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In Other Words, Platforms that Direct [Images that Motivate]

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Platforms that what? Charles and you said “separate,” but for me that has a negative connotation. The word itself means “flat form,” but a platform almost always involves a level change. We step up or down; we are allowed to congregate on one level; we may step up to glory — for viewing the sky or singing or talking.

In Other Words,

For at least twenty years, in my photographs, I’ve been looking for found platforms, platforms as stage sets — in other words, platforms that direct. I have been intrigued most, perhaps, by minimal platforms, where the level change is barely perceptible but pro-

Platforms that Direct

found. An Ionic capital on the Palatine Hill in Rome is such a minimal platform. Both eye and foot perceive this small fragment as making a change, a profound change in my view. Just having that piece lying in front of me made a big difference in my comparison of many compositions throughout the Forum and on the Palatine Hill.



"Capital Foot." Palatine Hill,
Roman Forum, 1977.
Photos by Alice Wingwall.

Similarly, I am absolutely charmed by a row of stones at the Mission San Antonio of Padua in the Hunter-Liggett military reservation, on California's central coast. The stones keep cars and trucks away from the front of the sanctuary. This is another minimal separation between the profane and the sacred space. It is a kind of annunciatory, thought-provoking, breathing space that is preliminary to the minimal, two-step stone platform that provides entry to the church itself.

Who knows, maybe one person put these stones down, but it seemed like a communal activity to make a platform to keep the



Above: "Platforms and Platforms." Mission San Antonio of Padua, Hunter Liggett Military Reservation, San Antonio, California, 1997.

Below: "The Hand Directs the Columns." Sproul Hall, University of California at Berkeley, California, 1996.

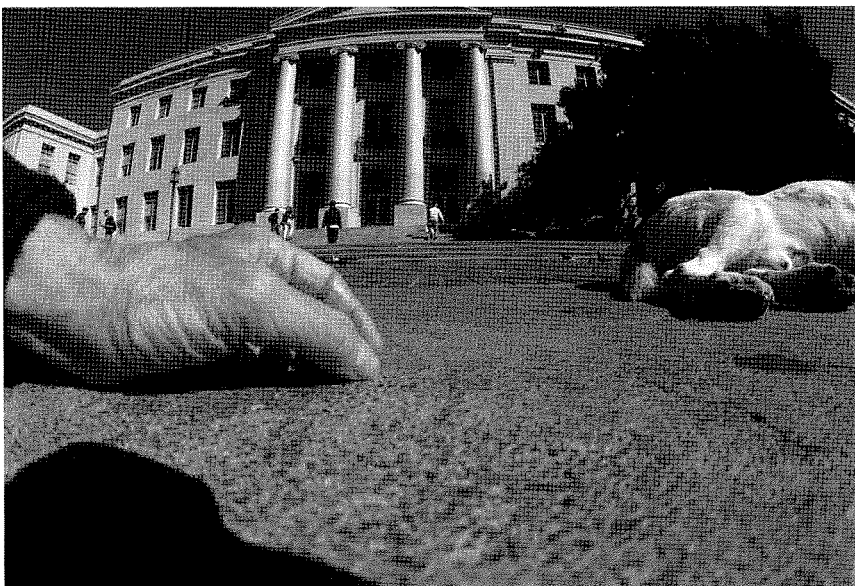
cars away from the church area. I imagine a line of people putting down stones as a kind of spiritual ritual. Or maybe there was a truck and somebody just dropped them down in a row. In Italy they would call such a place a *sagrato*. It is a space in front of the church, which is already becoming sacred with the church, but it is also a place of hesitation and thought. To me that's a platform of some consequence, however it happened.

A sidewalk becomes a platform at Sproul Hall at the University of California, Berkeley. With a few steps this walkway platform unites pedestrians and the columnar facade. I am really fascinated by

how people walk across it, walk into the building and walk along the sidewalk to the front. In the photograph neoclassic columns, Ionic at the top, are integrated with the syncopated rhythm of students passing or entering the building, and the flank of a sleeping dog and a probing hand.

Sometimes platforms are constructed as real elevators of the building, as in the base of the little temple of the Vestal Virgins, which sets the columns of that elegant temple up high for near or distant viewing among the larger fragments of the Roman Forum.

Another major platform is that of the little





Egyptian Temple of Dendur in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Until 1994 the platform on which it is placed was an actual separator, since you were not allowed to step onto that level; that platform was exclusive. You could only walk around the room and look at the temple at a “hands off” distance. There was a pylon gate in the front and then the temple behind, but you could not get near them.

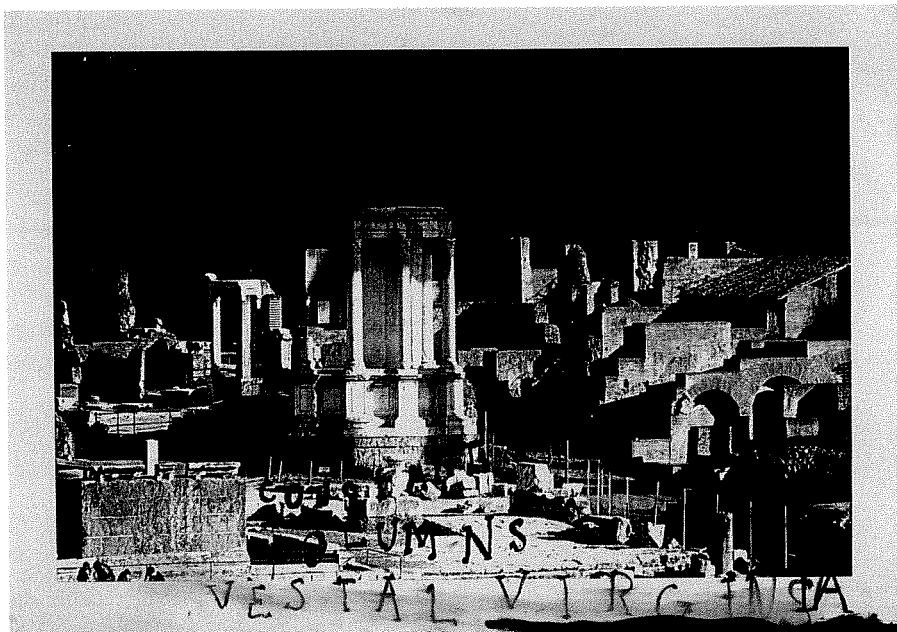
In January, 1994, the museum changed its policy and allowed people to go up on the platform and enter the building. That completely changed your relationship to the temple; after that you could

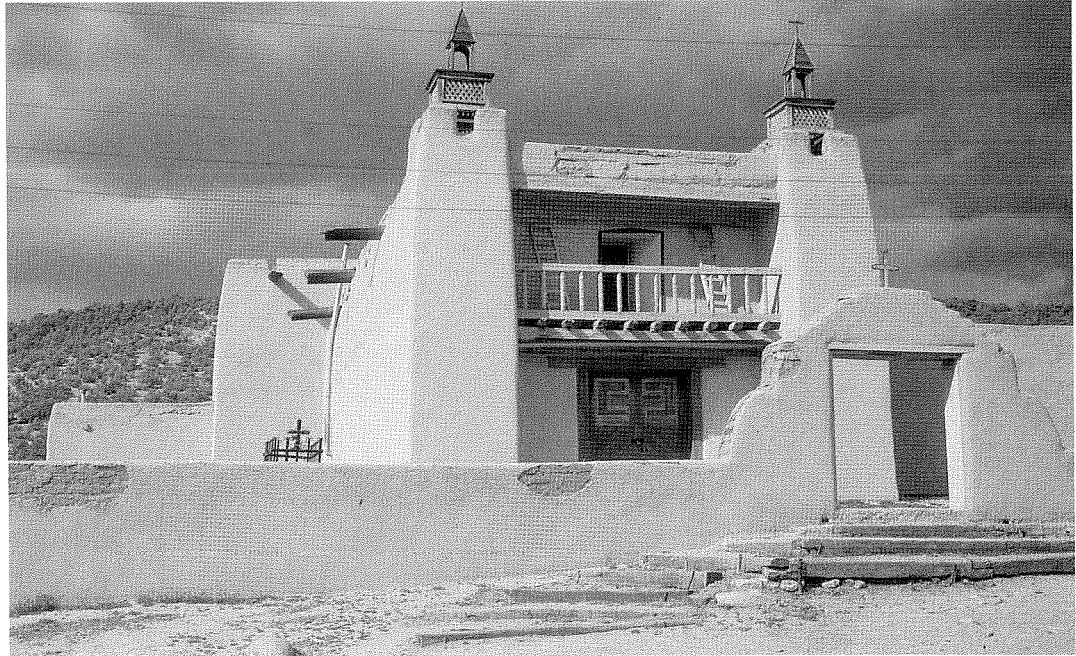
actually walk into, and look out from, the sacred space along the axis to the pylon. You knew you were elevated, part of the temple compound.

I have a love for the missions in California, New Mexico and Texas. New Mexican missions have walls around front courtyards that are constructed as distinct platforms. The photograph of the church at Trampas shows the beautifully shaped gate, modest steps and firm wall that completely bound a *sagrato* platform in front of the church.

The Mission of St. Francis of Assisi, in San Francisco (popularly called the Mission Dolores), seems to me to bear a schematic platform on

Above: “Hand Over Dog.”
Temple of Dendur, Metropolitan
Museum of Art, New York, 1994.
Below: “Constant Columns.”
Temple of the Vestal Virgins,
Roman Forum, 1995.





Above right: St. Francis of Assisi, Trampas, New Mexico, 1995.
 Below left: "Pragmatic Porch," Mission Dolores, San Francisco, 1996.
 Below right: "Stairbreak," New Mission Church, San Francisco, 1996.

its facade. There is a base that goes up rather high, about halfway up the door itself, and then above that there are engaged columns. The front wall may be seen as a diagram of the *sagrato*, or space in front — a remembrance of the courtyards of Romanesque pilgrimage churches in Spain, or the entry platforms of Roman buildings. The simple forms of the engaged columns also refer to classical order, as do some other pilasterettes that are just hinted at in the upper reaches of the pediment design.

I don't know if this has always been the design of the mission, but this facade seems to me to say,

"here's the scheme and how it might have been." The church now faces a very urban situation, with a busy street going directly in front of the entry. The facade diagram seems to me a fantastically nice way of referring to the platforms and *sagrato* without taking up space on the sidewalk.

Next door to that is the new church, which is set back a bit with a beautiful stair connecting the sidewalk to the main elevated entry floor. The steps are undercut in a way that makes them especially notable in themselves. They're not very comfortable to sit on, but people always do and I have. They form a grand passage to the





church itself and a platform for viewing the street below. I think this combination of forms in the old mission and in the newer church is an enticing lesson about platforms and stairs, about the idea of ascending into sacred space.

Porches and stairs are platforms that civilize. One of my favorite places in the Roman Forum is along the Via Sacra, where the columns of an old Roman Temple have lot of steps going up to them. Tucked in behind them is a baroque church, so you see volutes flying over the top. (I'm sure that the church was there before they excavated the steps).

The fantastic thing about the Roman Forum is that you can always make something else when you see a part of the ruin. When you're across the way, and you see these big pieces of stone lying about, you imagine how they could be different. The location in the photograph is next to the Temple of Vesta, which I discussed earlier, so you are in a niche of ruined fragments. You can not only see the stairs climbing to an important monument but also imagine how it would be if you reconstructed those stones right beside you. It's platform, platform, platform all around you — at least in my imagination.

Some of us have rented a small Palladian Villa a couple of times, the Villa Saraceno. It doesn't have columns, but there is a loggia with a flight

of steps in front. Each time we have ritually photographed the whole group on the stairs. But in this individual photograph there is a compelling spatial tension created by a single person and a white dog descending the steps: Where is our Heroine in the Magenta Dress Going? Can She Pay the Rent? Will He Guard the Treasures?" These stairs, like so many others I have found, directing as they go, are a sublime stage set.

— ALICE

Above: "Columns Thinking About Wings." Roman Temple with Baroque Church, Roman Forum, 1994.

Below: "The Magenta Dress Act II." Villa Saraceno, Agugliano, Italy, 1996.

