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TOWARD MAKING PLACES

The architect's task is more than the manipulation of materials and the molding of space; it is the definition and possession of place.



ONE EQUALS TWO PLUS: When we make one building we are remaking others and permanently modifying the urban or natural landscape.

A BUILDING SELECTS: It should admit those portions of the specific environment which contribute to the user's ordered image of the universe.



THE SPECIFIC COMES FIRST: A building is in a specific place to which it must specifically respond. Generalized forms must grow out of a thorough understanding of the particular place, activities, techniques of building and systems of service. We must start not with the geometry but with the user. Therefore . . .



THE END IS NOT IN SIGHT: Until we learn to understand the user's needs and desires, we cannot know what shape our world should take.

Architecture is in a bad way. It is taught as a craft and its best disciples are craftsmen. They learn to respect the nature of materials, to organize surfaces and solids. Sometimes they master the molding of space, and a few can learn to manipulate the magic flow of light (while others learn to manipulate the magic flow of money). Our magazines are filled with handsome photographs of buildings. But, with all this, our environment grows messier, more chaotic, more out-of-touch with the natural world and more inimical to human life. The order of the existing natural world is destroyed but no order closer to human understanding is introduced to take its place. The chaos shows up alarmingly clearly when numbers of our most distinguished architects are loosed on the same area, from the Berlin Interbau through the Brussels Fair to the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, at which latter a coating of travertine is expected to insure superficial uniformity for a disparate collection of very careful designs.

The more fashionable all this is, the better is the chance that it will be thought "expressive" of something or of somebody's self. In this chaos of self-expression, careful or sloppy, the basic function of architecture has somehow been forgotten: past the provision merely of shelter, past the expressive manipulation of materials or even of space, it is the creation of *place*, of what Susanne Langer calls an "ethnic domain." This creation of place amounts at first to *taking possession* of a portion of the earth's surface. Then, architecture being an act, that process of taking possession is abstracted, as life is abstracted by the playwright.

It seems evident, to people who study such things, that birds sing not for the joy of the morning or the beauty of the season but in order to take possession, to establish acoustically the limits of their domains. The Chinese more ponderously achieved the same sort of demarcation with their Great Wall. But, since men are subtler than birds, they long ago elevated this act of taking possession into an art, by abstracting the act. Ryoanji garden in Kyoto, for instance, contains just fifteen stones in a walled area of sand about the size of a tennis court, meant to be seen from an adjacent veranda. Thus seen, they are merely rocks in the sand, or tiger cubs crossing a stream, as some say, or turtles, or islands in the sea, or points for fixing the cosmos, as in the equally celebrated Japanese teahouse at the edge of the sea, from which the sea is visible only through one small window, placed low and over the bowl where one washes one's hands. So the message is clear: to have (by empathizing with it) the water in the bowl is to have it in the sea as well.

This is all thrilling, but disappointing too, like a play which brilliantly brings into focus a life that no longer exists. For us, it is not a natural world only, which needs to be thus possessed and abstracted, but a world formed too of man-made forms and ideas, where we have to ask, all over again, questions of what constitutes meaning and what is capable of being abstracted from that (what is real?) and what constitutes somewhere. Who is taking possession of what, and in whose name? So far, we are uneasy about this; we experience some discomfort when the land is taken over for "the people" on 60 x 100 foot pads, and we experience even more discomfort when the people's institutions can't seem to assert a reasonable act of possession—like New Orleans' new Civic Center, which is on the edge of town, in deference to an obscure hierarchy of values which is apparently based on the act of parking automobiles.

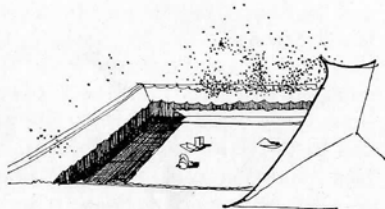
As both cause and effect of our confusion, there exists a strange hiatus in our architectural language: experience, which used to be a teacher (even

As scene is the basic abstraction of pictorial art, and kinetic volume of sculpture, that of architecture is an ethnic domain. Actually, of course, a domain is not a "thing" among other "things"; it is the sphere of influence of a function, or functions; it may have physical effects on some geographical locality or it may not. Nomadic cultures, or cultural phenomena like the seafaring life, do not inscribe themselves on any fixed place on earth. Yet a ship, constantly changing its location, is none the less a self-contained place, and so is a Gypsy camp, an Indian camp or a circus camp, however often it shifts its geodetic bearings. Literally, we say the camp is in a place, culturally, it is a place. A Gypsy camp is a different place from an Indian camp though it may be geographically where the Indian camp used to be.

A place, in this non-geographical sense, is a created thing, an ethnic domain made visible, tangible, sensible. As such it is, of course, an illusion. Like any other plastic symbol, it is primarily an illusion of self-contained, self-sufficient, perceptual space. But the principle of organization is its own: for it is organized as a functional realm made visible—the center of a virtual world, the "ethnic domain," and itself a geographic semblance.

—Susanne K. Langer

FEELING AND FORM



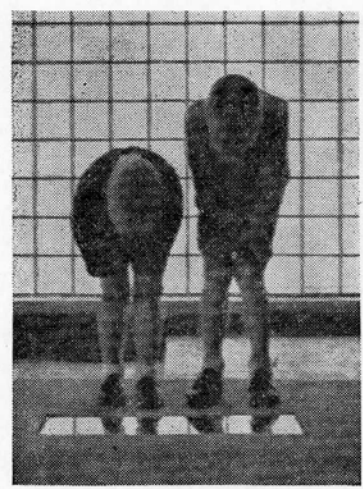
innovations of the lightning Gothic sort took generations) was firmly rooted in the chance to study existing building forms as they weathered, and as they were used, and to modify them as they needed it, and as the slowly changing situation demanded. Our famous architects, and many not so famous, seek always the magic moment. They innovate with each job, and with almost no experience, since we have no real way of saying how a building or a town—a place—works, and what effect it has on the people who use it. We have carefully developed techniques for describing what buildings look like, both in words and in two-dimensional monochromatic abstractions by celebrated architectural photographers. The talismans of these gentlemen have such value that, in curious annual rituals, they are examined by panels of experts who bestow awards on the buildings from which the most elegant abstractions have been made. Meanwhile, nobody—critic, architect, teacher or other theoretician or technician—has so far communicated any interest in the way these buildings work, the way they have taken possession of someplace for somebody and the way in which, in turn, people take possession of them. It would be hard to communicate such an interest: there is no technical language to do it. But the language, presumably, does not exist because the need for it has not yet been urgently enough felt.

Lacking experience of the old sort, and the basis for achieving any, we need a body of theory, a formulation of a way of working which will let us consider how, and for whom, our structures are to function, what they are and how they figure in the lives of the people who use them. The forms which the famous “form givers” give, and even the spaces which some of those forms enclose, become far less important than the places which we establish and of which we establish possession.

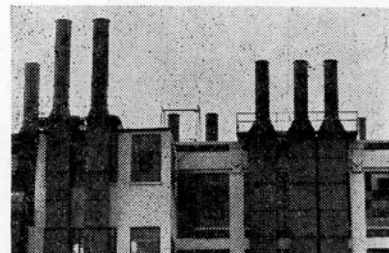
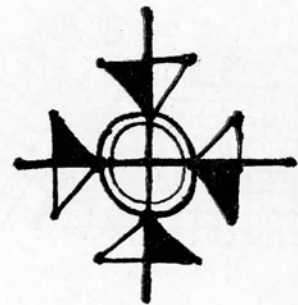
C. W. M.

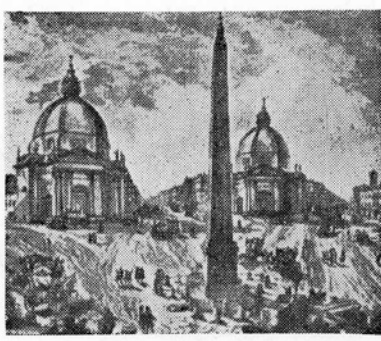
The “form giving” of fashionable architects of the '50s and '60s is particularly susceptible to lionization on museum walls and in the pages of glossy magazines. Its opposite is generally taken to be the “anonymous” architecture of barns or the Bay Region style. (One takes it that museum attendance would run lower for a demonstration of this sort of thing.) A more useful distinction might be made between the *general* solution and the *specific*. The general solution, whether curvily sculptural or puritanically cubed, is the diagram of an independent idea, conceived in isolation; the specific solution starts with a place, makes it habitable, and enhances the qualities of the specific place by making it responsive to the needs of the people who use it (in all those ways we find so difficult to communicate). A-frame churches and all-glass office blocks are in the first category. Some industrial buildings, and the orphanage of Aldo Van Eyck are in the second. A third category, more rarely found, firmly rooted in the specifics, manages to generalize these specifics so they take on a universal importance, transcending the importance of the place itself, just as characters in a play, superbly aware of the nuances of the situation they find themselves in, yet create a frame larger than this situation, large enough to hold us all. Chartres Cathedral is a candidate for this third category.

We can leave this category to occur when it will; our troubles start from too much that is general and too little that is specific, too much that is expression and too little that is response, too much that is invention and too little that is discovery. The richly varied places of the natural world are structured in an ordered relationship that is yet full, for people, of drama and surprise (see “The Cross Valley Syndrome,” by Paul Shepard Jr., in *LANDSCAPE* for Spring 1961). They are rapidly being obliterated under a



THE GENERAL AND THE SPECIFIC





meaningless pattern of building monotonous (the tract house and the glass office block) and chaotic (those fashionable forms) all at once. The new structures will fall down one day but the obliteration of the natural order is permanent. We are in urgent need of understanding *places* before we lose them, of learning how to see them and to take possession of them.

C. W. M.

BOUNDARIES

There is still great power in the traditional ways of ordering and establishing places, though with something of the poignance that attaches to a departed view of the world. Some of these ways remain essential to the making of place, though the lapses in our language cloud their very existence. Landmarks have for centuries ordered our sense of position (but monuments are essentially landmarks, and the FDR Memorial competition discussed in the book reviews demonstrates how chaotic are our thoughts about all this). The obelisks, for example, which Pope Sixtus V had set up in the medieval tangle of Rome, and the straight avenues he had cut leading to them, were quite specifically to let the pilgrim understand where he was and where he was going, as he proceeded from basilica to basilica. A processional way, passing from landmark to landmark along an axis (not the standard long narrow empty space leading from nowhere to nowhere, like the malls of our housing developments, but an axis on the way from someplace to someplace) can coalesce space, so that such a city as Peking, sited as casually, according to Sir Hugh Casson, who was there, as "a dog biscuit on a beach" can gather up importance as the processional way from gate to gate to increasing sacrosanct precinct intensifies the importance of being *there*.

The demarcation of edges, as well, is crucial to this gathering up and enclosing importance, and the absence of edges may well be responsible for the disappointing sense of nowhere in some of our newer cities. The urbanity of island-bound Manhattan is unquestioned, given the clarity of the boundary formed where the water meets the land, and the strong sense of place and of city in downtown San Francisco is, I suspect, at least in part a function of the half-forgotten real estate feud which established rival gridiron plans on opposite sides of Market Street, where once roared streetcars four abreast. To cross this mess has been, for almost a century, immensely difficult; just possibly, like a medieval wall or a river, or like similar convulsions of the gridiron in Dallas and Denver, it has held the life of the city in place, and if it went the life might leak away.

A sense of place might conceivably exist independent of such traditional ordering devices as processional axes, boundaries and landmarks; but basic to it is the division of inside from outside.

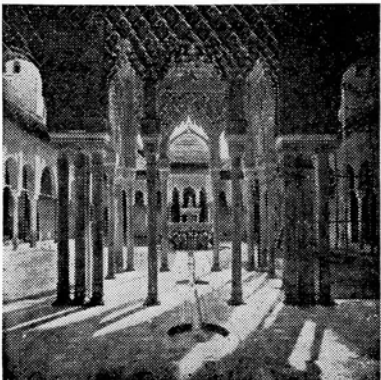
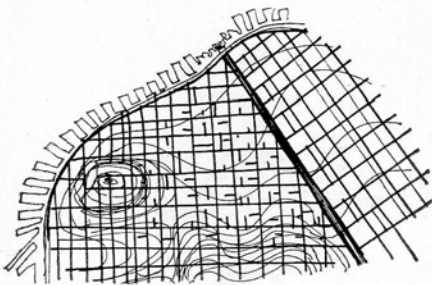
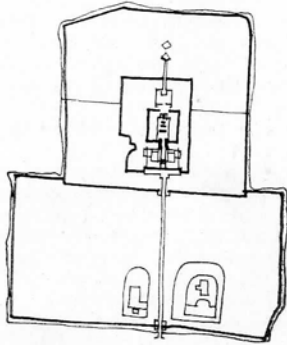
C. W. M.

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE

The first, and simplest, act of possession is to establish an *inside* that is separate from the *outside*; to set apart one section of the environment as secure against the hostile, uncontrolled *outside*. Such are the snug houses of our Anglo-Saxon dreams, the sacred compounds of Oriental reality and the staked fortresses of the frontier.

Inside doesn't necessarily mean "indoors," it is not determined by where the fresh air is; it is determined by where the participant thinks he is. An interior court that forms part of a complex of spaces may be *inside*. The Court of the Lions at the Alhambra is a very good example of such space.

Inside is partly a function of the participant's attitude and may even be variable. The lobby of a theater is *outside* at 9:00 p.m. *Inside* may be



very simple, as in a primitive hut or a Philip Johnson building, or it may have an elaborate hierarchy of development, as in the progressive stages of *inside* in an Egyptian temple, the walled cities of Peking or the Barcelona Pavilion.

Being *inside* is knowing where you are. Supermarkets have very little *inside*. *Inside* may belong more to the “outdoors” public spaces than to the rooms which surround them, as in the Place Vendome or in the more spontaneous communality of the western silver towns, where the genuine false fronts emphatically define the space of Main Street, making a place for law and order, gunfights and bustles in the midst of the desolate and desperate wilderness.

Once the architect has established *inside*, it's his responsibility and right to select and screen the view out. It is, indeed, one of the advantages of being *inside*—being *in* is being selective.

D. L.

A work of architecture is a statement of beliefs, a projection of our attitude towards reality into a three-dimensional environment. The importance of this must be kept in mind. We each know only a small portion of what is. Environment is that piece of reality which gets through to us; which passes the highly selective screen that sifts the world into comprehensible experiences, a screen lodged partly in each person's brain and partly in the specific spinning of circumstances. What we do, the way in which we respond, is a projection of that screen—it brings it into the open for scrutiny and in turn selects and sifts the experiences of others.

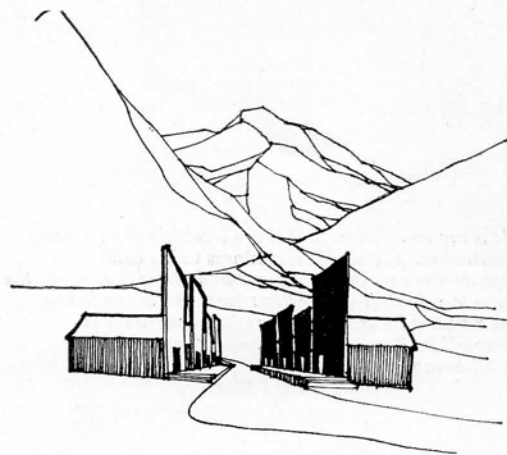
In architecture, the real challenge of this lies not in the expression of ourselves but in the effect that our work has on determining its user's “fix” on reality.

The importance of architecture lies in a building's capacity to determine the way in which its occupants see the world. Our world is exceedingly complex and impossible to comprehend in its totality. Each science is an attempt to hold reality still long enough to think about it. A painting, or a piece of music, isolates a coherent set of visual relationships to encourage and reward more than normal undisturbed attention. It creates a minute insulated world where the mind can dwell untrammelled in order, thriving on consistent care and systematic response, until that order becomes a means of grasping reality.

Architecture when consistently and provocatively ordered can do the same. It can establish a coherent *inside* environment and, in addition, it can screen and select the view of *outside*. We must get into a frame (or a “frame of mind”) in order to make any sense out of the world.

The “view of outside” is much more than a photograph out the window. What we see through a selected opening is one indication of our relation to surroundings. Our entire attitude is at stake, however. The “view of outside” includes the taste of the air, the level of sound, recollections of other places and people, and knowledge of the town structure.

What we “let in” to our selected environment should help us to “place” ourselves specifically in a broad context. By directing attention to specific events and processes, the frame that we build can remind us of a total order, an order that includes both the works of nature and the works of man. We should be reminded of an order that is not our own; the simple facts of the natural world that nurtured our growth and on which we still depend. The daily cycle, the change of seasons, the movement of air, are all healthy evidences that we are caught up in



THE FRAME



For 30 years architects have been providing the outside for man, even on the inside. But that is not their job at all. Architecture means providing inside for man even outside.

—Aldo Van Eyck
Otterlo, 1959

processes more important than our appointments calendars. The changing direction and intensity of sunlight is a continual gauge of our "place" in time. A building must emphasize, not destroy these variations.

Natural growth is also a record of the processes of nature and of the conditions of any particular locale. It is symbolic evidence of the dynamics of organic process. In addition, it makes us aware of the constituents of the natural environment. Trees and bushes reflect and modify the sun, move and flicker in the breeze, suggesting the world's animation.

That which we make becomes part of this all-encompassing process and enters into the flow of time. It should show evidence of this. It is here that man's synthetic development comes into conflict with the natural order. Our own rate of change is no longer related to the gradual processes of decay and regeneration which initially created the world that we know. Much of our technological effort is directed towards eliminating the effects of time. The aluminum barns that glitter disturbingly in golden fields stand out because they are not in phase with their surroundings; they remain essentially aloof from organic change.

The world is being made over to fit man's rhythm of development at an alarming pace. As we consume and destroy more and more of our natural world we are learning to carry our environment with us. Instead of perfecting the earth we are discarding it. In this process each generation thinks as though it were an end in itself, giving the illusion that no other existed and, incidentally, that no other will come. Our technical needs and capabilities in many cases do demand highly specific temporary structures whose destruction is an integral part of their economic life. But temporary structures in most cases permanently alter the land. The "luxurious" plaster hovels, for which the hills of California are being leveled, will soon vanish, but the hills will not return; and the thoughtless network of service lines from which they spring will remain to inhibit the growth of future development. Whatever its virtues, Disneyland is a pathetic and shortlived substitute for the natural beauty that has been squeezed out of existence by its parishioners.

The existing structure of the land is a resultant of unseen natural process operating over a long period of time. We must respect this structure and work to have our constructions be a continuation of that process, letting the present landscape play an evident role in the determination of suitable form for each place, respecting the impact that any structures have on the land. Similarly, the existing structure of a community is a result of many, often conflicting, processes, and is analagous to organic growth. Again, what we do should be as part of an interacting process which includes and respects what has been done, what there is to do and what there could be to do. Whatever we build significantly affects neighboring structures and the overall sense of place. We must attend as much to this reshaping of the existent environment as we do to the shaping of our own building. In this sense there is no *outside*.

What's *inside* should also make us conscious of the resources that man has created. The form of a building should respond to the systems that produce it whether by implication or dramatization. The elaborate service systems, mechanical, transportation and communication networks that give sustenance to our daily lives should not be buried in oblivion. We ought to be reminded of our dependence on man's technical know-how and to recognize the part it plays in our lives.

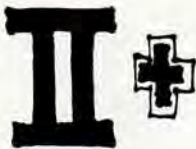
D. L.

It is my conviction that there is within the human individual a sense of relatedness to his total environment, that this relatedness is one of the transcendently important facts of human living, and that if he tries to ignore its importance to himself he does so at peril to his psychological well-being.

—Harold Searles
LANDSCAPE, Winter 1962

Harrison Brown tells us that we are approaching a time when ores will not longer exist. The deposits of millenia will have been exhausted in a few hundred years.

—Aspen Conference, 1962

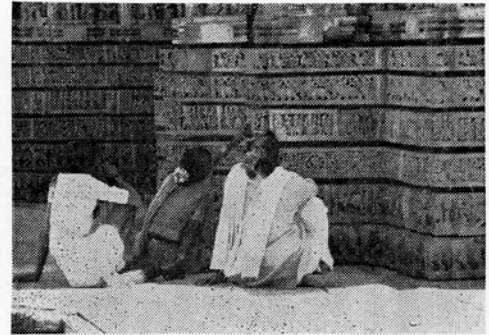


Most importantly, we must "let in" the user, not as a hapless occupant filling a chair in the "living room," or "giving scale" to the elevation, but as an active participant. He is the person who really defines what's "in," the person who uses the architect's clues to establish a world for himself.

Architects must learn to understand the tension between actual possession and abstract possession. The architect abstracts the act of possession, clarifying it through the discipline of selected observations. He establishes an ordered frame for the random, chaotic movements of thought and body. A frame whose form is an intermediary between the participant's *inside* and the *outside* world of existing environment and technical capacity. It should be neither an arbitrary generality nor a glove-like translation of specific activity. The user must be allowed to participate, to reclaim through his acts that which has been abstracted for him. The ghats at Benares are the most striking example of this tension. As great cascades of steps they plunge out of the narrow streets and down to the sacred Ganges. As an edge to the river, their simple geometric forms indicate the annual rise and fall of the river and its tremendous importance to the town, providing with one gesture an infinitely adaptable base for activity. Each step is a potential place: place to worship, place to wash, place to sell, place to sing, place to sleep, place to die and be burned. Every day the people come to bathe in the hallowed water, to repossess the river's edge. The steps remain, the act is daily repeated.

The places that we build should also keep us aware of the conjunction between natural order and synthetic form that is at the base of human activity, establishing an abstracted frame that gives meaning to, and is given meaning by, our personal acts. In Hindu temples the Being beyond all time is each day presented with a flower.

D. L.



Science and art, it has been said, search for unity in hidden likenesses. The establishment of our domain requires us to give meaning to external realities and experiences. We seek patterns of order and search for essential unities within the seeming chaos of life. We require architecture, as distinct from building, to create a singular sense of order: a sense of *place*. The qualities of place are dynamic, temporal and personal. Our response may vary but our feelings about place are real. *Place* and architecture communicate to all who use it the essential meaning of a particular environment.

The creative act of architecture abstracts intrinsic qualities of an existing natural environment and, together with components of our mechanical world, synthesizes a new place, a harmony of human and natural environments.

When we are at a *place* we know it. If our image or perception of a specific environmental order is confused or unclear then there is no place. We don't know when we are *there*; we don't know *where* we are. Organic synthesis, human possession has not occurred. Our lives are increasingly spent in just such meaningless environments. Mechanically contrived "order" is substituted for environmental synthesis and becomes our reality. Immobility replaces action. As personal images blur and dissolve, a vacuous culture replaces human experience with instructions on how-to-live.

S. V. D. R.

THE SEARCH FOR ORDER

The physical and social sciences are coming together and finding they have much in common. There is no reason why architecture should not participate in and profoundly benefit from this trend toward unification, but both a broadening and deepening of the current level of architectural discourse will be required.

—Joseph Esherick

GIANT FENCES CAN WORK
THREE WAYS FOR YOU.

YOU'VE GOT TO BEAT THE DRUM.

GIANT ROADSIDE SIGNS COST PLENTY
BUT REALLY STOP TRAFFIC.

DO SOMETHING TO START PEOPLE
TALKING ABOUT YOUR HOUSE.

RELAX AND HAVE A LITTLE FUN
WITH A GOOD PUBLICITY STUNT.

BUILD YOUR REPUTATION
WITH GOOD DEEDS.

GET THEM EMOTIONALLY INVOLVED.

ONCE THEY PICK THEIR LOT THEY'LL
ALMOST SELL THEMSELVES A HOUSE.

YOU CAN ALMOST TIP THE SCALES BY
GIVING PROSPECTS LOTS OF CHOICES.

GIVE OWNERS A SENSE OF BELONGING
AND KEEP SHOWING INTEREST IN THEM

—captions from photo stories:

How to get the Crowds Out.

*How to turn Lookers into
Buyers.*

—HOUSE AND HOME
MAGAZINE, April, 1957

AN ECONOMIC STANDARD

The system of experiences, spatial and temporal order created by architecture, is dynamic and open-ended. Architecture becomes relevant and real only as it involves its users, imparts meaning to their experience and elicits response. The reality of architecture is the process of interaction between *place* and inhabitant. This essential reality is most often ignored in current practice. Most architects just don't seem to be interested in how people use and respond to their "solutions." Yet the only way to determine the validity of hypothetical solutions is to test them operationally. The current test of successful architecture seems to be the number of pages of architectural garnish garnered in the trade press. Concern for the real process of architecture is evidenced by the inclusion of people in photos as elements of scale and background.

The history of modern science is a history of testing assumptions as accurate approximations of external reality. Science demands that the test of truth is operational. This is precisely what the latter-day alchemists of architecture will not do. Somehow they intend to produce gold. Simulated ends, preconceived and untested theories all substitute for a logical process of organizing conceptual images. The Pure Food and Drug Act forbids the marketing of a new product until its effects on an innocent public have been tested and observed. We need a Pure Architecture Act!

Recently the A.I.A. proposed that the architects' responsibility today extends to all facets of community design. This pronouncement sounds rather hollow until the profession can establish means for evaluating architecture as an environmental process, which is something we expect of every scientific discipline. We need clearly to integrate our methods with the work of both behavioral and social sciences and the natural environmental sciences. Systems technology may provide the technical means to integrate knowledge from these fields with the particular problems of architecture.

The A.I.A. position sounds particularly plaintive in the light of the increasing sectors of building not designed by architects, although traditionally within their realm of competence. The post-war housing boom, which changed the face of our land, was conceived and put together by "merchandisers." The merchandiser's business is to predict how people will react to certain environmental stimuli. This they learn through observation and testing. "They know what people want". . . how many architects do?

S. V. D. R.

We have suggested that environmental design implies the creation of rational systems of order. We insist that a valid process of environmental design or basis for architectural synthesis must evolve from continuing evaluation of results. We now need to determine what objective standards are best suited to judge how well a specific "place" works.

The making of "places" involves the utilization of resources which have alternative uses. "Economics," according to Lionel Robbins, "is concerned with the relationships between ends conceived as the possible objectives of conduct and the technical and social environment on the other." The concepts of economics provide useful tools in establishing a standard by which to analyze or synthesize design problems. Each unit of resource must be allocated in such a way that program objectives are maximized. This is not simply an additive process but an accelerating one. Measuring a ration of input to output, of how we may utilize resources to maximize our satisfactions from them, is simply a technical

statement of the process that each of us goes through, consciously, on making a decision as to the use of time or money.

It is one of the organizing principles of science. The physicist Ernst Mach defined his work as an attempt to arrange experience in the most economical order. Human action must order "what is"—the experiencing of environment—into an economical system which collectively and individually produces the greatest positive response.

The experience of primitive cultures concerned with satisfying only the most primary needs is important to us. For the making of places which attempt to satisfy these primary needs (the first functional level of ordering and creating community) embodies its own particular process of economizing through an intimate contact with place and its potential. Such economy in creating "place" goes much deeper than the obvious examples of primitive shelters which fulfill their function admirably through a recognition of intrinsically suitable form and material.

We tend to forget that most of what we know as civilization is in a sense economic surplus. It consists of human energy and natural resources not committed to providing basic sustenance. Environmental design decisions cannot neglect the importance of the resource base of our civilization. We should not look for order in the surface array of man-made things, for they are only transformations of our real resources. It is these resources and not their material expressions that we must respect in the design process.

The economizing principle, which synthesizes each unit of human or material resources into an equation to maximize a set of design objectives, should not be confused with cheapness. Cheapness usually means the maximization of dollar return to an individual or group at the expense of significant community values not within the scope of the program. True economy maximizes benefits to the entire community.

The economic standard of objective performance does not absolve us from a professional and individual responsibility of determining what our objectives and values should be. To forfeit our right to influence these decisions is professionally irresponsible. The right democratically to determine the shape of our environment is the real freedom at stake.

S.V.D.R.

The places that man first made were easily identifiable in the midst of natural order and were symbols of his occupation. He needed no state flags, crosses on top, nor wagon wheels on his lawn. As the places, and thus the symbols, multiplied and converged, a hierarchical order emerged, and decorative symbolism was merely an extension of the basic ideas communicated by built form. A man could find his way about a city and return without mental strain. Our streets now have myriad decorative symbols but few that are basic, hence confusion, because they are an extension of nothing. The rapidity and degree of communication of purpose varies with the complexity, and so one may spend ten seconds at a newsstand or ten years in a city to know it. A "newsstand" that hides behind a small sales window in a city wall would have little success, and, if the city equalizes or maximizes everything, one may just close one's eyes and travel by automatic system to one's appointed slot. Yet this is the tendency.

Ed Stone revolted against the dreary urbs and yelled "let's go to bat for beauty," and Yamasaki followed him on a spree in architectural cosmetics, applying exotic skin decoration to great cages for men, and some had the gall to call it "New Baroque." As with heroin, the relief was temporary and the after-effects terrible, with hundreds of less able

I believe that even philosophers interested in esthetics find it difficult to explain the origin of our feelings towards forms which are dictated by the laws of statics or dynamics, since these laws are not intuitively understood nor can be explained by the experience of our ancestors. But there is no doubt that any product of high efficiency is always esthetically satisfying.
—Pier Luigi Nervi

Cooped up as we are in the world of common experience, we must endeavor to break away and explore the remoter levels and construct theories befitting not solely the commonplace levels. . . . Those who fail to explore will naturally construct theories compatible with their restricted experience but entirely out of touch with the wider fields which they ignore.
—A. D'Abro

THE SYMBOLIC FUNCTION



architects trying to recapture that first emotional thrill of novelty. Elsewhere man was translating the need for "order" into a need for geometric pattern, hence Brasilia, a solidified image that holds little respect for the dynamic nature of man's life. Hence, also, many "community centers" which mark the geometric center of arid tracts with forms that ignore the rich possibilities of human interchange that are the basis of communal life.

The accommodation of the dynamic system of human activity demands a fabricated order that has in itself a similar possibility of change; therefore, the elements that must be considered permanent, basic and continuous are not material, although they influence material development. If we do not seek and find these basic characteristics, a technological repertoire is merely a plaything. Significant building evolves from human intercourse and action, and can even evoke them, but if the form derives from some arbitrary, formalist code of esthetics, out of contact with the client, then it can slowly strangle life.

Eero Saarinen felt that his new C.B.S. building must be the simplest skyscraper in New York, and so it becomes a smooth tower of Euclidian sterility, following all the others into a world that visually eliminates and physically constricts the persons and processes within, while turning a lifeless face to the observer who is awed by its distant immensity. The visiting architect registers awe, notes its meticulous detail and next year, perhaps, he will build a two-story version in Virginia City. Such image-making is idolatrous. Sir Basil Spence lay entranced in the dentist's chair and dreamt of light coming through a wiggly wall, which looked so nice that he used it in the new Coventry Cathedral. One hardly imagines Chartres originating in a pentatholic coma. "A church," says Peter Hammond, "is shaped by worship," and yet we get "crown of thorns" churches, "fish" churches, "fountain of light" churches and worse still, "hands in prayer" churches, all striving to look like what they are not.

Let us turn our backs on fantasy and Utopia both, and confront reality. Although we have pretended to let art remarry science, we carefully maintain them in separate corners of the mind, to the detriment of both. We finally accept prestressed concrete and "ultimate design" in concrete, fifty years late, and wave our discovery joyfully in clients' faces. We still question the advantages of mass transportation while trying to abolish the automobiles we love. We flatten magnificently sculpted land for homes, and yet build artificial hills on the roofs of city garages. Clearly we are caught somewhere between the dollar and the dream, each of which is an evasion of the real issue.

P. J. Q.

DISPELLING THE MYSTIQUE

We must first look at the functional problem—not how the building works, but how people work—and derive our notion of economy from the occupation of space rather than its cubic foot cost. The motivations of human activity and the dynamic movements ensuing must be accommodated, must be anticipated, so people must be regarded as the generators and not just the unfortunate recipients of our brainstorms. This can only be achieved by stripping our architectural thinking of all the peripheral terminological junk with which we have weighed it down. Let's banish from our vocabulary, for a while, such phrases as "expression," "enrichment," "rhythm," "personal style," "scale" (as a '3-D' size code), "explosion of space," "quiet spaces," (whoever heard of a loud one) "plastic space," together with all the beautifying devices of imposed order, and seek, instead, the order inherent in a situation, using fundamental values as criteria.

But where does this leave the "art" and the "wonder of creation." The answer is, for a few moments, out in the cold. Architecture is a synthetic act of creativity and cannot be produced by preconception. The elimination of all but essentials is necessary to clarify the vision, by putting one in a position to create. Thereafter it depends on one's talents and one's logic and one's courage.

P. J. Q.

We have an obligation to make the layman aware of our real objectives by speaking his language, one that he has almost forgotten, and of which he needs to be reminded. His sensitivity must be revived not by encouraging him to join in the jargon of a mystique but by making for him places that are real to him, of which he feels a part because they have grown from his need.

Our teachers of architecture can do well by discouraging young men from imagining themselves as creative geniuses. Genius emerges of itself. The crystallized concepts of three-dimensional compositions should quietly disappear from our curricula, and we must cease to wave before the student such magic phrases as "integration with the site," "integration with the urban scene," "integration and continuity of spaces." Let us instead talk perhaps of "integration with the activities of a place." Students above all need to be confronted with the realities of architecture. They need to be put in a position to create. Only then can we find out who are architects and who are not, and perhaps architecture will be on the way towards recovering its symbolic function.

P. J. Q.

OUR OBLIGATION

The present is not a time of style whatsoever, it is a time of groping—a time of discovery. It is a time, you might say, of realization. Our problems are all new, our spacial demands are new, and it is a time, therefore, more concerned with trying to create better institutions from those we have already established.

—Louis Kahn, Otterlo, 1959

BOOKS ON ARCHITECTURE

NEW FRONTIERS IN ARCHITECTURE

(CIAM '59 in Otterlo)

By Oscar Newman

Constructive criticism in the architectural press is a rarity. Journalists seem to prefer discourses on the problems of urban renewal or simply broad and beautifully-phrased generalities about the world of design. An exception is Reyner Banham, who too seldom enters into print. Specific evaluation of a building in terms of its basic functions is an infrequent occurrence. Critic Allan Temko's occasional but genuine efforts in this direction are unfortunately ridden by overtones that suggest that he has made up his mind what a building ought to look like. The A. I. A. and A. C. S. A. organize an annual seminar, in which wonderful ideas are propounded and exchanged by greats and unknowns alike, without a single attempt to test any of them against a real situation.

The test of the idea is the building itself in use, yet among architects themselves honest evaluation of one another's work is taboo. Only those who are vitally concerned with the need to seek affinities and common directions will attempt to bring their concepts before their colleagues for evaluation.

The founders of CIAM (Les Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) met at La Sarras in 1928 to tackle

jointly the problem of building for human settlements that would include millions of persons, and to observe how a common direction might emerge from their several approaches. The ideas of Gropius, Le Corbusier, Mies, Roth and others converged in discussion that eventually resulted, at the 1933 meeting, in the "Charter of Athens," which announced that the keys of urbanism were to be found in the four functions of the city: to provide "a place to live, a place to work, a place for recreation and circulation." Later modifications, added at Paris in 1937, were: "the geographical and topographical situation; the economical situation; the political situation." This concern with categorized functions led to systematized building of great blocks laid out in rigid mathematical grids, and the basic determinant of urban form appeared to be statistical data. It seemed logical, though, to group people densely in towers in order to release open green space where they could walk freely. Le Corbusier's "La Ville Radieuse" and the methodical efforts of Gropius and Breuer accelerated the process until the monoliths were appearing everywhere from London to Rio. As with many developments in architecture, the way of thinking and working became a game of form-grouping which has played itself out in such senile manifestations as the apartments lining Lake Michigan south of Chicago's great core, and the city of Brasilia, where this