of place plays such a major role because we consume it detached from the critical filter of direct physical experience. The artist's condensation of the presence of a city moves us. Eager to dissolve into the fictional world created for us, we readily attach the qualities of a film or novel to the place in which it is presented.

Los Angeles is a convenient case study of this phenomenon because it has been the subject of so much scrutiny by the arts. The perceived reality of the city comes as much from the expectations generated by pre-exposure as from the direct experience of dwelling in Los Angeles itself. In the last 40 years or so, a way of seeing has emerged that has become indispensable in fully absorbing the environment of the Southland.

Novels such as Nathanael West's *Day of the Locust*, John Fante's *Ask the Dust*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon*, and all of Raymond Chandler's Marlowe stories can set the reader in a position to accept common, even brutal landscapes in an altered and dramatic light.

Film also influences our conception of place. Particular pieces of Los Angeles are consistently used as stand-ins for distant parts of the world, or to evoke specific moods. The desert roads east of the city have been the setting for so many James Dean movies, biker films, "Route 66" and "Highway Patrol" episodes that traveling through them now yields a heightened sense of desolateness and futility.

Undoubtedly, the places used in the works presented here must themselves suggest the seed of the setting or mood desired. But isolated on film or in print, and made consumable independent from an environmental context, these qualities become magnified beyond their natural measure. This circularity of artifact, intervention, and reflection is critical to the perception of place, and is precisely what this portfolio of literary and film images means to suggest.



1 Sunset Boulevard, Paramount Pictures, 1950.

"We've got the flash restaurants and nightclubs they run, and the hotels and apartment houses they own, and the drifters and con men and female bandits that live in them. The luxury trades, the pansy decorators, the Lesbian dress designers, the riffraff of a big hardboiled city with no more personality than a paper cup. Out in the fancy suburbs dear old Dad is reading the sports page in front of a picture window, with his shoes off, thinking he is high class because he has a three car garage. Mom is in front of the princess dresser trying to paint the suitcases out from under her eyes. And junior is clamped onto the telephone calling up a succession of high school girls that talk pidgin English and carry contraceptives in their make-up kit."

"It is the same in all big cities, amigo."

"Real cities have something else, some individual bony structure under the muck. Los Angeles has Hollywood—and hates it. It ought to consider itself lucky. Without Hollywood it would be a mail-order city. Everything in the catalogue you could get better somewhere else."

"You are bitter tonight, amigo."

from *The Little Sister* (p. 203), by Raymond Chandler[1]



2 Sunset Boulevard, Paramount Pictures, 1950.

"Isn't it marvelous!" exclaimed Mrs. Schwartzen, clapping her hands and jumping up and down excitedly like a little girl.

"What's it made of?"

"Then you weren't fooled? How impolite! It's rubber, of course. It costs lost of money."

"But why?"

"To amuse. We were looking at the pool one day and somebody, Jerry Appis, I think, said that it needed a dead horse on the bottom, so Alice got one. Don't you think it looks cute?"

"Very."

from *The Day of the Locust* (p. 13), by Nathanael West[2]



3 Day of the Locust, Paramount Pictures, 1975.

He spent his nights at the different Hollywood churches, drawing the worshippers. He visited the "Church of Christ, Physical" where holiness was attained through the constant use of chest weights and spring grips; the "Church Invisible" where fortunes were told and the dead made to find lost objects; the "Tabernacle of the Third Coming" where a woman in male clothing preached the "Crusade Against Salt"; and the "Tabernacle Moderne" under whose glass and chromium roof "Brain-Breathing, the Secret of the Aztecs" was taught.

from *The Day of the Locust* (p. 92), by Nathanael West[2]

You are a coward, Bandini, a traitor to your soul, a feeble liar before your weeping Christ. This is why you write, this is why it would be better if you died.

Yes, it's true: but I have seen houses in Bel-Air with cool lawns and green swimming pools. I have wanted women whose very shoes are worth all I have ever possessed.

I have seen golf clubs on Sixth Street in the Spaulding window that make me hungry just to grip them. I have grieved for a necktie like a holy man for indulgences. I have admired hats in Robinson's the way critics gasp at Michelangelo.

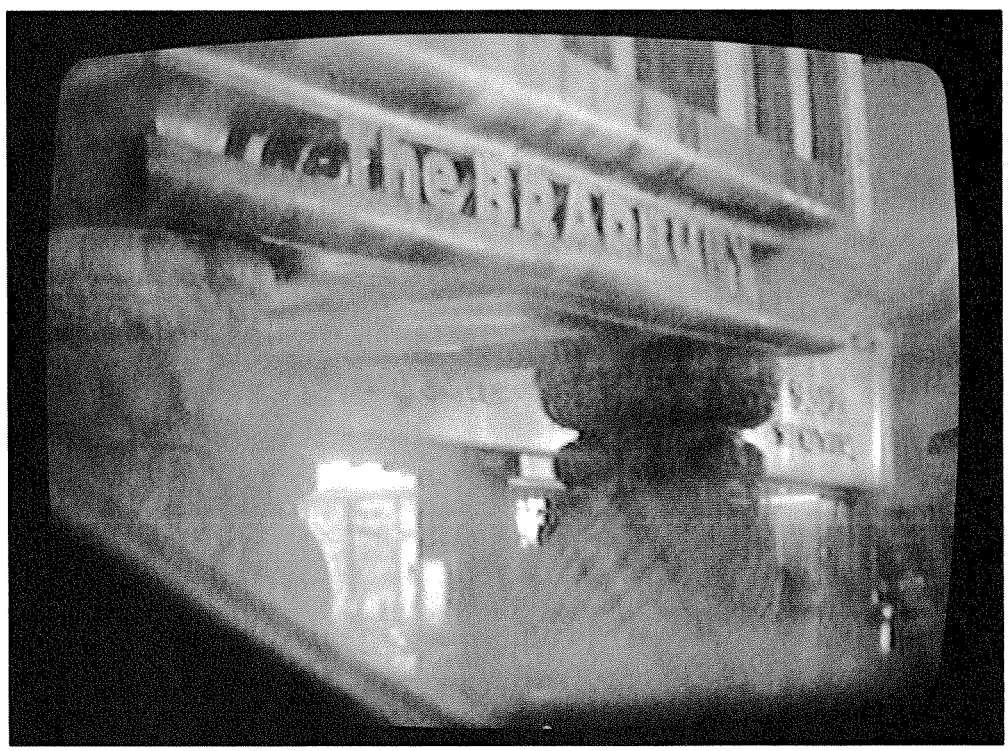
from *Ask the Dust* (p. 20),
by John Fante[3]



4 Sunset Boulevard, Paramount Pictures, 1950.

Ah that first day! Mrs Hargraves opened the door to my room, and there it was, with a red carpet on the floor, pictures of the English countryside on the walls, and a shower adjoining. The room was down on the sixth floor, room 678, up near the front of the hill, so that my window was on a level with the green hillside and there was no need for a key, for the window was always open. Through that window I saw my first palm tree, not six feet away, and sure enough I thought of Palm Sunday and Egypt and Cleopatra, but the palm was blackish at its branches, stained by carbon monoxide coming out of the Third Street tunnel, its crusted trunk choked with dust and sand that blew in from the Mojave and Santa Ana deserts.

from *Ask the Dust* (p. 16),
by John Fante[3]



5 Blade Runner, Michael Deeley/for Ridley Scott, 1982.



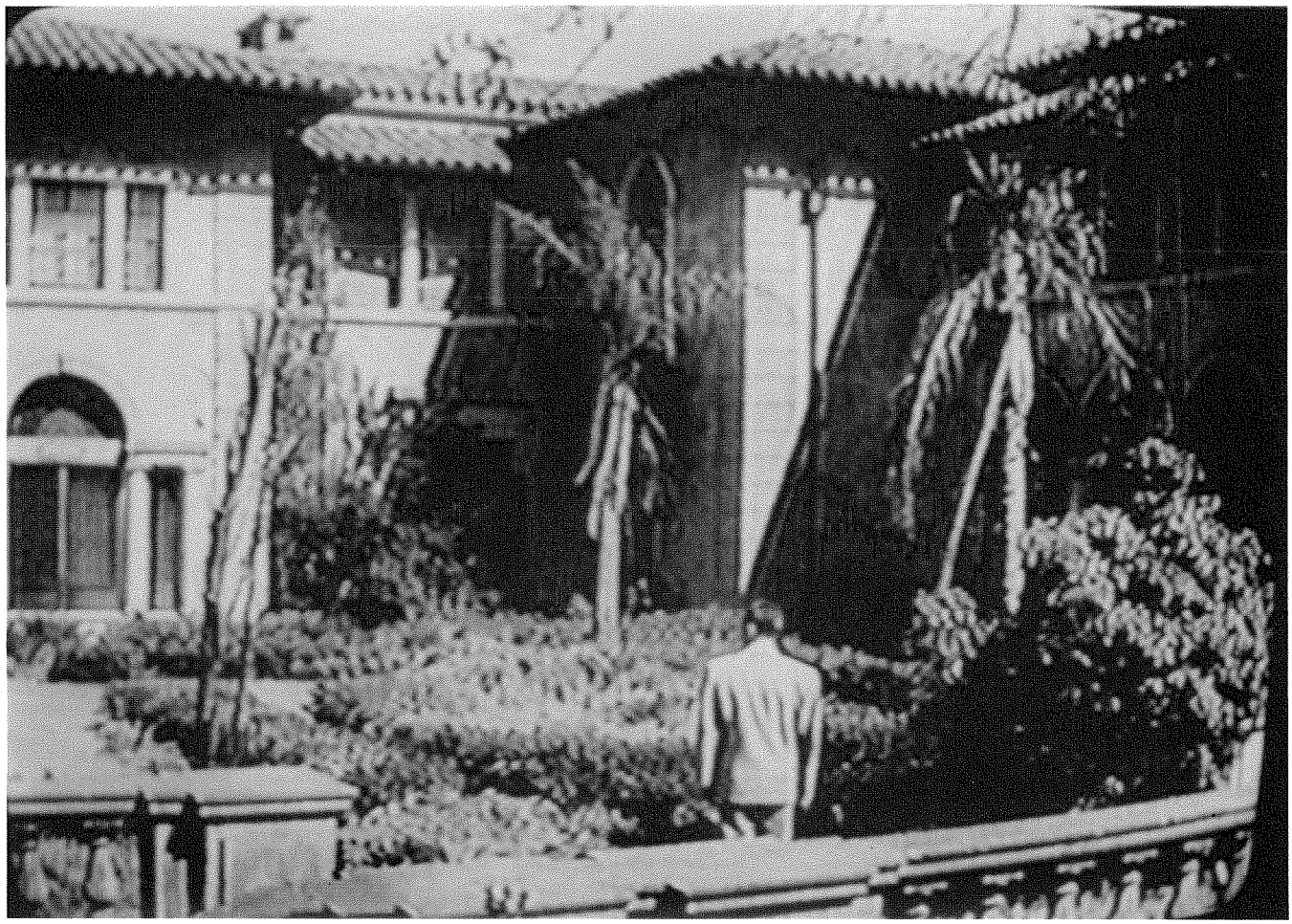
6 Day of the Locust, Paramount Pictures, 1975.

They turned to the right, sped past a Rosicrucian Temple, past two cat-and-dog hospitals, past a School for Drum-Majorettes and two more advertisements of the Beverly Pantheon. As they turned to the left on Sunset Boulevard, Jeremy had a glimpse of a young woman who was doing her shopping in a hydrangea-blue strapless bathing suit, platinum curls and a black fur jacket. Then she too was whirled back into the past.

The present was a road at the foot of a line of steep hills, a road flanked by small, expensive looking shops, by restaurants, by night-clubs shuttered against the sun-light, by offices and apartment houses. Then they too had taken their places in the irrevocable. A sign proclaimed that they were crossing the city limits of Beverly Hills. The surroundings changed. The road was flanked by the gardens of a rich residential quarter. Through trees, Jeremy saw the façades of houses, all new, almost all in good taste—elegant and witty pastiches of Lutyens manor houses, of Little Trianons, of Monticellos; lighthearted parodies of Le Corbusier's solemn machines-for-living-in; fantastic Mexican adaptations of Mexican Haciendas and New England farms.

They turned to the right. Enormous palm trees lined the road. In the sunlight, masses of mesembryanthemums blazed with an intense magenta glare. The houses succeeded one another, like the pavilions at some endless international exhibition. Gloucestershire followed Andalusia and gave place in turn to Touraine and Oaxaca, Düsseldorf and Massachusetts.

from *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan,*
by Aldous Huxley[4]



7 Sunset Boulevard, Paramount Pictures, 1950.

The building was a huge white stucco affair, Moorish in style, with great fretted lanterns in the forecourt and huge date palms. The entrance was at the inside corner of an L, up marble steps, through an arch framed in California or dishpan mosaic.

A doorman opened the door for me and I went in. The lobby was not quite as big as the Yankee Stadium. It was floored with a blue pale carpet with sponge rubber underneath. It was so soft it made me want to lie down and roll. I waded over to the clerk with one of those mustaches that get stuck under your fingernail. He toyed with it and looked past my shoulder at an Ali Baba oil jar big enough to keep a tiger in.

from "Trouble Is
My Business,"
by Raymond Chandler[5]

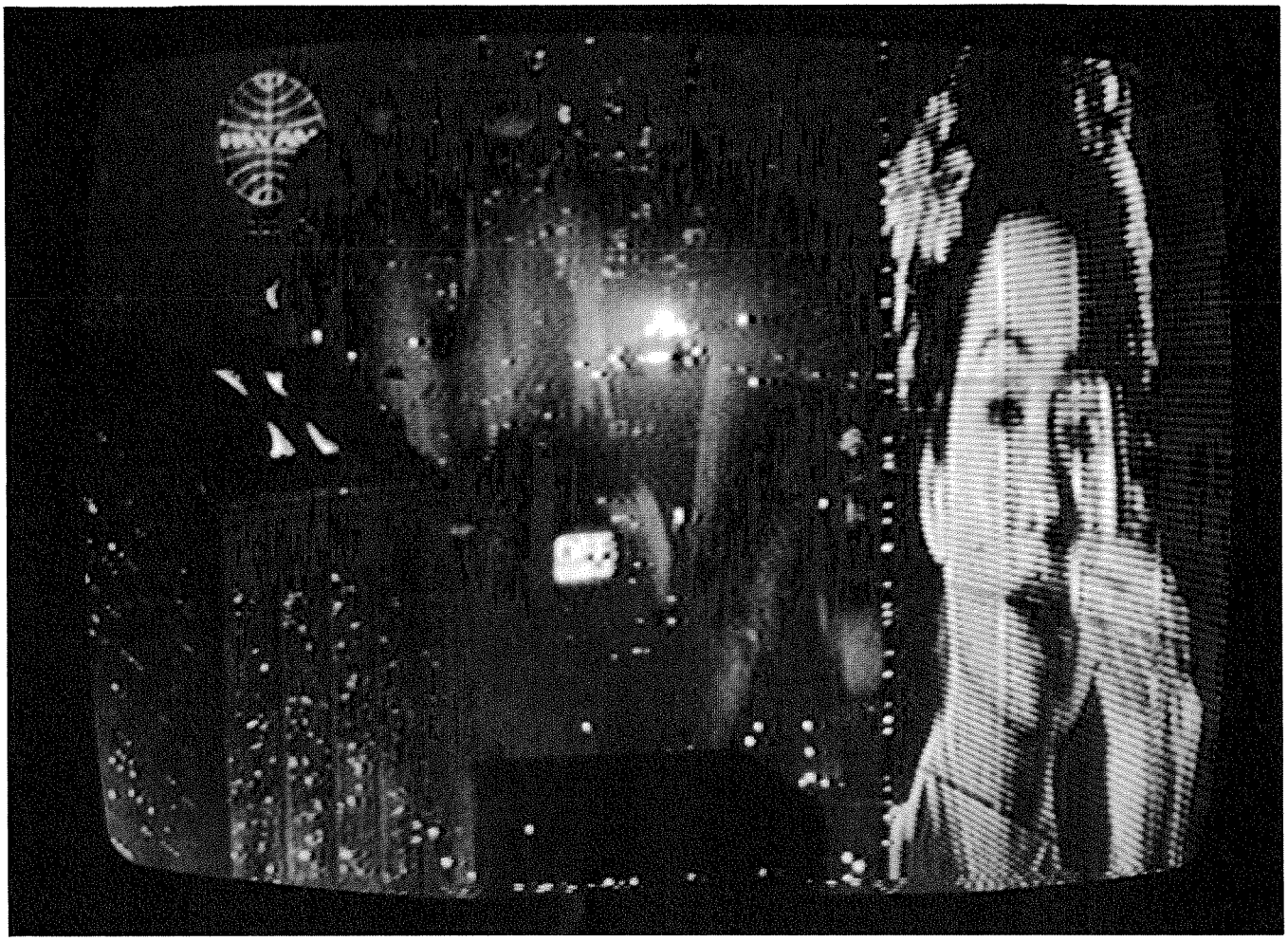


8 Blade Runner, Michael Deeley/for Ridley Scott, 1982.

"It's as though one were walking into the mind of a lunatic," he said, smiling happily, as he hung up his hat and followed the others into the great hall. "Or, rather, an idiot," he qualified. "Because I suppose a lunatic's a person with a one track mind. Whereas this . . ."—he made a circular gesture—"this is a no-track mind. No-track because infinity track. It's the mind of an idiot of genius. Positively stuffed with the best that has been thought and said." He pronounced the phrase with a kind of old-maidish precision that made it sound entirely ludicrous. "Greece, Mexico, backsides, crucifixions, machinery, George IV, Amida Buddha, science, Christian Science, Turkish baths—anything you like to mention. And every item is perfectly irrelevant to every other item." He rubbed his hands together, he twinkled delightedly through his bifocals. "Disquieting at first. But, do you know? I'm beginning to enjoy it. I find I really rather like living inside an idiot."

"I don't doubt it," said Mr. Propter, matter-of-factly. "It's a common taste."

from *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan,*
by Aldous Huxley[4]



9 Blade Runner, Michael Deeley/for Ridley Scott, 1982.

I smelled Los Angeles before I got to it. It smelled stale and old like a living room that had been closed too long. But the colored lights fooled you. The lights were wonderful. There ought to be a monument to the man who invented neon lights. Fifteen stories high, solid marble. There's a boy who really made something out of nothing.

from *The Little Sister* (p. 96), by Raymond Chandler[1]



10 Sunset Boulevard, Paramount Pictures, 1950.

I drove east on Sunset but I didn't go home. At La Brea I turned north and swung over to Highland, out over Cahuenga Pass and down onto Ventura Boulevard, past Studio City and Sherman Oaks and Encino. There was nothing lonely about the trip. There never is on that road. Fast boys in stripped-down Fords shot in and out of the traffic streams, missing fenders by a sixteenth of an inch, but somehow always missing them. Tired men in dusty coupés and sedans winced and tightened their grip on the wheel and ploughed on north and west towards home and dinner, an evening with the sports page, the blatting of the radio, the whining of their spoiled children and the gabble of their silly wives. I drove on past the gaudy neons and the false fronts behind them, the sleazy hamburger joints that look like palaces under the colors, the circular drive-ins as gay as circuses with the chipper hard-eyed carhops, the brilliant counters, and the sweaty greasy kitchens that would have poisoned a toad. Great double trucks rumbled down over Sepulveda from Wilmington and San Pedro and crossed towards the Ridge Route, starting up in low-low from the traffic lights with the growl of lions in the zoo.

Behind Encino an occasional light winked from the hills through the thick trees. The homes of screen stars. Screen stars, phooey. The veterans of a thousand beds. Hold it, Marlowe, you're not human tonight.

from *The Little Sister* (p. 87), by Raymond Chandler[1]

Notes

1 Raymond Chandler, *The Little Sister* (New York: Ballantine, 1984).

2 Nathanael West, *The Day of the Locust* (New York: Bantam New Directions, 1975).

3 John Fante, *Ask the Dust* (Santa Barbara, CA: Black Sparrow Press, 1984).

4 Aldous Huxley, *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

5 Raymond Chandler, "Trouble Is My Business," in *Trouble Is My Business* (New York: Ballantine, 1980), p. 13.

Dimensional Self-Stability and Displacement in Field-Ordered Directional Alternations

Maurice K. Smith

The adjoining subject skeleton for (my) FORM LANGUAGE WORKSHOP reviews the "FACTS OF FORM" in major rubrics of (in case you can't decipher it!):

I: FORMAL ATTRIBUTES

A: **"Form-Sphere"** (cf. Ostwald / Munsell's color-solids): Recognizes some 30 "pure" (diagrammatic) morphologic / geometric definition-groups located around "equator" in generative transformation. Toward North Pole, identified FORM-FAMILIES transform through the organic + surface-tension-bound—dissolving in snowy mists (+ Alexander Cozens "blot"). In LANDSCAPE (+ geomorphology) Euclidean "geometric" clarity is abandoned. Toward South Pole, firm "GEOMETRIC" characteristics are retained / predominate—in machines, crystals, architecture, etc. . . .

B: **Size:** Some eleven, from microscopic through human-use ranges to telescopic.

C: **Categories:** Thirteen, from inclusive landscape to building.

D: **Media:** Six, from drawing through materials to light.

E: **Time:** Here + now / historic, and **Place:** varied cultures / geographies.

II: BEHAVIOUR / ORGANIZATION SYSTEMS

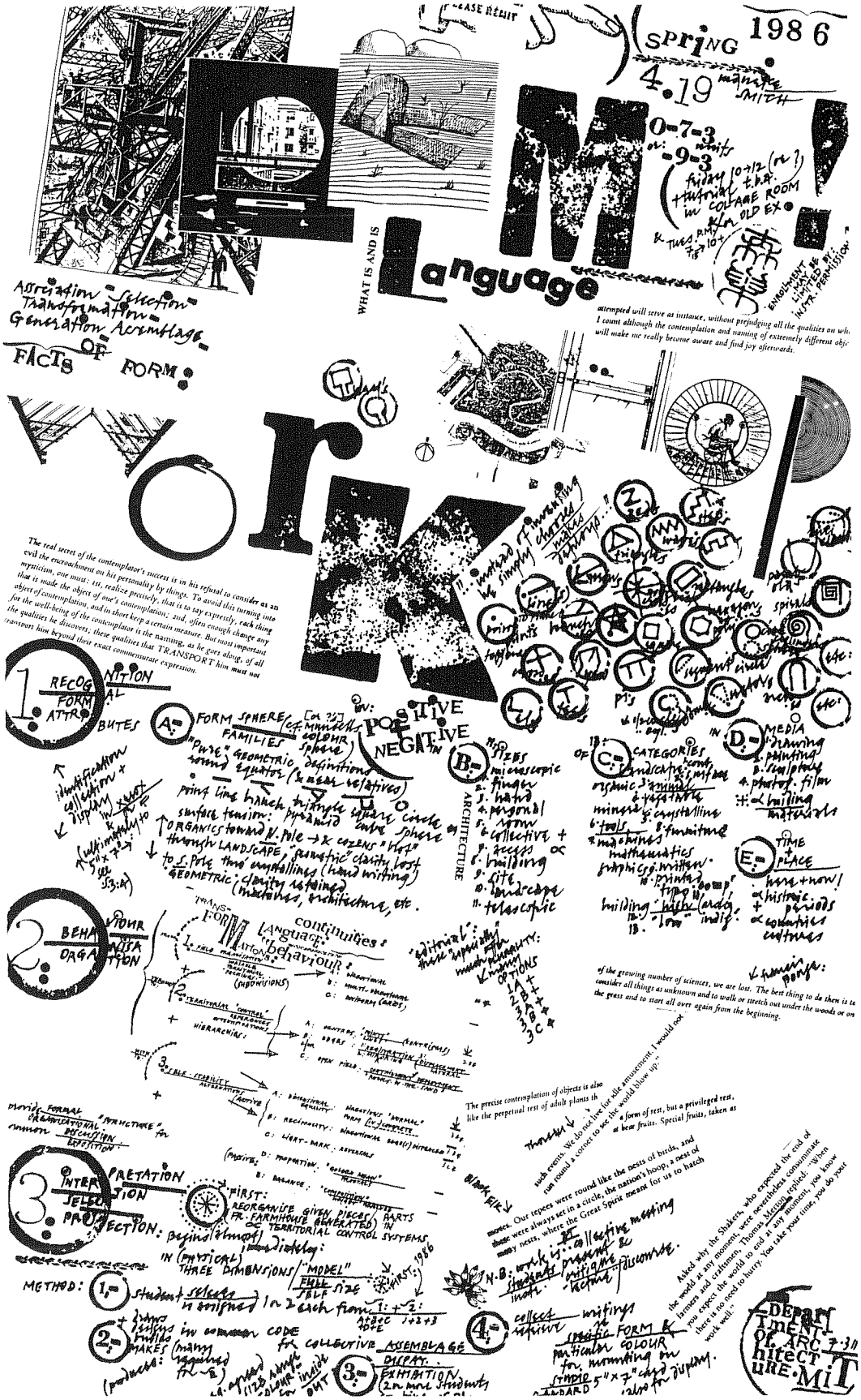
1. **Field Organization:**
   Three Variable Territorial "Packings"
   - A: DIRECTIONAL
   - B: MULTIDIRECTIONAL
   - C: UNIFORM

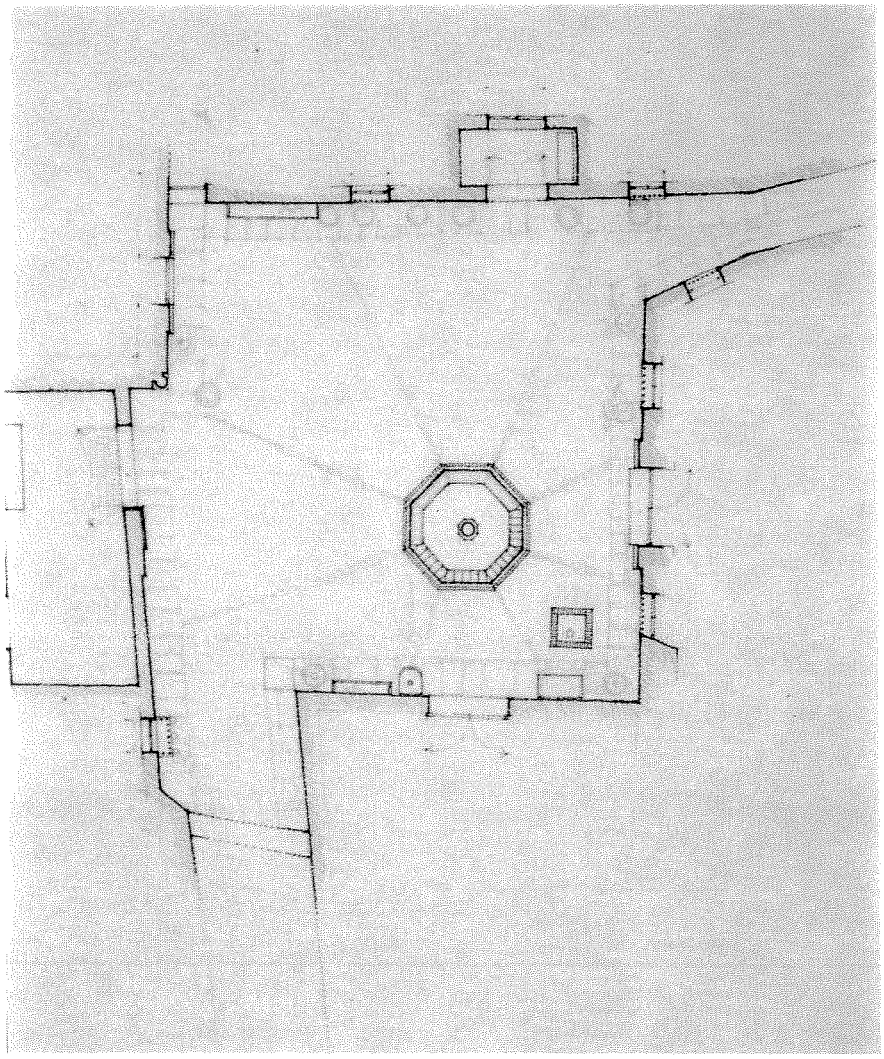
2. **Territorial Control:**
   Three References, Intensifications
   - A: CENTERS: Points + Lines
   - B: EDGES: 1. Registration; 2. Mirroring; 3. Lateral Displacement
   - C: OPEN FIELD: (Containments Deployment) "Rocks-in-the-Sand"

3. **Alternations / Self-Stability:**
   Five Methods:
   - Three ACTIVE A: DIMENSIONAL EQUALITY: Directions "NORMAL," Form "in-COMPLETE"
   - B: RECIPROCITY: Directional EDGES Displaced
   - C: LIGHT-DARK REVERSALS
   - Two PASSIVE D: PROPORTION: Fractals, Golden Mean
   - E: BALANCE: "Composition," Resolved "Weight"

The most habitable / associative (built) environments in II: BEHAVIOUR / ORGANIZATION include / exemplify 1A, 2B+2C, 3A, 3B, 3C.

The following observations offer a brief introduction to some aspects of (only) **one** of those mutually sympathetic six topics: **DIMENSIONAL SELF-STABILITY—II 3 A.**


SPRING 1986
WHAT IS AND IS
Language
Work
FACTS OF FORM
Association - Selection - Transformation - Generation - Assemblage -
RECOGNITION
FORM
ATTRIBUTES
BEHAVIOUR
ORGANISATION
INTERPRETATION
PROJECTION
METHOD:
MEDIA
TIME + PLACE
Department of Architecture M.I.T.



Cordoba: Plaza de las Flores

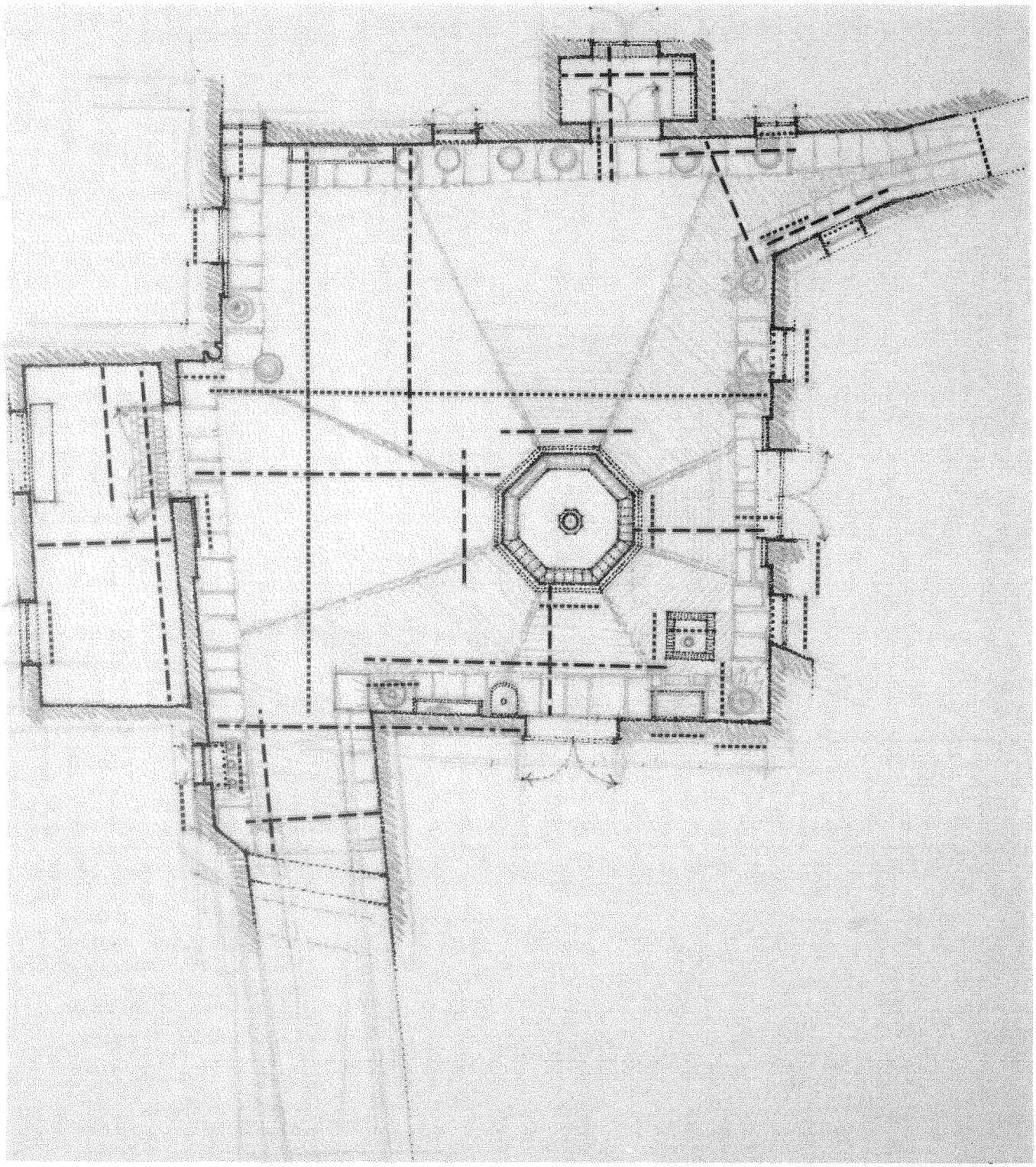
The Plaza de las Flores measures 37 feet in both orthogonal directions (large dot-dot tape)—no Renaissance surprise, an almost topologically complete self-stable, if singular, stopping place at Plaza size.

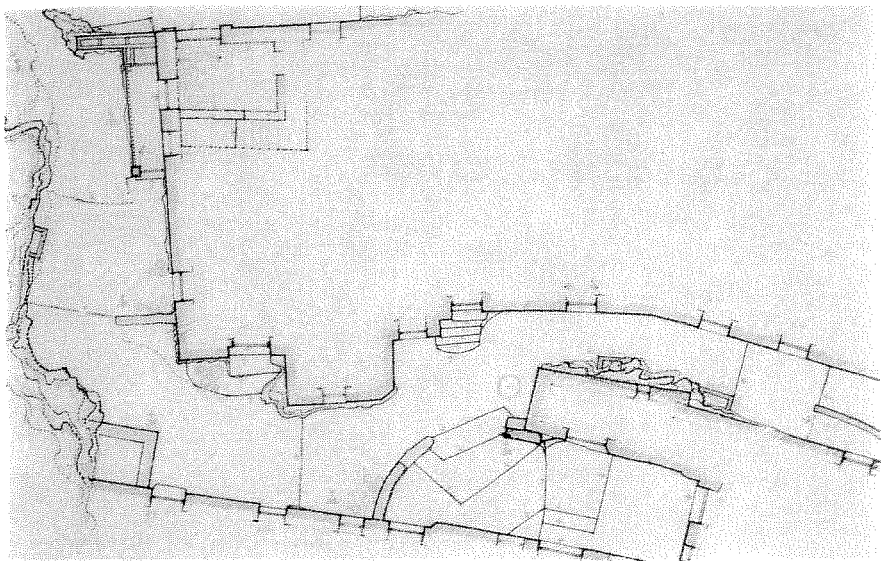
20 feet both ways (dot-dash tape) for easy movement / work through / in the Plaza—both GO and STOP.

The octagonal well "object" is displaced by its **own** 9 feet (width) from the Plaza building wall—again both ways.
This is the Plaza's "GOING" access dimension (dash-dash tape).
Varied uses of that small room size in multiple continue the double-directional field.

The *calléjon* funnels along + out at "public" Plaza entry equally, and so narrows at "private" departure.
Depth of larger domestic entry lock is width of the smaller in parallel; similar demarkations position many openings.

The shortest tape, small 4 feet (dot-dot), is for narrowest part of the *calléjon*, depth of small entry, several windows / doors, wall set-back and well-facets, etc. . . .





Casares, Andalasia (upper 6 color photographs overleaf)

Serpentine lines represent "unfinished" rough rock—either = full building height (at far right) or at building wall to ground exchange. This steeply ramped + stepped street climbs 30 feet in 70, generating, as it rounds the top-right corner, an entire floor height—donkey / manger below, citizens / house up-stepped above. In leveller terrain, people and animal (erstwhile) doors alternate.

Tape dimensions:

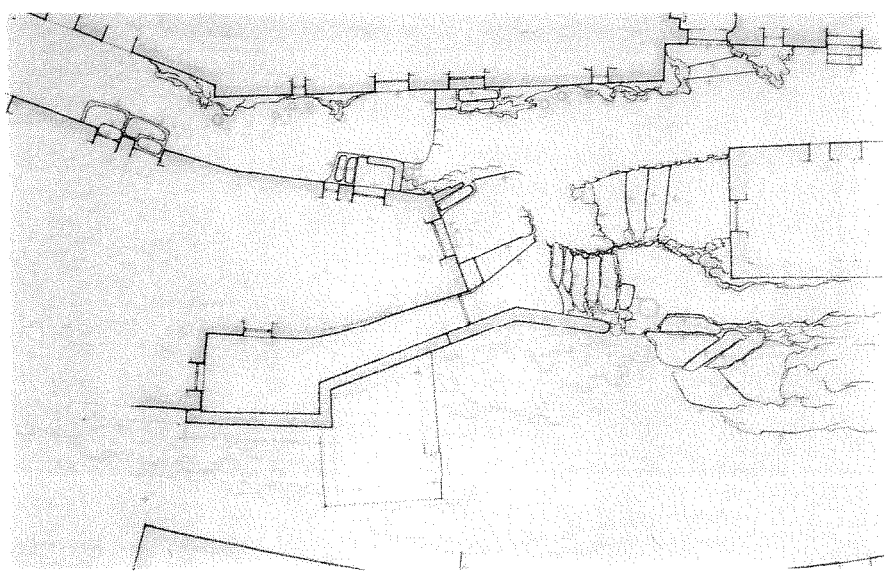
red: 4′3″—personal size, one-donkey going.

light-green: 8′0″—room width, two-donkey actual going.

dark-green: 11′9″—room length, street territorial width.

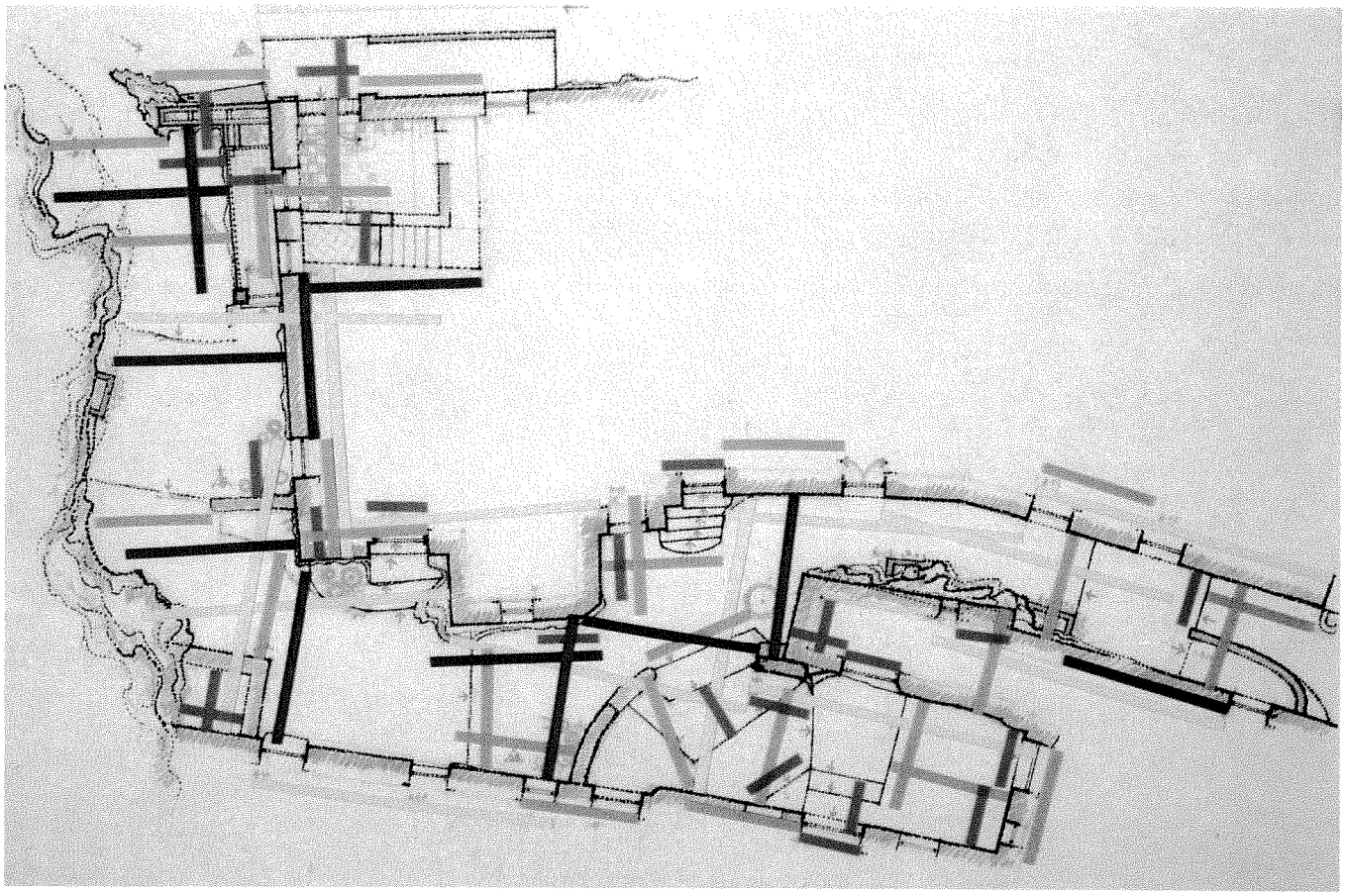
yellow: 20′0″—building size, collective plaza.

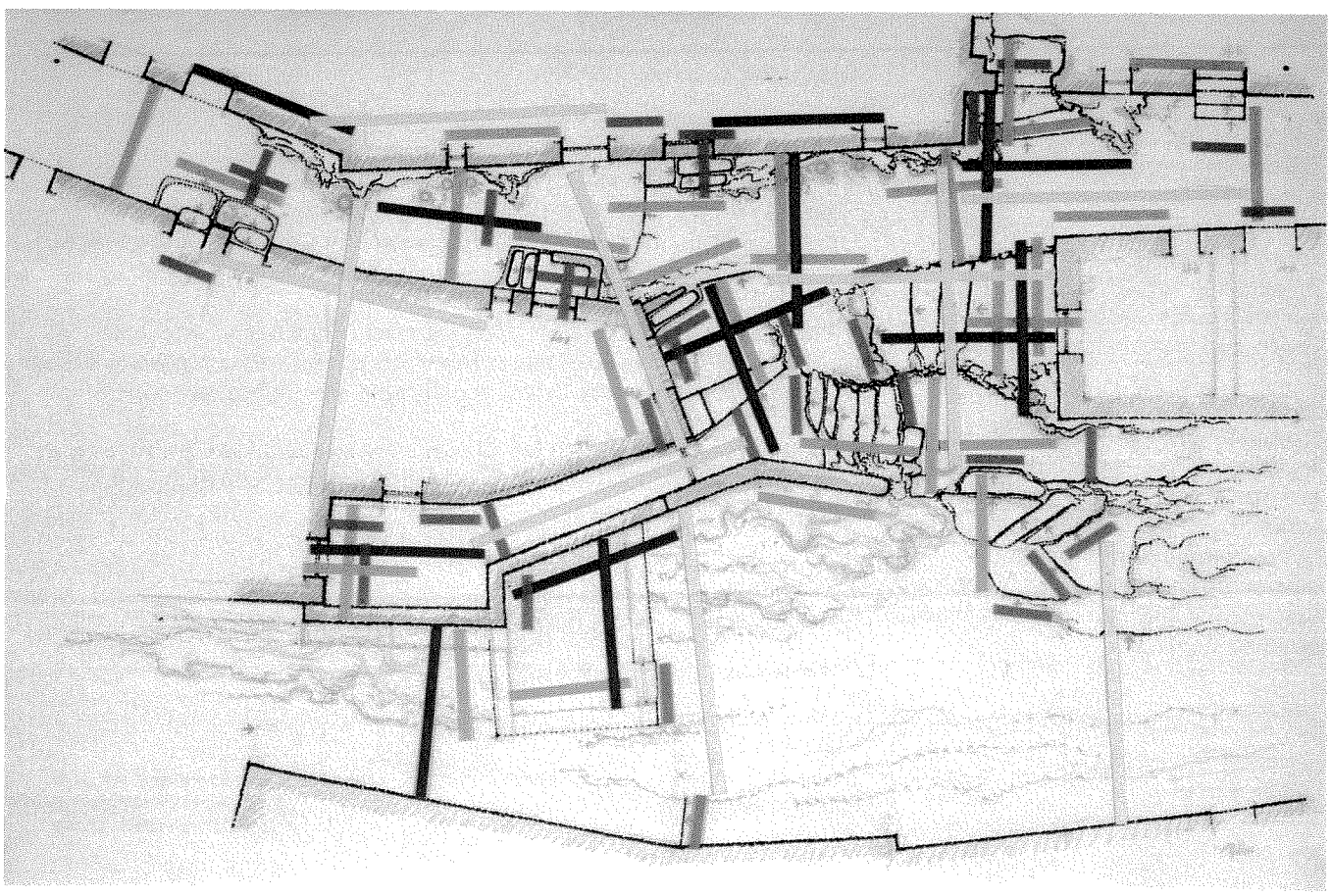
Throughout all CASARES these dimensions are remarkably consistent. The full (yellow) collective is achieved here only at the upper "YIN-YANG" directional reciprocity.
The projecting 4-floor building arm within the "S" yields room width of only 4 feet, as in the lean-to pig-pen at right upper inside corner.

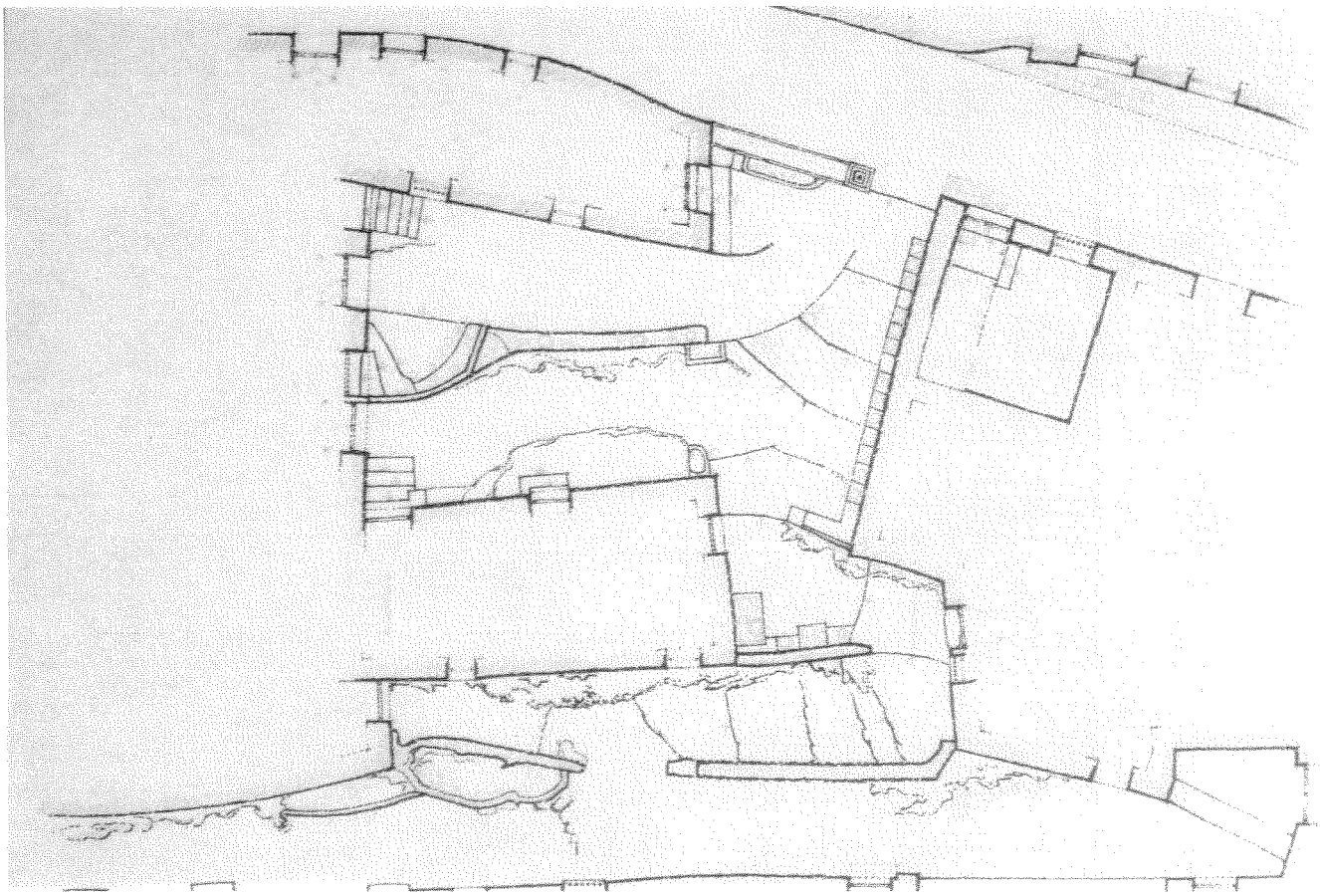


Still in landscape intensificational development, this portion shows the town's (yellow) basic building dimension already securely in place. Rough-formed (but red width) street / public steps lead down / up through a semiprivate outside room / patio, once a stable access / work area (furnished with red-width slate wall-bench).

So public / private boundaries vary / reverse through use / occupation. There is no total / permanent privacy "outside." Similar use options pertain throughout the town's exterior / domestic porches / rooms.







You are invited to inspect / check the dimensions / reciprocities! The room-size produce / food "store" at upper right is one of some 30 in the town. This one offers a public floor-territory of 5′6″ × 3′9″—enough for two standing customers. Others prospecting can see in through a barred window from the ramped street, and wait their turn outside.

In this drawn area of only 60 feet maximum each way, there are 19 separate entries, each particular and semiprivate—achieved through careful open-field-distribution (none mutually opposite) and advantageous exploitation of the reciprocally alternating six contour-terraced slope.

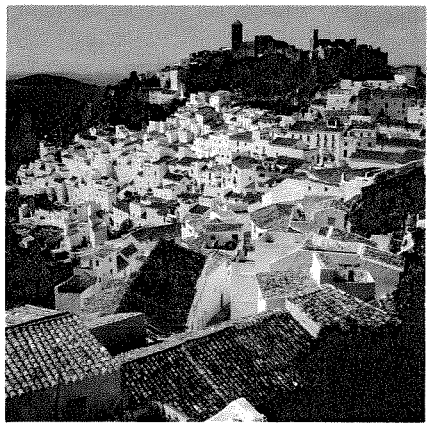
Andalusian Courtyard (#7)

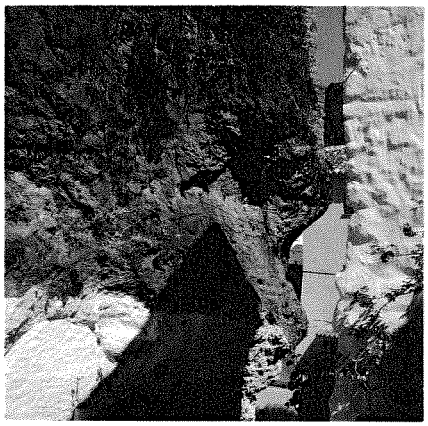
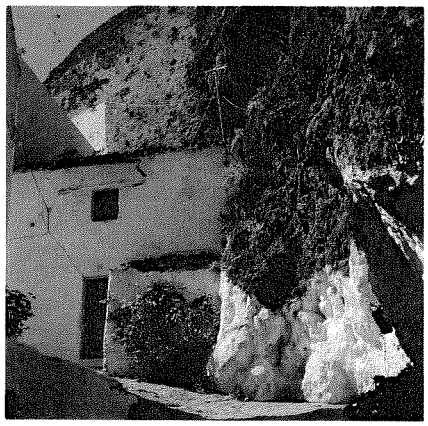
No two courtyards are identical. Customary "inhabitants" include tree, well, mounting block, steps / stairs to upper levels, etc. . . .
While these components / "players" are almost always present, their positions relative to both the varied form (rectangle, el, tree, etc . . . .) + dimensions of the courtyard itself and to each other display a full range of (ordering) permutations.

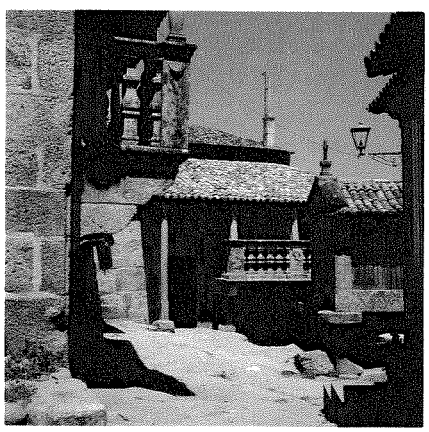
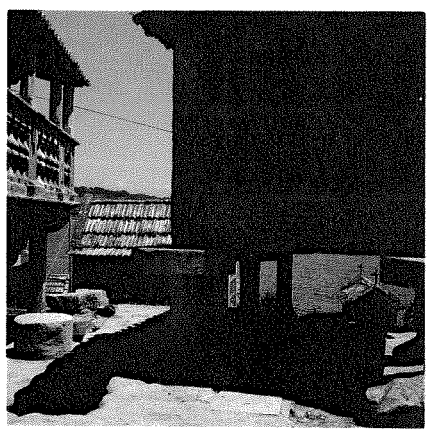
In the shown example (? Vejer de la Frontera) dimensional stabilities evidenced by white-washed tree trunk = displacement from court wall and its-own / arched-doorway height (small room size, light-green tape).

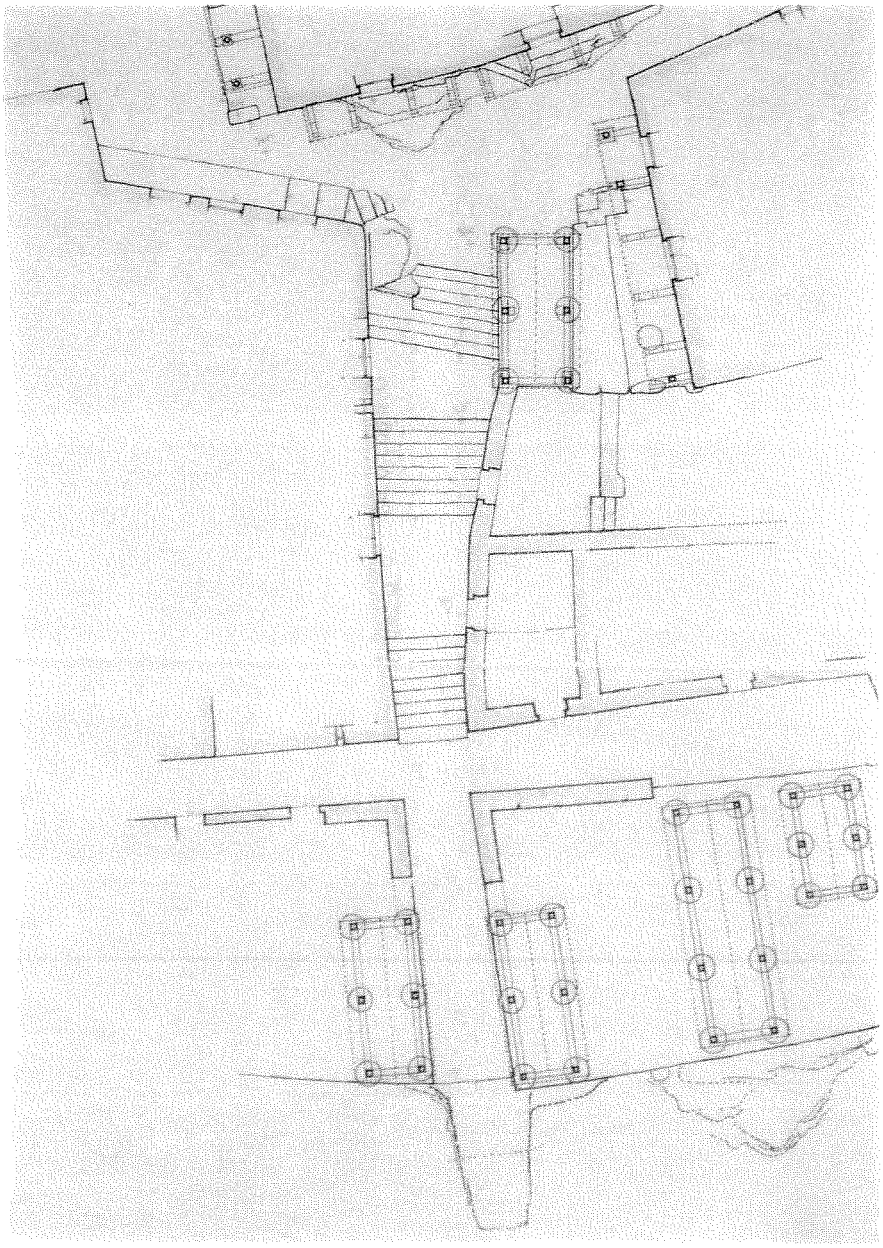
Mounting block is displaced by its own cube-measure from wall—also equals barred window, width of smaller doors, and platform height / width—(person size, red tape).

Opposite: Casares—upper six
Vejer de la Frontera—middle
Combarro—lower three



Combarro

Several *horreos* are normal to and at the walled *ria's* edge.
A single raised storage building "inhabits" the small plaza (one of a triple chain) 20 feet above the sea, and 70 feet inland.
Generated from below by processional stepped access and bounded above by a second contour street, the plaza form simultaneously encourages both

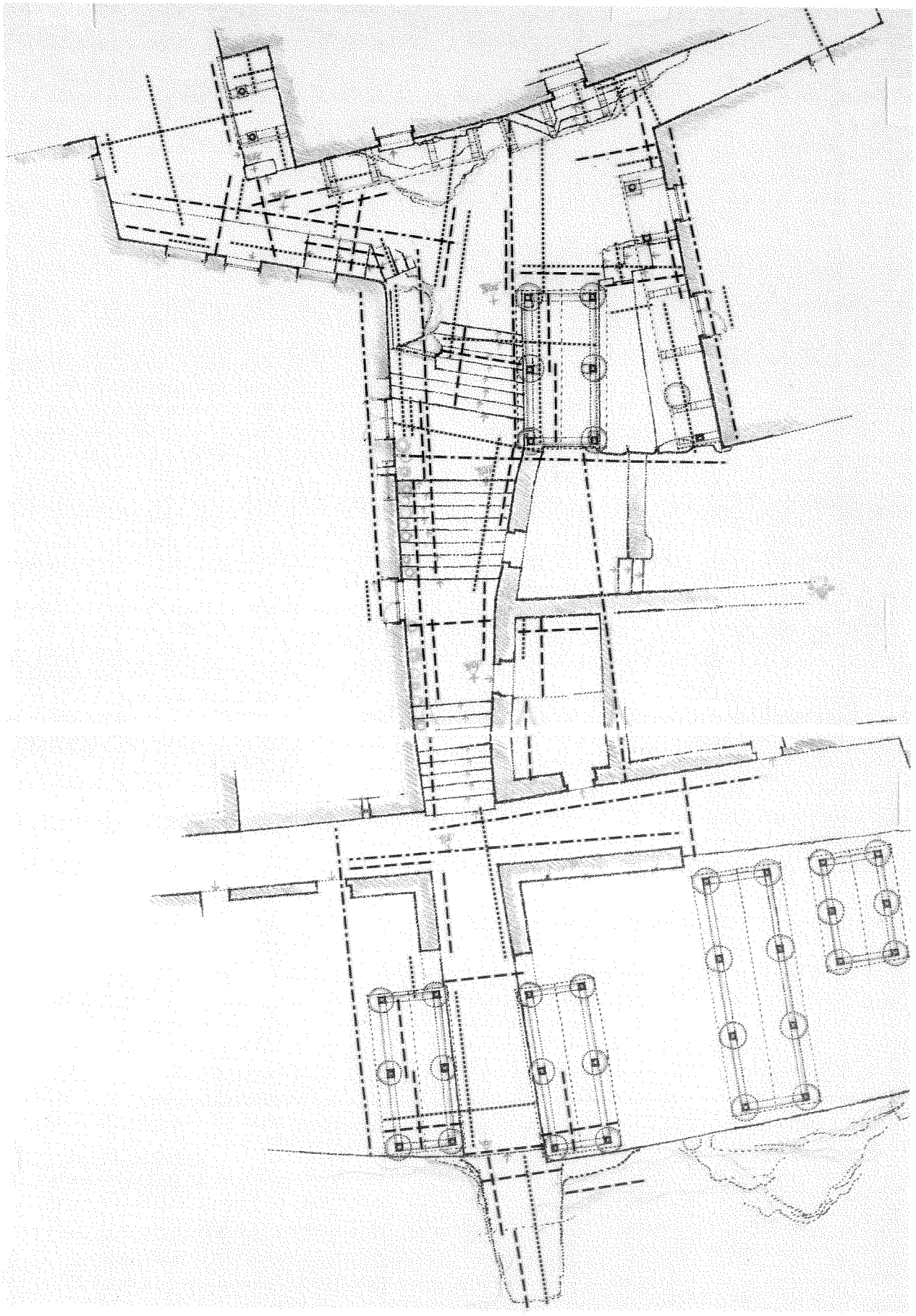
$$\frac{\text{GO}}{\text{MOVE}} \text{ and } \frac{\text{STOP}}{\text{STAY}}.$$

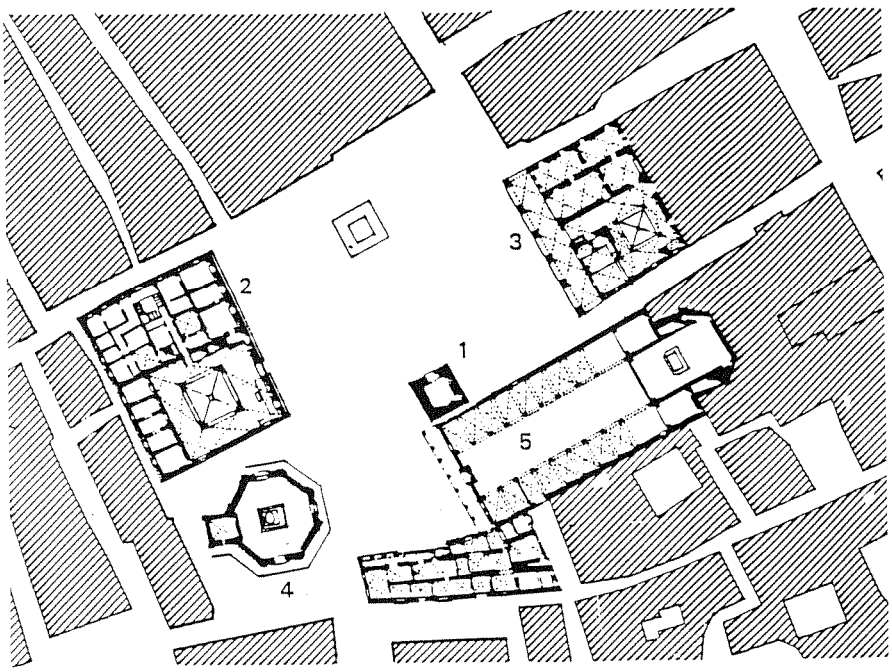
Measurement confirms. Plaza dimensions 31½ feet each way (dot-dash tape). This is also the (width of) building size "parallel" to upper *horreo*, etc . . . at the more public outside edges of *horreo* to plaza building wall faces. They are equal—a virtual but incomplete "square."
Again, as for the Flores well, the freestanding object (here the *horreo*) is displaced precisely by its own dimensions to / from plaza-bounding wall / ground definition—both length (dot-dot, 15 feet) and width.
This width (dash-dash, 8 feet) is also the "normative" steps / street going—similar to the light-green tape in Casares.
The narrowest street passage (dot-dot, 4 feet) again equals many doorways, thresholds, corbelled balcony projections, etc. . . .

A precise measurement system / method involving use-dimensions and self-displacement for key demarkations is clearly in effect—optional open-field disposition—without the more limiting control of serial repetition, additive modules, or extended subdivision / multiplication of "high" architectural composition.

Variable "slack" in adaptation to local terrain / ownership is largely in the "walls"—host to specific premade door / window openings. Larger collective to building-size demarkations may / may not include one or more access / material dimensions.
So here, in village / town context, is the more inclusive, lively-field, use-dimensional precursor of more limited / rigid close-packing proportionate orders paramount in architect-designed "high" Renaissance etc. systems.

At this investigation stage, it seems self-evident that in "optional alternation dimensional self-stability" is embodied part of an operative universal form field-theory.

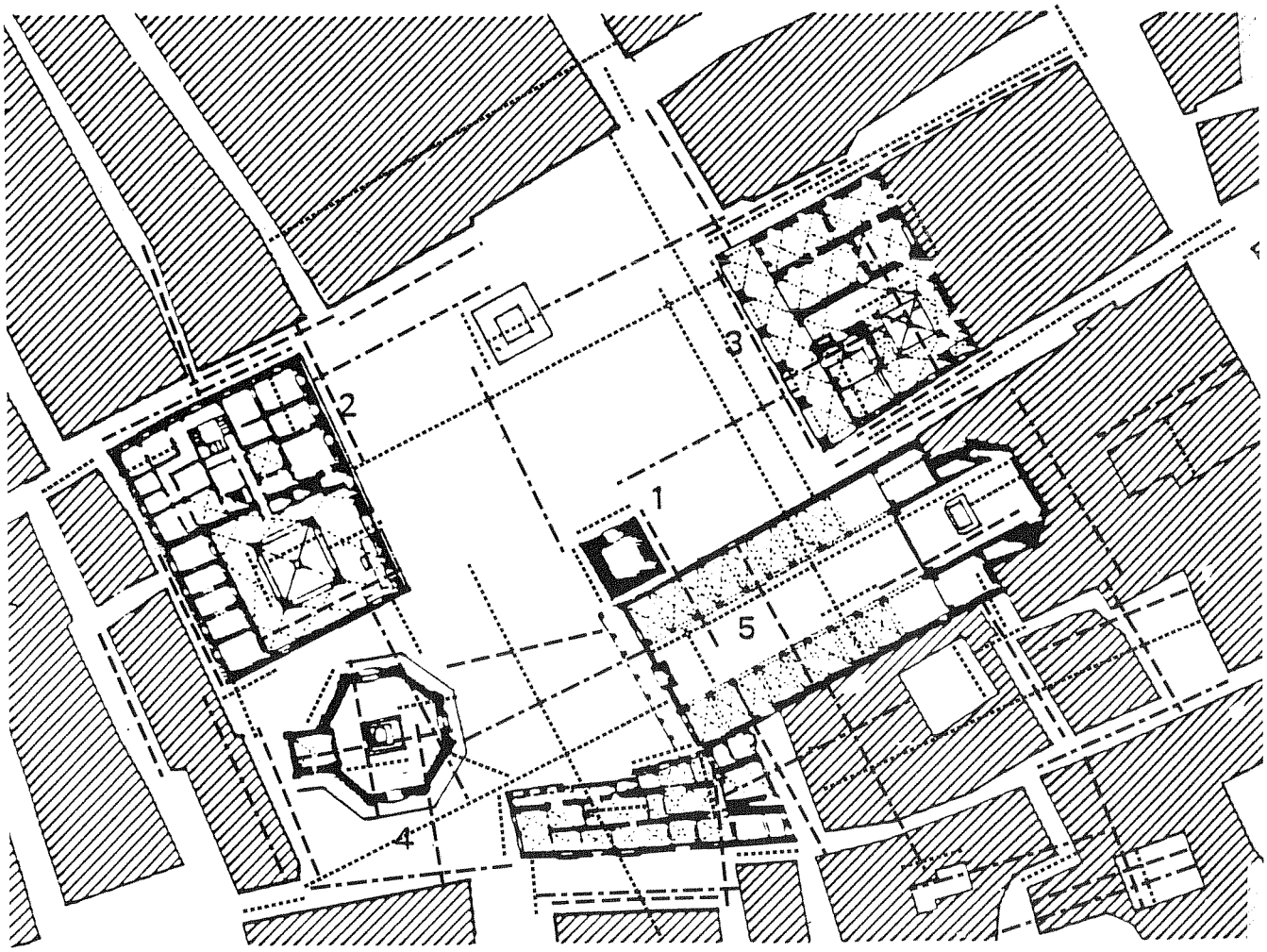




Pistoia: Piazza del Duomo

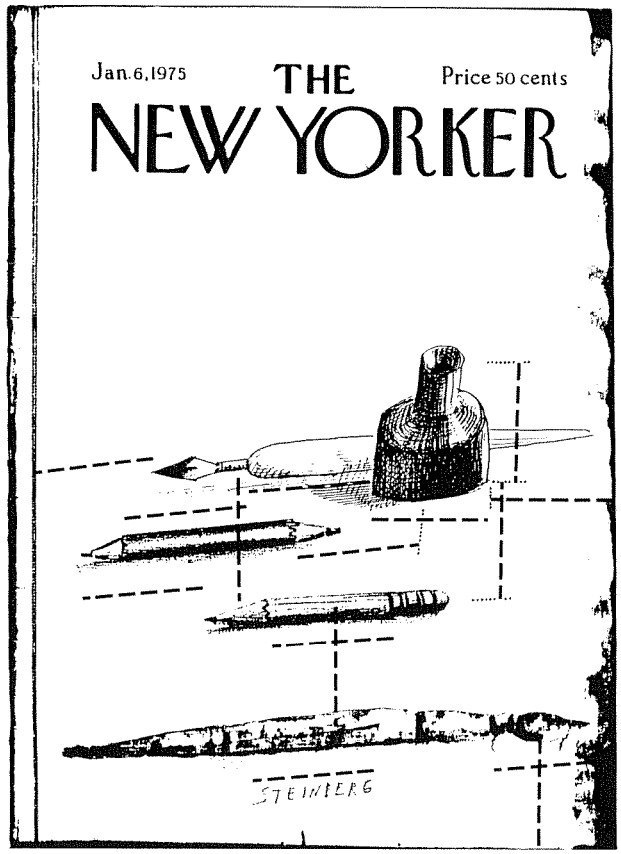
The structuring double-directional dimensional displacement observed in Iberian towns / villages, doubtless controlled / measured by inspectoral / agreed authority / chains / knotted ropes (?), is also manifest in intensified (European) urban plazas, e.g., this one.

The Duomo's (#5) length (longest dot-dot tape, circa 70 meters) displaced longitudinally **and** laterally demarks the major plaza boundaries / extent. It also positions (when containing Duomo width) the west side of City Hall (#3) and, usually including one or more access ways, is a recurrent building / block size.
City Hall width (dot-dash tape), circa 37½ meters, is also Pretoria (#2) depth.
Duomo width (dash-dash tape) is circa 26 meters.
The shortest of the 4 dimensions / sizes tape-shown-street going (short dot-dot, circa 10 meters) demarks also the narrowest building width, baptistry facets (#4), Duomo nave width, belfry side (#1), courtyards, large rooms, etc. . . .
This equivalents at public / collective size the behaviour of the small red / personal-size tapes = one loaded-donkey width in Casares, etc. . . .
Behaviour, then, may be "fractal" at different sizes, but end-result form is not.
Similar demarkational systems are evinced in many elsewheres, e.g.



Palermo: Piazza Pretoria. The two churches, St. Caterina and Martorana, almost normal to each other, each maintain building length ahead.
Between them is Piazza Bellini (Martorana is "buried" in (?) later "fabric") defined by Caterina equally accurately by its laterally displaced width.

Milan: Piazza del Duomo. A singularly simplistic site with its adjoining 19th-century Galleria, etc. . . . , the cathedral's own length is repeated to bound the extent of its open forecourt.

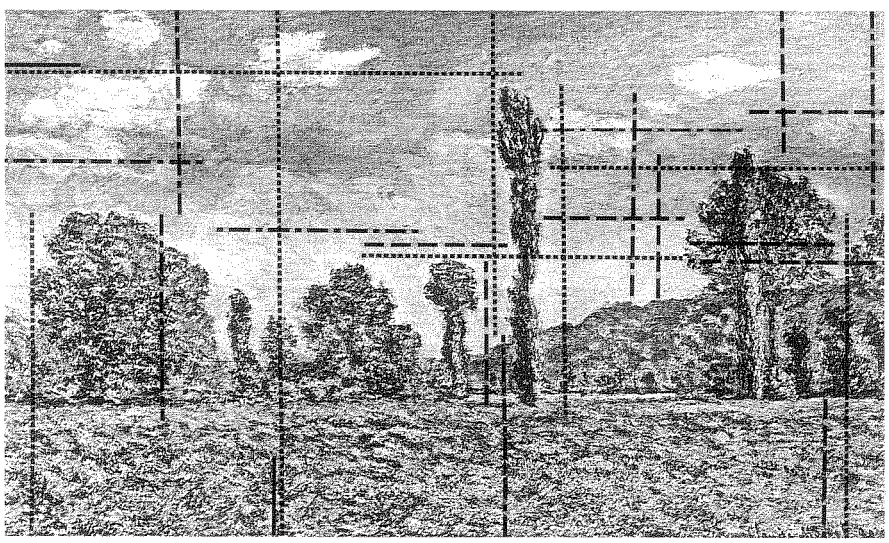


Saul Steinberg: *New Yorker* Cover, January 6, 1975

The ink bottle's (true) height equals width equals lateral displacement from right-hand page boundary, and demarks vertically to the second pencil: centers or material edges construct optional "slack." This single dimension distances each item in vertical series: top pen from left-hand boundary, lower pen from its "frame"—and even the signature!

The landscape has its formation and as after all a play has to have formation and be in relation one thing to the other thing and as the story is not the thing as any one is always telling something then the landscape not moving but being always in relation, the trees to the hills the hills to the fields the trees to each other any piece of it to any sky and then any detail to any other detail, the story is only of importance if you like to tell or like to hear a story but the relation is there anyway. . . .

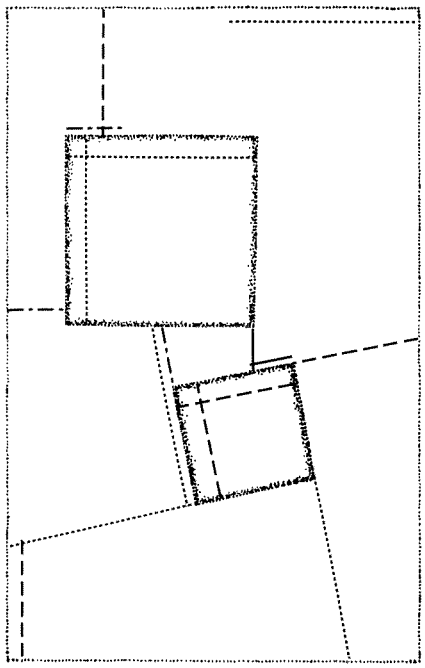
Gertrude Stein: *Lectures in America*, "Plays" (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957, after Random House, 1935), p. 125



Claude Monet: *Poppies near Giverny,* 1890

Double-direction self-stabilities and displacements demark major definitions—tallest poplar both by its own height from right-hand boundary, and by "frame's" height from left edge, etc. . . .
The (picture) "frame" remains a participant in the "landscape" field. (Monet was a closet constructivist?)

Similar structural relationships / displacements are observable in almost every work illustrated in Albert Skira's 1949 *History of Modern Painting*!

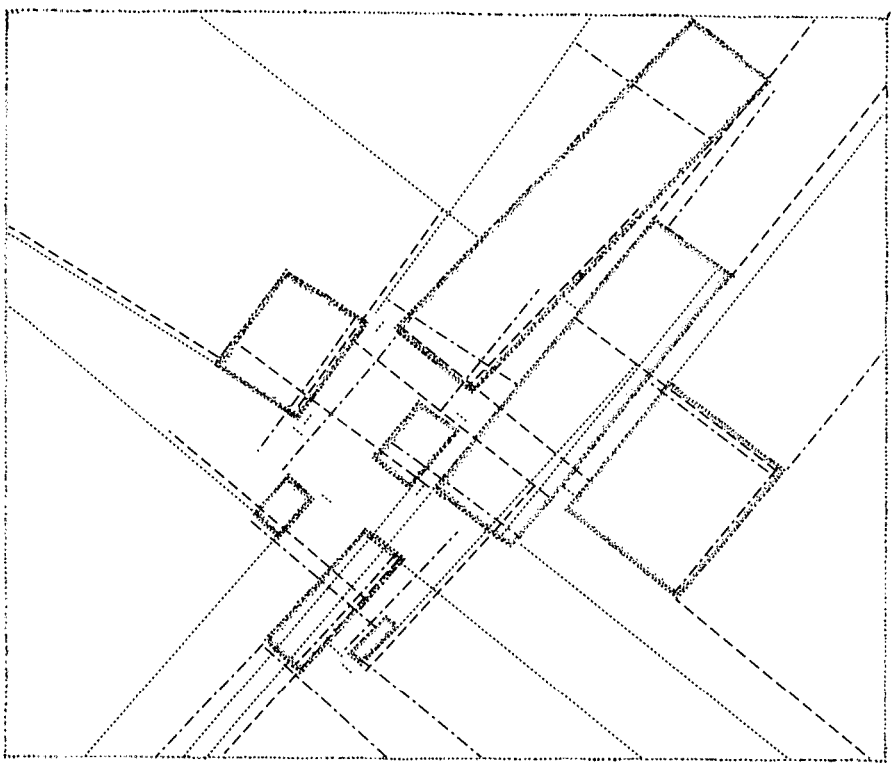


Kasimir Malevich

Carée Rouge et Carée Noir, 1915

Although plausible accounts exist (Pedersen et al) of derivations (from black cross) for the two square sizes, there appears no adequate accounting of their "in-site" organization / construction / deployment.

Each square is finitely boundary-positioned as shown—by its own dimension, the other's and / or the displacement (length) in extension of left-hand side of (small) rotating RED square which bisects lower side of (large) orthographic BLACK square.
Even "passings" from BLACK to within RED (full tape) are self-stable / equal and the whole is "solidly" / completely constructed.



Eight Red Rectangles, 19XX

The pieces are area-derived and "plate-shifted" from two squares: one, the length of 2nd top rectangle; the other, its width.
All 8 "mobiling" parts are firmly "nailed" to the including (9th) frame / site and / or #2. Although seemingly much looser and more complex than "the red + the black square," the same methods pertain.
Each demarkation is precisely positioned; the middle-size series are tape-omitted to retain clarity.

As in "architectural" plazas—
domestic, collective, public,
CORDOBA COMBARRO PISTOIA
etc. . . .—primary territorial positioning is double-directionally stabilized, while the "uses" of each dimension vary / "reverse."
The size range (may even) analog proportionally—from building / block size (#2 length) to the smallest (#8) section, which, of course, equals the normative smallest "field access" and inverse / obverse "passings."
The entire field then is a "supreme" study in intrinsic / dimensional self-stability.

After-notes

The Spanish towns drawings were made at $\frac{1}{8}'' = 1'0''$ from accurate on-site measurements by M.K.S. (on MIT sabbatical) in spring 1982.

More extensive street-plan portions of some 11 towns were subsequently measured and later drawn at $\frac{1}{16}'' = 1'0''$ by Thomas Hille and Andrès Mignucci. Their work, under my auspices / supervision, was supported financially through the Grunsfeld Fund.
We presented a near-300 running-feet exhibit at MIT in fall 1982. In addition to dimensional self-stability, topics addressed included primary street-access systems (in landscape intensification); directional access-street junctions / displacements; building–street territorial exchanges.

Mr. Hille has since furthered our street plan-studies with plans + elevations of late-Renaissance, a-thematic interventions in two highland eastern Portuguese towns, Monsaraz and Marvão. Vertical dimensions, of course, continue / reinforce / intensify the systems observable in plan.
The later Renaissance "composition" serialises / subdivides with dimensions already generated / determined and open-field deployed in the more variable pre-extant landscape-intensified "habitable" / associative "indigenous" built-form.
Several graduate students have incorporated this "universal" observation method and have demonstrated (in part) its generative application in their respective theses—other countries / cultures / times. For example, Louise Hara, "Passage," June 1985 (applied to a Warrenton, Virginia, project); Matthew Longo, "Reciprocal with the Landscape," June 1985 (applied to several New England North Shore towns).

Within each Iberian town studied the specific dimensions for each "tape" are phenomenally consistent—while the entire family of dimensions differed somewhat from town to town.
As expected, in easier / flatter terrain, building / collective dimensions were greater than in difficult / sloping sites—transportation vehicle-aided versus donkeys only, etc. . . .
Each town's dimensional consistency, then, surely predicates a finely tuned / agreed / enacted / asserted measuring system—"building inspector" with official knotted rope? chain? marked sticks?—rather than the "intuitively" shared understandings often attributed to under-documented indigenous building / architectures.
There can be no doubt of similarly finite measurings / displacements in urban plazas.

How ubiquitous / "mandatory" this particular behavioural / formal attribute really is awaits further assimilation / assessment.
It is certainly observable as a convincing delineator of territoriality in association with the other alternations (light-dark, π, reciprocity, etc. . . .)—not only in building and design but also in a host of other particular sizes / categories / media, etc. . . .
The range includes ridge-roosting seagulls, the dark spots white aureoled on foxglove petals, and, probably, Jacobs cattle beans.
Antienvironmental, disassociative, minimal modular repetitionisms achieving variation / change only through removal / substitution receive no further comment here.

Should the case for, say, the painters founder and be held largely intuitive (I would demur), then the frequency / density of dimensional self-stabilities employment / existence is so great that even stronger acceptance for its deep-(built in)-structure is warranted.

Most painters, from "romantic" landscape recorders to projective constructivists (Monet, Steinberg, and Malevich represent them here), and photographers—Ansel Adams, Eliot Porter, David Muench, etc. . . .—join with other "visual" designer species.
All methodically employ lateral or double-directional displacements.
Prospective "external" continuities are predicted through edge self-displacements and reversals.
Their plazas / contexts are the extents / boundaries of **their** frames / sites, even as

. . . (the painting) must have its own life. And yet it may not move or imitate movement, not really, nor must it stay still. It must not only be in its frame but it must not, only, be in its frame. This whole question of a picture being in its frame returning to its frame or not returning to its frame is the question that has latterly bothered me the most. Modern pictures have made the very definite effort to leave their frame. But do they stay out, do they go back and if they do is that where they belong. . . .

Gertrude Stein, op. cit., p. 87

Contributors

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James Goring is a Los Angeles native living in Berkeley, California after receiving a Master of Architecture there in 1985. He is currently a practicing architect at William Turnbull Associates in San Francisco.

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Joyce Earley Lyndon is a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and a fellow of the Landscape Institute in the United Kingdom. She spent twenty years in British planning departments and ten years as a consultant in southern California. Since 1957 she has been a working member of the Environmental Planning Commission of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. She lives on the Rhine in southern Germany.

Andres Mignucci-Giannoni is a native of Puerto Rico with degrees in architecture from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and MIT. He has a long-standing interest in studying the process of transmitting cultural values through urban physical settings.

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Maurice K. Smith lived for many years in New Zealand and studied architecture at Auckland University. He came to the US in 1951 and studied at MIT on a Fulbright in 1952–53. In 1958 he returned permanently to MIT, where he is now Professor of Architecture. His teaching has included studies of intrinsic form language common to all physical definitions, behaviors and media—including landscape and indigenous architectures as well as generative habitable building systems and collage assemblage.

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