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The Immature Arts of City Design

Kevin Lynch

Few Americans think that city-making is a fine art. Most professionals agree, if judged by their actions rather than by their words. We may at times enjoy a city, but only as a fact of nature—just there, like a mountain or the sea. But, of course, we are mistaken; cities are created objects, and at times in history they were managed and experienced as if they were works of art. However misshapen, a city is an *intended* landscape.

If we think of a fine landscape, we usually think of a rural one, or of some historic city center. Those places evolved gradually, and within the confines of custom, site, purpose, and technology, they emerged coherent. Or, when we remember some deliberate act of city design—Paris, Rome, or Beijing—we also remember it as a demonstration of dominant power. If we abhor tyranny, perhaps we should not look for an art of city design. If we live in a pluralistic, changing high-technology society, perhaps we cannot hope for one?

Art (or design: the two terms are confounded) is something “soft,” irrational, concerned solely with appearance. At the scale of the city, it can only be a matter of decoration. It has no appreciable connection with the fundamental issues of city policy, which are economic and social. City planning is quantitative, rational, analytic. It speaks in words and numbers, not merely in pictures. It is oriented to policy, wrestles with administrative detail, skirts the political mine fields. Although it may appreciate the luxuries of design, it does not have time for them. Other things are too pressing.

This view of art as something isolated from other life concerns runs deep in our culture. “Arty” is a term of contempt, while “artless” means something genuine or natural. “Inartistic” and “unscientific” have very different connotations.

Even if we lay those prejudices aside, the judgment that modern cities cannot be works of art may be quite correct. There seems to be a universal division in the planning field, a division between those engaged with social, economic, and locational policy at the urban level, and those concerned with physical form at the project level. Schools, professional roles, clients, and institutions are all divided in that way. Those academic departments of urban design that try to throw a bridge across the gap are subject to the constant temptation to devote themselves to the architectural design of large-scale, unified development projects. Students with talents for the design of sensuous form drift to the established profession of architecture. Our schools of urban design depend primarily on foreign students, coming from countries in which there are greater opportunities for the design of large-scale projects—whether because of the stage of the country’s development, or the presence of a more authoritarian regime. This surge of foreign students will recede in time, as urban design begins to be taught in the schools abroad (or it *should* recede, since urban design is rightly tied to the particularity of place and society). Few U. S. cities have an urban design division. Is urban design un-American?

In any art, someone creates an object or event to convey meanings and

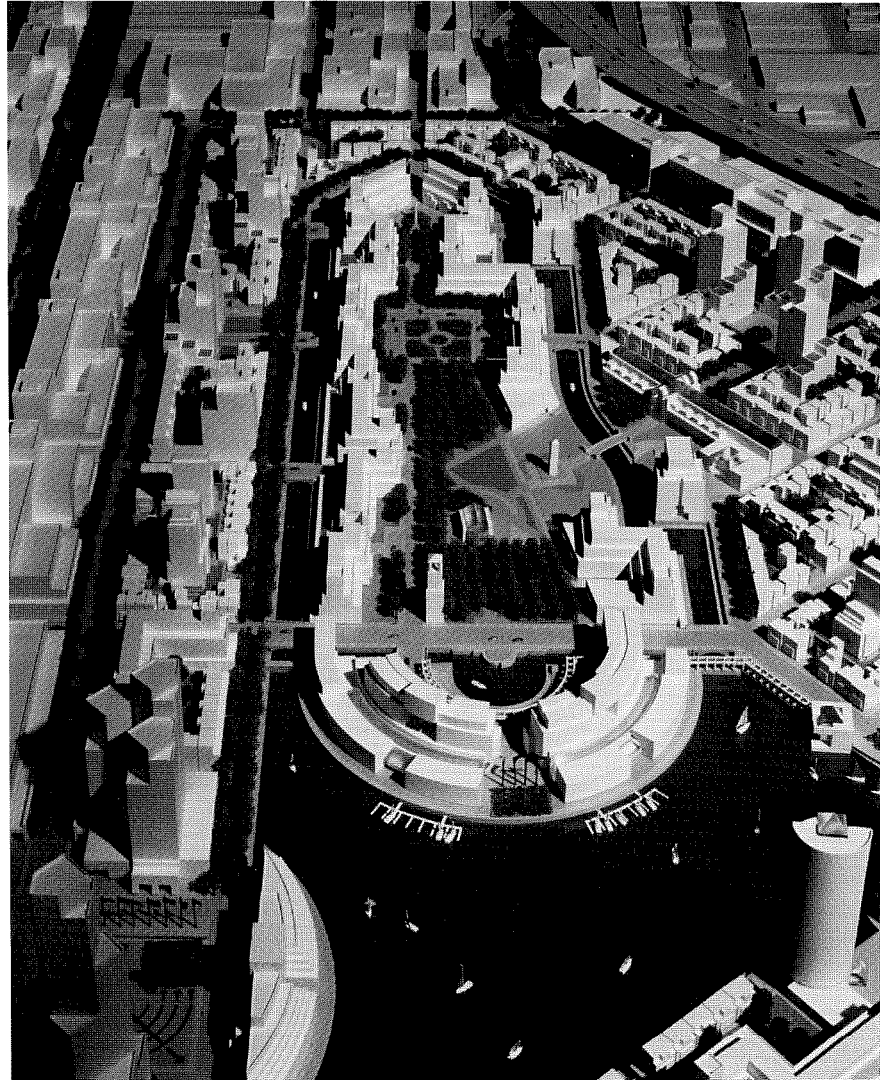
feelings to a critical audience. The various arts may be more or less complex and ponderous, but they all involve an intentional creation, and the conveyance, intentional or not, of a personal experience through the sensuous form of the thing created. The artist has precedents, a transmitted skill, and works within a style. He makes inventions. In part, at least, his creations are enjoyed for themselves, and not solely as means to other ends.

If it exists, city design is thought to be a branch of architecture. But it must manipulate things and activities that are connected over extensive spans of space and time, and that are formed and managed by numbers of actors. It operates through intervening abstractions: policies, programs, guidelines, specifications, reviews, incentives, institutions, prototypes, regulations, spatial allotments, and the like. Through all this clutter, it seeks to influence the daily experience of a bewildering variety of people. As a process, it is as far removed from the immediacy of direct handwork as one could possibly imagine, but in its effects it is just as immediate, and far more encompassing and powerful.

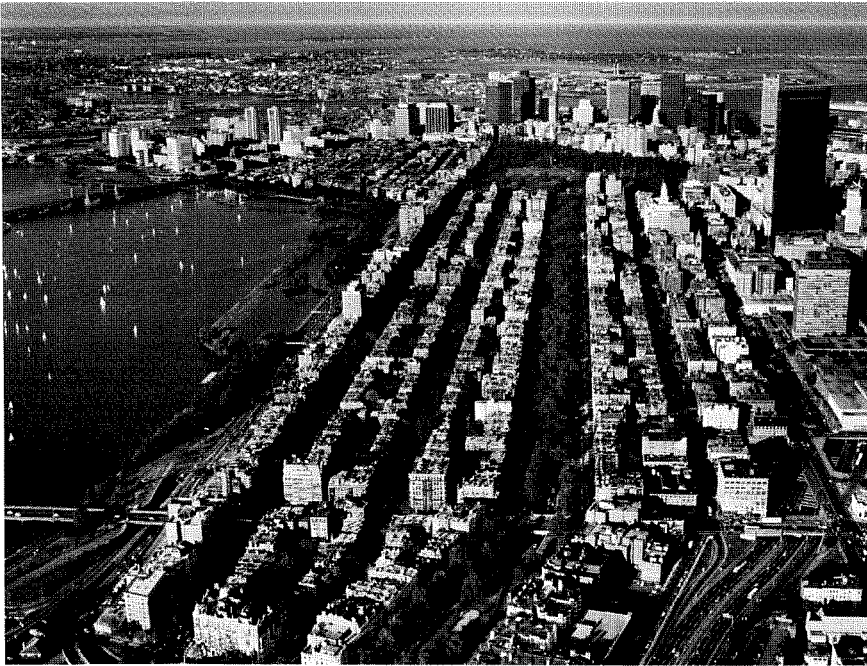
City forms are more resistant to design than architectural forms, for the city has a ponderous inertia. It is the accumulated product of many historic actions, and will surely undergo as much again. Just to attain a well-known form—an axis, arcade, cluster, or greenbelt—can be a notable success. While innumerable precedents and images run through the head of any architectural designer (grand staircases, serpentine walls, tent structures, broken arcs—who could

not go on and on?), the repertoire of the city designer is far more limited. City designers are piecemeal artists working within a persisting framework. Since they communicate only occasionally with each other, this persistent setting is an important link between them. Cities cannot be designed as comprehensive wholes in all their aspects. They must be dealt with in partial ways, whether as chosen groups of features, or via strategic abstractions. This combination of protracted time, complex and extensive material, collective design, a plural audience, and a perpetually unfinished result, must be unique among the arts, if art this is.

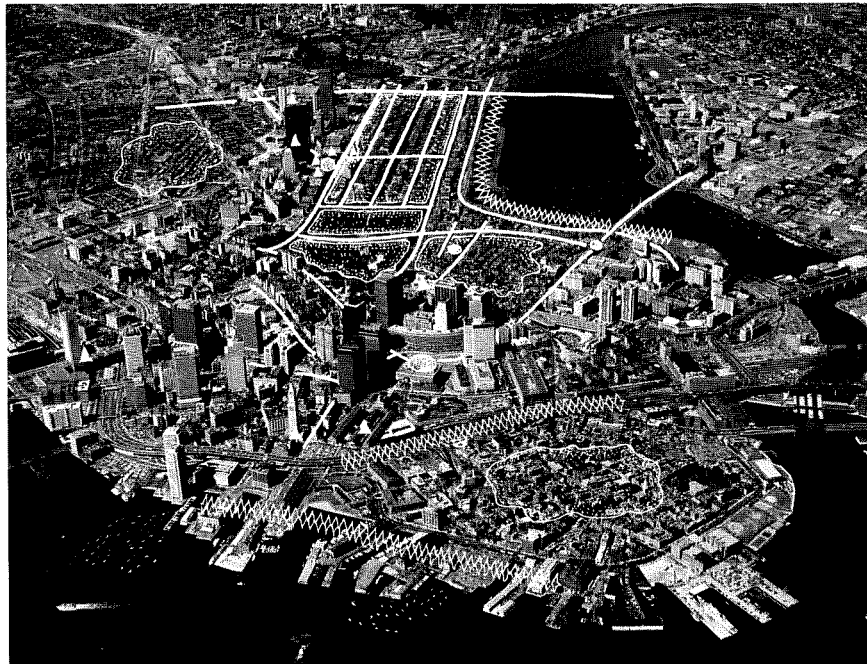
Baroque architects were adept at large-scale work. They could use irregular sites and disordered buildings in complex contexts, because they focused on movement and sequence, emphasized details, used illusion and cosmetics, played with contrast and ambiguity. But since they spoke to a restricted, courtly clientele, their work was also simplified. Later, architectural theory felt a broader social responsibility, but it stressed clarity and integrity of form, and the composition of complete, extended areas. It called for clean sites and total control. More recently, architects talk once again of context and contradiction and seem more comfortable in a disordered world. But they are still object-oriented, still intent on innovation and personal expression, traders of historical spare parts and refined allusions around a closed professional circuit. Their products follow a recognizable international style, despite the welcome deference to context.



I A typical big urban design proposal:
Mission Bay project for San Francisco. Will it in fact be built as shown? How will it fit into its surroundings, or match the desires of its future inhabitants. Photograph courtesy of I. M. Pei & Partners



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3

2 The Back Bay in Boston: in its day a “big” project, but one realized gradually under favorable circumstances, and now matured into a well-loved landscape. Here we can be sure of what public policy is designed to protect. Courtesy of Landslides/Alex S. MacLean

3 The essential structure of central Boston as perceived by one of its inhabitants. Could such an image be consciously designed? Courtesy of Landslides/Alex S. MacLean

Until architects change these attitudes, the city designer must unlearn much of what they have to teach. Landscape architecture seems closer to city concerns, since landscape architects deal with large areas that grow and develop in time, that are only partially under the designer’s control. Yet contemporary landscape architecture is not as intriguing or compelling as contemporary architecture. The fires that played behind the great French and English gardens seem to have gone out, along with the moral and political statements that those gardens made.

Three Accepted Modes

To begin, we can say that there are at least three ways of improving the sense of our cities, which most people who might stop to think would accept as reasonable. First, we can manipulate certain key *parts* of a city with aesthetic intent, wherever those parts are built new and at one time, under unified control—certain squares, principal streets, parks, or groups of buildings. Doing this well, and fitting those new parts smoothly into their context, is the task that “urban design” normally sets for itself. Such work draws on the skills and precedents of site planning, architecture, and landscape architecture, against a background knowledge of politics, sociology, and economics. The urban designer works with public or private clients who have the resources to achieve large projects of this kind. The traditions of such work lie in the achievements of kings and princes. Today it is based on redevelopment and big capital.

Indeed, it may rely on them too unreservedly. Many of these projects are alien intrusions in the city fabric, and unresponsive to their users. Critics can compare them with well-fitted small projects, and conclude that decentralized design is always a better way of achieving a humane and varied environment. Nevertheless, large project design can at times be quite legitimate, when the work is by its nature at that scale, as in a large new park, for example, or the refashioning of a major street. A lack of response to context or to user is not a necessary characteristic of large projects, even if it is a common one.

Large development projects occur at the city center or along the city margins, while the design of new towns or town extensions has become much less frequent in the United States. Elsewhere, much of the work at this scale is stiff and arid, even if there are exceptions, such as Tapiola in Finland. Turning to the past, we can cite the achievements of Amsterdam South, Boston's Back Bay, or Edinburgh's New Town. But these older extensions benefit from the incrustations of time.

Beyond this somewhat risky art of big parts, one may well deny that city design is possible. Perhaps a really fine urban landscape only results from some long and favorable historic development, an evolution beyond our ability to cause or direct. In that case, the best one can do is to protect those beautiful places, once they have evolved. Therefore, we should focus on conservation rather than on creation. In any new place, one can

only construct a stable, practical framework, which will perhaps later become the stage for some eventual flowering. This is a defensible, but rather despairing, view of city quality. Some will even assert that an adequate provision for the more direct requirements of a place—its accessibility, its healthiness, its close fit to behavior—will *insure* its beauty. But that extension of the familiar functional theory seems even less likely to be true of a city than of a good machine, since cities have such contradictory purposes.

Even if we believe that city design is not an art, in the usual sense of a direct creative process, yet surely sensory quality is a legitimate and necessary concern of city planning. Criteria for the immediate, sensuous, psychological effects of the environment should certainly be added to all those other impacts that we consider in setting city policy. Area programs should deal with shape, sound, smell, climate, color, texture, symbols, space, and sequence, as well as with use, access, bulk, and the like. Programs and criteria are effective ways of improving the quality of everyday life, even if their composition is a rational exercise rather than a creative act. Creative artists work within them, and are supported by them. I am convinced of their importance, and city planning is at last beginning to move in this direction.¹

And Six Possibilities

These three views of city design—that it is only a concern with big

new parts, or an exercise in conservation, or a preparatory programming process—are reasonable but unsatisfying. I would like to think that an art or arts of city design (peculiar arts, to be sure) are at least possible, certainly desirable, and, in prospect, engaging. Clearly, they cannot be big architecture, that dream of pervasive, never-failing control. City design is, indeed, concerned with big places, but it must deal with continuous change, a plurality of clients, conflict, and participation, and yet leave room for the creative act and the aesthetic response. It should be possible to create new forms and styles and to convey meanings and feelings worthy of critical judgment. What possibilities might we think of, that could sustain such development, judgment, and delight?

One would be a concern that focused on the basic *perceived structure* of a region. Such designs might deal with the character of key centers, landmarks, and districts and their connections, and propose a strategy of how those characters and connections should develop in successive stages. This mode of design fixes essentials and leaves openings; it is loose and tight at the same time. It is a proposal for developing the public image of a settlement, along with those physical interventions and guidelines necessary to create that image. "A line of towers and public plazas, following a suspended transit line, will be extended from the present cluster up that ridge, flanked by a close packing of low



4

4 Journeys could be shaped to create a coherent sequence of motion, space, and view, as in this diagram for an imaginary highway. Diagram by Kevin Lynch

workshops and residences on either side. The line will begin at the new bridge, at the confluence of the streams which everyone thinks of as enclosing the town, and it should be possible to see this core in foreshortening as one approaches up the river valley.” This is the way (if too simple an example) in which great cities are remembered. But intended frameworks are not solely appropriate to great cities. They can be used wherever an area or a project will undergo substantial development, by numerous actors, over an extended period. They can guide growth in a renewal area, for example, or on a large campus.

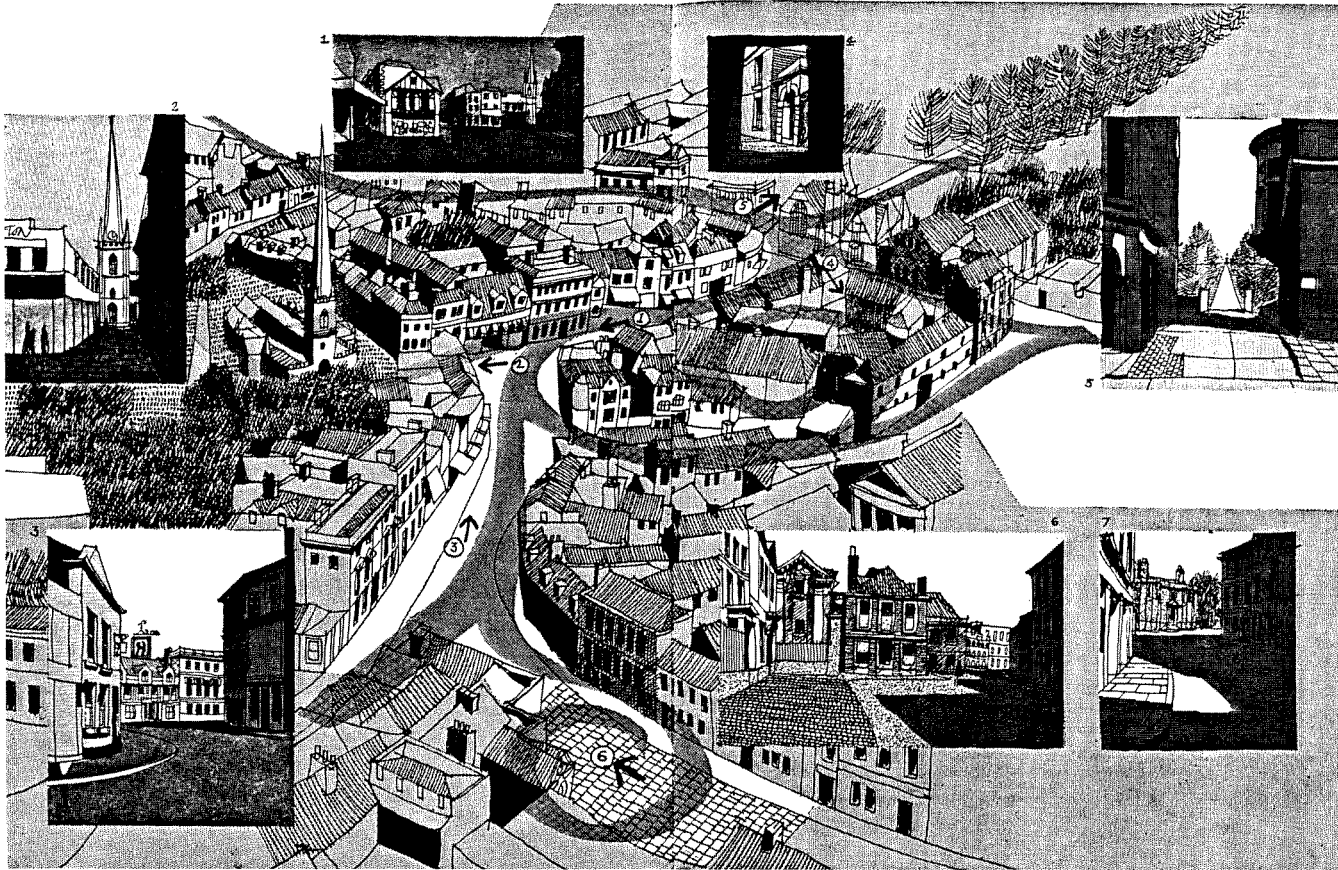
Such images are crossings of social meaning and recollected form that grow and elaborate in time. They link citizen and place, enhance the significance of everyday life, and reinforce the identity of group and self. “I am the citizen of no mean city.” Just as topography is the basis of a site plan, present images are the basis for framework designs, and present hopes their guide. In daily converse, ordinary citizens participate in making those images, and yet they can also be conscious inventions, new forms. Images arise from changes in perception, as well as from physical changes. Newspaper critiques, “town trails,” new viewpoints or entrances, painters’ or designers’ visions, or the enthusiasms of renovators, all remold a city’s image.

There are powerful precedents for such structures. Analyses of existing city images have often been made. Image *designs*, on the other hand, have been rare. They require a

fluent, diagrammatic language that can be interpreted and applied by a broad public, and can be followed or modified over a long period of time. Image design must be supported by concrete illustrations of the character implied by the diagrams, and by such familiar abstractions as a proposed network of public spaces, the locations and visibility of future focal points and landmarks, such as a tree-planting plan, and, surely, a scheme for the principal approaches. As an area develops, and these elements gain prominence and character, and as their popular image matures, the proposed structure is more easily apprehended, and its conservation and enhancement are more likely to be supported.

Image designs require the intuition of latent public perceptions and the application of this forecast to actual development decisions. But they do not require total control, since there are many ways of carrying out such general structures. They *do* demand sustained interest and continuity of application, however, which implies an agency concerned and competent at that scale, or at least a body of informed opinion that can exert effective influence. Framework designs are an appropriate way of dealing with something as large, as dynamic, and as persistent as a city. Sensory programs can be grounded in them. They would be works of art, lengthy social collaborations. They are not customary.

In a more concrete and realistic mode, city design can focus on the



5 Gordon Cullen shows us how the center of a small English town can be considered as a series of engaging views. Courtesy of Van Nostrand Reinhold Co. Inc.

journeys by which people actually experience cities. City trips are enjoyed or suffered, but they are remembered. The pleasures of motion, and its connotations of energy and life, are, perhaps, especially meaningful to us today. Streets and vehicles are under public control, and this is accepted as normal and necessary. It is routine to design streets, bridges, tunnels, and sometimes street façades, but only occasionally are they treated as sequential experiences: as comings out and goings in, as arrivals, glimpses, risings, fallings, a winging around, a sudden view—as approaches, progressions, or foretellings. There are techniques for recording such temporal forms, although they may be unfamiliar to most designers.

There are precedents for this in modern highway design, which at its best has a well-developed style: the rural, long-curve, split-lane freeway, following the form of a rolling ground. Other styles can be imagined: ones that cut through, oppose, and so dramatize the ground, or which emphasize surprise and ambiguity, or exaggerate apparent speed, or open and close space rhythmically, or amble about and investigate oddities. We find rich examples of sequences in classic monumental approaches, or in the byways of old cities. Architects sometimes consider these spatial narratives within their buildings. Garden designers have created many marvelous outdoor sequences—the Wang Shih Yuan in Suzhou, the Sento Gosho in Kyoto, or great English gardens such as Stourhead.

But ordinary streets could also be designed that way, and as such could transit lines and cycleways and promenades: along a waterfront for example, or through a succession of neighborhoods. Such effects would seem natural to consider when making the initial layout of circulation, but they can also be considered in planting or lighting an established street, when opening a new connection or locating a major new roadside feature. Even the character of the vehicle is part of a sequence design. Wind and swooping motion makes almost any city ride memorable, when it is accomplished in an open-top, double-decker bus.

In the city, of course, one cannot remold the entire setting for the sake of serial vision, as one might do in a garden. One shapes the road—and perhaps also the vehicle—to reveal what is latent in the surrounding fabric, just as one would work with the topography of a highway corridor. While serial design is unfamiliar as a deliberate city intention, yet certain chance sequences are well known: approaching Pittsburgh by tunnel from the south, or New York on the Staten Island Ferry, or riding along New York's East River Drive or Chicago's Michigan Boulevard.

It is unlikely that anyone would specialize in sequence design (as one might specialize in some others of these possible modes). Sequence design should simply be a normal preoccupation of the engineers and site and city planners who arrange our public streets—an element normally considered and

normally commented upon. If they are unfamiliar, the principles of sequence design are hardly new. See various garden texts, or Philip Thiel's work,² or "The View from the Road,"³ or Cullen's "Concise Townscape."⁴ The opportunity is there, if rarely exercised. Journeys are real entities, deliberately planned and directly experienced. But to propose designing a succession of visual experiences only raises eyebrows.

In its third mode, city design can be a conscious art of *renewal*, an art of refurbishment, tinkering, and redoing. This work may not sit so well with some designers, who want to make it new and all their own. But we commonly find pleasure in renewing an old house, and an artist can be absorbed in recombining found objects. By making one's mark on something old, by recovering selected features, one achieves a richness otherwise unobtainable.

This is the appropriate stance when working in almost any city area. It is especially appropriate in a plural, changing world, so full of ambiguity and contradiction. Our middle-aged suburbs cry out for such enrichment. Current achievements in "place making" (as described by Fleming, for example, in his book of that title) are good examples of the art. Renewal is creative design, not just preservation. New and old are contrasted to bring out the meaning of each, and so the depth of time is made visible. There can be different styles of selecting what will be presented: should we pick out an underlying pattern of

function or condition, or emphasize an historic succession, or make a surprising contrast? To take another example, the color applied to old buildings need not be historically correct, as current conservation doctrine would have it. It can be used to glorify details, to create a disruptive pattern, or simply to be outrageous. We may deny that cosmetics is a fine art, but a tattooed face can blow the mind.

To paint add planting, lighting, graphics, shelters, and street detail, the insertion of “pocket” open spaces and public art, the placement of a modest monument or new building at just the right location, or the encouragement of street activity. Guides for any future construction can be part of the package. If most current examples of this art have been located in modest downtown areas or historic conservation districts, and have had a rather similar stylistic cast (we begin to have a sufficiency of Victorian main streets), yet refurbishment could also deal with newer areas and use different styles. Residents enjoy these accomplishments and can participate in them. The renewed neighborhood is reaffirmed as *home*, a place whose history and function has been made meaningful. There are institutional means for bringing this about, even if public budgets are slender.

Still another city art is the design of *events*, with which the artists of the Renaissance were quite familiar. The great aristocratic and religious festivals of the time required the collaboration of architects, painters,

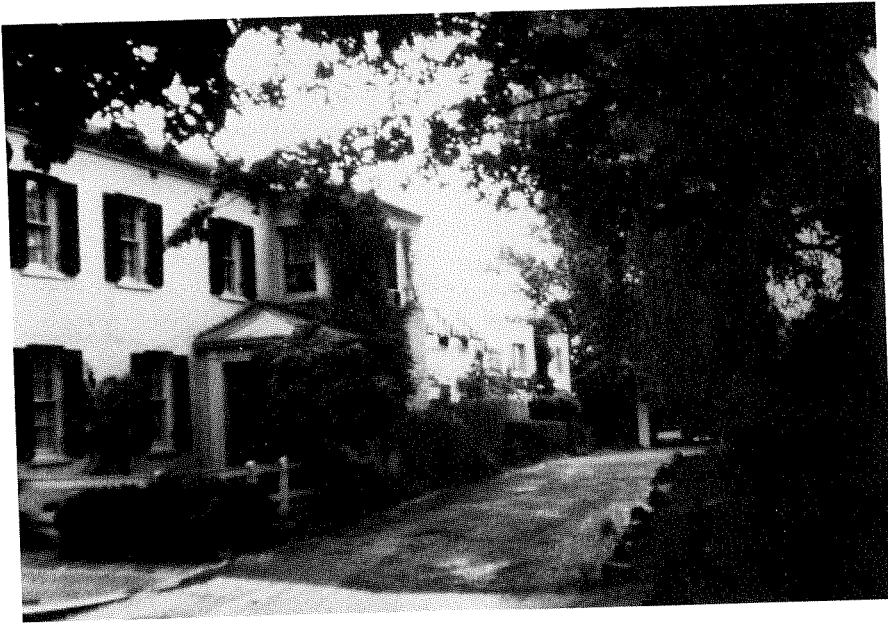
sculptors, poets, musicians, dancers, players, costume makers, cooks, and the confectioners of fireworks. Celebrations can be invented, streets decorated, sound and light shows composed, parades, fairs, carnivals, and dances organized. We all know successful examples: Boston’s First Night, Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, Baltimore’s ethnic fairs, New Orleans’s Mardi Gras, the planned entertainments in shopping malls, neighborhood street dances, coronations, grand openings. Some are traditional, others consciously designed. They add meaning and sparkle to city life, and make us aware of our common humanity: we take joy together. Celebrations need not be confined to the special occasions. They can lighten and inform our daily routine. Of course they can also fall flat, like tired Christmas wreaths on the light poles along the street, and the jolly Santas at the corner.

Most city events are accepted as if they just happened. Event designers are unsung. Their professional role is precarious, their work ephemeral, and their next job uncertain. If these happenings had a more stable institutional base, and if their composers had more explicit recognition—perhaps if their works, like that of a composer or a dramatist, were repeatedly performed and thus attracted critical judgment—then event design might be a more compelling role.

Of course there is a danger here. The deliberate “animation” of a city street can rise to the level where we simply become the passive viewers

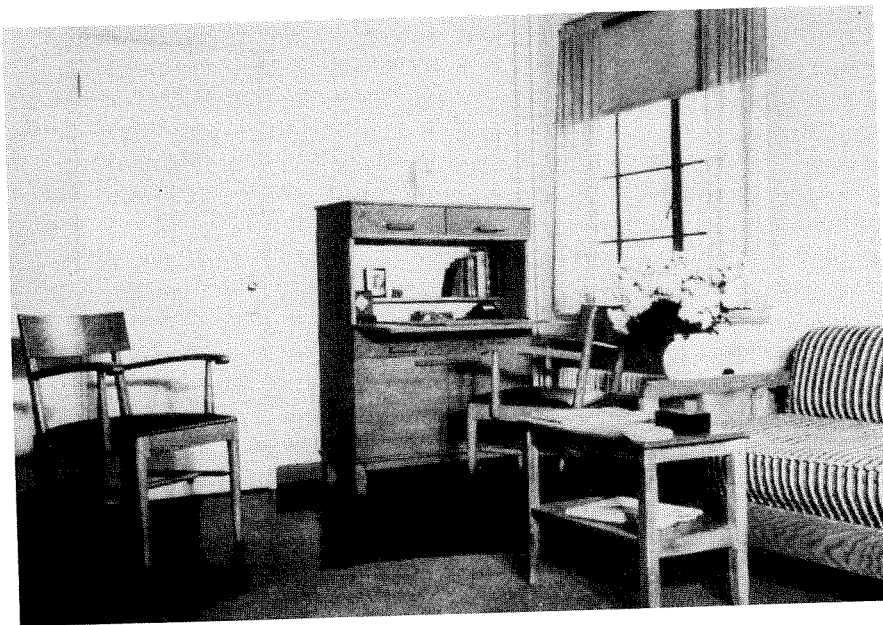
of an encompassing spectacle or, worse, the manipulated participants in some false demonstration of loyalty or “fun.” But if good event design makes use of showmanship, it does so not to compel the actions of its audience, but to give them opportunities for action. Moreover, in the human diversity of our streets (and except for the initial tourist experience), it is less than likely that any event will be long maintained without the assent and interest of those who attend it. Boredom, dissent, and disbelief are effective censors. While the freedom of the streets must be preserved, it is not so easy to subvert.

The fifth mode of city design is just routine: something unnoticed, of low order, a task for draftsmen, who are employed by towns or by equipment suppliers to shape those small repeating pieces of which the city is composed. Their work is everywhere: signs, paving materials, seats, fences, shelters, light standards, power poles, hydrants, trash cans, telephone and letter boxes, parking meters, curbs, and all the rest. Designed as isolated, standard objects, they coalesce into the commonplace jumbled scene. On the other hand, designing each piece afresh to respond to each particular situation (as one might design the special fittings for some exceptional building) would be enormously expensive. Design, production, installation and maintenance would then be unbearably complex. The customary process—piecemeal, standardized, and out of context as it may be—fits the way city



furniture is actually produced and distributed, and the way its parts are stocked. At least this process ensures the technical adequacy of each piece.

City designers might intervene more effectively in this area if they were to engage in *system* design. By that I mean the design of constellations of things that will be used repeatedly: a typical bus shelter, along with its signs, lights, seats, and associated services; or a minor street, including its cross-section, walks, carriageway, curbs, planting, lighting, signs, fences, and system of maintenance; and the ways in which all these may be interrupted or modified to fit changes in use, topography, or local preference. A pattern and schedule of landscape materials could be prepared for typical public places, in a certain urban region, with rules for their location, grouping, planting, and upkeep. One can deal with the shape and finish of subway entrances, steps, and tunnels; with a cycleway in relation to other ways and fronting uses; with a fencing system; with the location, form, and information content of public signs; with typical pocket parks and playgrounds; and with many more features to be used in a general locale. The craft of the industrial designer is relevant here, and perhaps these designers might venture into the municipal realm, if they could bear the confusion. Recent trials have not always been so successful, however, since industrial designers are accustomed to clients who are in firm control of their products, who can see that



6 Greenbelt, Maryland, is not only an almost forgotten example of a fine new townscape, but also of how a system design (in this case of good furniture which could be rented by residents) can enhance the quality of the whole. Photographs by Gary A. Hack.

they are made and delivered just as they are designed.

Where the institutional capability exists, system design can be highly effective. Much of the success of Haussmann's parks and boulevards hung on this attention to detail. Since system designs will be used repeatedly, they have significant influence and can justify substantial design attention and careful citizen consultation. Suitable parts must be found in supplier's catalogs or developed from local sources. Technical demands must be met, and maintenance procedures instituted. It must be determined where the system is relevant, as well as in what particular locations it should *not* be used. The operating departments must be satisfied.

This is where the city designer will be likely to find his stumbling block. Operating departments have long-standing ways of conducting their business, and, with some reason, are jealous of their control. System design is, therefore, best located directly within the operating departments, provided that they are open to new ideas, and have a unified responsibility for that system of objects. But in most cities the streets and their appurtenances, which are our primary public places, are managed by a great jumble of agencies. When the streets are under unified management, system design has been handsomely done: in parks, in shopping centers, in some new towns, and in renewal areas. Unfortunately, urban designers too often see this as lowly work.

System designs can be partial designs: intended, that is, to be completed or modified by other professionals or amateurs yet to appear on the scene. A basic bus shelter might be furnished, sited, and decorated according to the plans of a professional hired by a neighborhood association, or a pocket park of standard layout might be planted by those who will enjoy it. This has financial and administrative implications, as well. For example, instead of demanding that "one percent for art" be expended on works chosen by experts before a building is erected, let that sum be reserved for outdoor improvements one year after the building is occupied, as determined by the actual tenants of the building.

Design may also extend to features not under the control of the public or private agency for whom the designer is working. Designs then become illustrations, or *prototypes*: models to be followed by other builders, expositions of possibilities that other actors are neglecting. In that way, design services are brought to those who would normally not use them or could not afford them. Prototypes may even aim to inspire the formation of a new agency or client group in order to seize some newly revealed opportunity. Ideas for remodeling an ordinary storefront or for installing an engaging window display might be useful, as would models for self-built houses, designs for low-rise apartments to be put up by small builders, and schemes for a backyard community garden, a small workshop on a residential

lot, or a street vendor's stall. Christopher Alexander's "patterns" are outstanding examples of this genre. Early pattern books guided much of the house design in this country, and popular magazines continue that work today—if in a slick and illusory way. Fantasy designs, such as for a sea-bottom landscape or a communal house, may spark the formation of a group that seeks to realize them.

Prototypes must be done in communication with the shopkeeper, house builder, gardener, or street vendor, and in response to their felt needs. Otherwise, the work is fantasy (although fantasy, if explicit, has its own usefulness). Built and furnished examples in use, like the developer's "model house," will be much more effective than a plan. Once accepted, a model can have an enormous influence. Most current models do not come from public sources, but rather from the media, or some source of supply, or as an imitation of an object owned by people of higher status.

These Uncertain Arts

So we find six possible and, for the most part, undeveloped modes of city design, in addition to the three accepted modes with which we began. These are different ways of thinking about our city environment. For the most part—except perhaps in the case of renewal—they refer to relations and actions for which no public or private bodies take public responsibility today. They are

fitted to situations where actors and audiences are decentralized, and, in many cases, they imply some degree of redistribution of power, if they are to be successful. All of these modes have one thing in common: they are based on the ways in which we actually experience a place, rather than on some professional or administrative division—when we experience it as an event, as an image in the mind, as a journey, as a home place transformed, as a purposeful group of objects, or as a workable and familiar pattern. Here lies their potential power and, since they leap the institutional lines, their difficulties as well.

Each possible mode has its allurements and its difficulties. Structural designs for the underlying perceived form of a settlement match the sense of these places at their own scale, and deal openly with change and continuity. But communicating them requires an abstract language, and implementing them demands sustained concern. They must be firmly based on how the citizens see their settlement, and not simply on the perceptions of the single designer. To my knowledge, this mode is not taught or practiced anywhere in this country. Intentional precedents hardly exist, although a rich palette of structural form and element character is imaginable, or can be harvested from observation.

Sequence design is a more tangible possibility, since its material is normally under public control and its effects are consciously

experienced. There are notations and simulations for manipulating this material, and a store of historic precedents. This could become a strong and attractive mode of design, although not a likely specialty. On the other hand, it is a rarely considered mode. It still seems an odd thing to think about when laying out a street, a highway, or a transit line.

The rehabilitation of individual buildings has often achieved attractive results, and we are beginning to see some success at the community level. For the moment, renewal design is tied to downtown renewal and to historic preservation, and to the doctrines of those endeavors. It is unusual to see renewal design practiced in those ordinary areas where it might be more broadly effective. It is considered merely cosmetic and not a fine art with its own traditions, styles, and talents. But renewal has all those possibilities, and perhaps the continuing evolution of historic preservation is leading us in the direction of those possibilities. For designers, it begins to take on some modest glamor, glamor being the lodestone that attracts talent. To be more effective, this mode must develop better methods for involving the ordinary residents and users of a place.

On occasion, event design has been done with great skill, and surely it has its historic precedents. Well done, it is a common pleasure. It could be extended from the great holidays to our daily experience. Its practitioners are unknown,

however: their role unestablished, their budgets and their institutional base uncertain. If this art is to bloom, stable public or private agencies must take up the responsibility for happenings without sacrificing the freedom of the streets.

The design of city furniture, on the other hand, is commonly practiced, paid for, and implemented. These standard designs are uncoordinated, and respond primarily to technical demands. They focus on the “hard,” manufactured things. Imaginative designs for clusters of these objects—as they will be managed and used in typical public situations, and which allow further adaptation—would go far to humanize our cities. The obstacles to this particular mode lie in the structure of the supply industries, the fragmentation of municipal operating departments, and the stubborn values of trained designers.

Last of all, while prototype design could be an efficient use of scarce design talent, it requires a more intimate response to the user than most public or private planning staffs are accustomed to. Without that response, the work remains on paper, a prospect that reduces the enthusiasm of designers. Moreover, agencies must become motivated to provide such indirect design services. Good prototypes could reshape our daily environment. Their generation would be a model of participatory design.

None of these six modes is a developed art; some are emerging.

Each requires its own skill, models, languages, institutions, and practical experience. All six meet the criteria laid down at our beginning. They deal with the large environment in daily use; they are comfortable with continuous change, partial control, pluralism, and participation; and they are creative arts, eliciting an aesthetic response. The principal obstacles to their development lie in a lack of institutional support, in the attitudes and training of professionals, in the rarity of user participation, and perhaps, most of all, in the absence of any public or private responsibility for the way in which the sense of a city affects our daily lives.

Attitudes in the planning profession reinforce this lack of public support. Talented designers move into architecture, where they have some hope of seeing their dreams made flesh. Once there, they are socialized to value innovation, large and expensive projects, a fashionable surface, and strong personal expression. Planners, on the other hand, think of themselves as administrators and technicians, not as artists. The gulf between sense quality and public policy, between art and planning, widens and deepens.

All six modes could be taught, practiced, and critically appreciated. They could manipulate a rich variety of form, develop a style, and exhibit talent. They are possible but peculiar. Might our schools of planning and urban design lead off by demonstrating some of these

potentials? Or must schools always waddle after practice?

Even if we fail to nurture these arts, and so fail to make cities that are intentional, collective works of art, nevertheless we *must* be concerned with the sensory form of what surrounds us, since it is critical to our survival as well as to our pleasure. So we at least must manage city sense in a programmatic way. A concern for sensory quality is an absolutely necessary part of environmental policy. Otherwise, our cities will remain alien to us.

But why not hope for an art as well as for a policy?

NOTES

- 1 Kevin Lynch, "Managing the Sense of a Region," MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 1976. The Boston Redevelopment Authority, "Boston Tomorrow." New York City Planning Commission, "Midtown Zoning." San Francisco Department of City Planning, "Downtown."
- 2 Philip Thiel, "A Sequence—Experience Notation," Town Planning Review, Vol. 32, #1, April, 1961.
- 3 Donald Appleyard, Kevin Lynch & John R. Myer, "The View From the Road," MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 1964.
- 4 Gordon Cullen, "The Concise Townscape," Van Nostrand, New York City, 1971.