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DESIGN AS A VALUE SYSTEM

I want to describe design not in its usual meaning but as a value system. We are quite clearly in the grip of a real dilemma of goals and objectives in our society, if not in the world. Certainly we are in our profession.

On the one hand, there is great affluence. Materialism is rampant; money-making is a primary motivation; and the Harvard MBA is everywhere. Because of the primacy of television as a source of information we are surrounded by surrogate experience, not real-life experience, and it is hard to tell what is real or unreal anymore. As a columnist has said, "something is horribly wrong." Everything is packaged these days and the packaging has become the real reality.

We are surrounded by image-making architects who design very special places where columns are hollow. It's hardly a good idea to lean against them because you could be sued for denting them. The entire project, actually, has a hollow ring. Everything seems to be designed to evoke a stage-set image these days, having very little to do with the actual activities going on within the building or the landscape.

Everywhere developers are hiring architects and landscape architects to authenticate their deals by making buildings and open spaces which, like advertisements, call attention to the project. It has become a form of corporate pimping, if you will. It leaves the architect to serve out his role as what Philip Johnson calls "a design whore." The designs are profoundly phony, Disneylandish structures and landscapes without meaning, or profundity, or sense of value. They are full of sound and fury, but signify nothing socially relevant.





At the other end of the scale, as Randolph Hester points out, are the homeless, the disadvantaged, the socially burdensome; the planet's ecological balance is threatened. Real-life communities and small-town neighborhoods are disintegrating in the face of shopping centers full of silly shops selling trendy knickknacks and doo-dads and taking over from the authentic downtown of the village or town.

I get the impression that most young people these days are bemused or despondent rather than appalled at the directions that we are going in or what our values are and how to achieve them. What is design really all about? Design, particularly environmental design, has a profound responsibility. It is, in a sense, the bearer of the cultural value system of a community. For that reason, environmental design goes way beyond the visual; it is much more pervasive. It deals with cultural issues, with context, with lifestyle, with social and economic issues; it has profound ecological ramifications and influences on the future of the planet; it deals with the whole community as well as the individual; it is contributing to a human ecology and, in

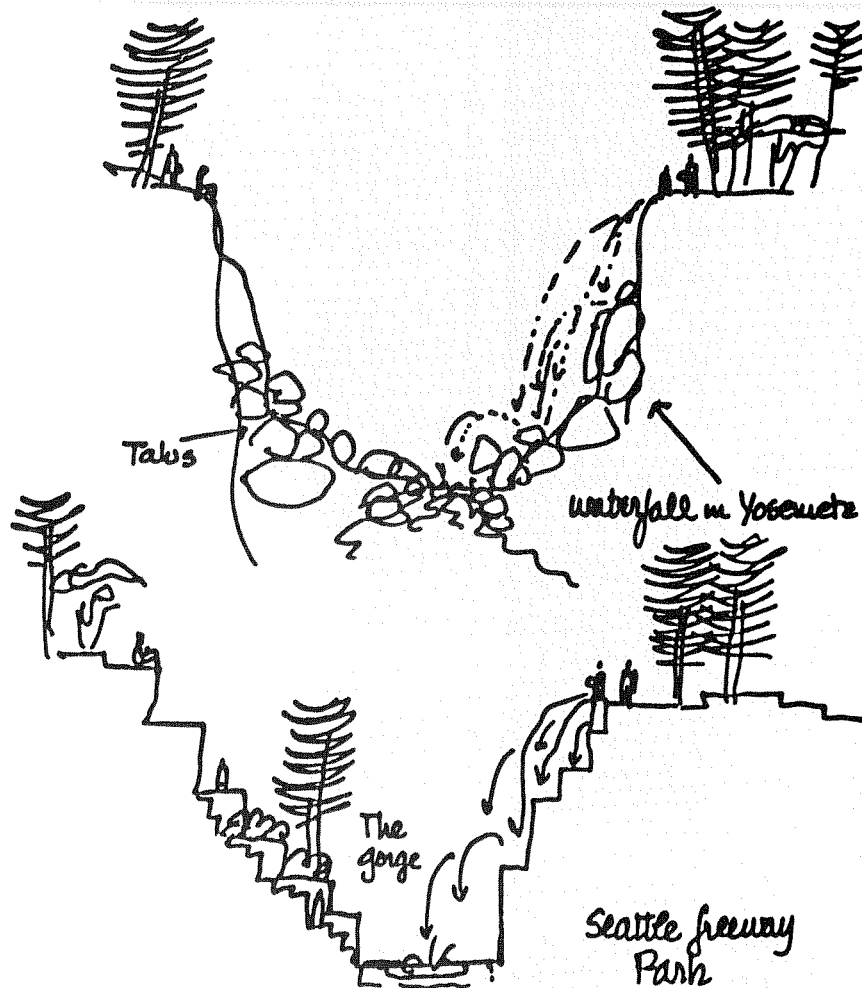
that sense, it must be multi-sensory and holistic. And, I think, holistic is the operative word.

Perhaps more importantly, landscape design must go much deeper than image-making, which simply trivializes it. It is, after all, not a matter of constantly changing style, as some people think—like the redesign of new fashions each season. It has nothing to do with old-fashioned carpet bedding or modish, intricate gridded patterning on the ground, which is the more recently stylish way of doing things.

Landscape design *is* about social relevance. It can become poetic and symbolic, but, perhaps most importantly, it can articulate a culture's most spiritual values.

For its best meaning, it can strive to externalize and make feasible spiritual values—for individuals, for a community, and for the whole planet. The role of the landscape designer, can be similar to the role of a Shaman who, in the Dutch teacher Beuy's words, "can transform base materials into mystical touchstones." Beautiful term.

In that way, landscape design is like alchemy. That is what makes it an important art form, and why, in fact, it is worthy for us to pursue this particular profession.

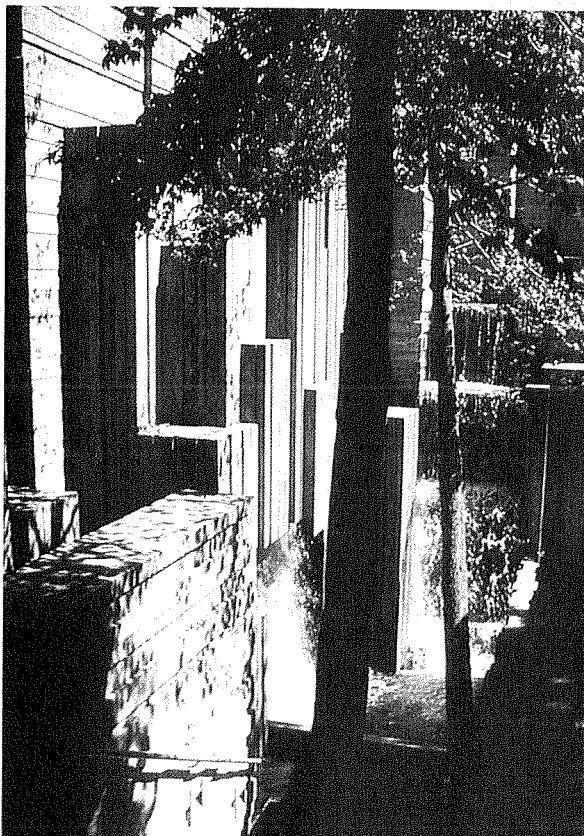


waterfall in Yosemite

Thundering sound of water

Seattle freeway Park

In the gorge at the freeway Park is "lehrs" being below the waterfall at Yosemite's

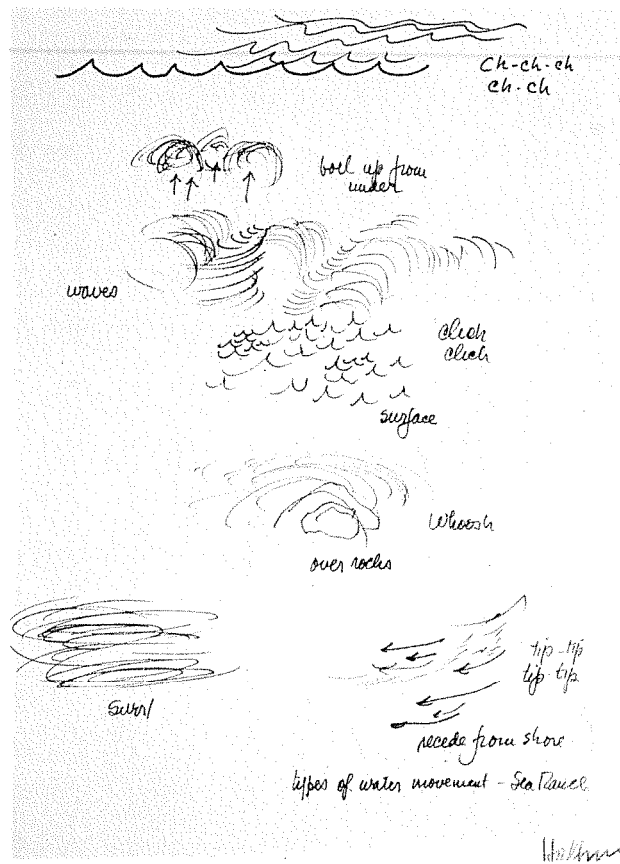


Seattle's Freeway Park, inspired by the landscape of Yosemite National Park. Photograph and drawings by Lawrence Halprin.

Some of the most remarkable transformational environments I have personally experienced exhibit manifestations of spiritual values. They have altered my life.

What they seem to do is release in people something inherent inside them, something that is already there. They evoke some basic need, which lies dormant until it is evoked.

These environments speak to us at a basic, human, archetypal level, revealing to us our latent human and spiritual values.



Types of Water movement
—Sea Ranch.

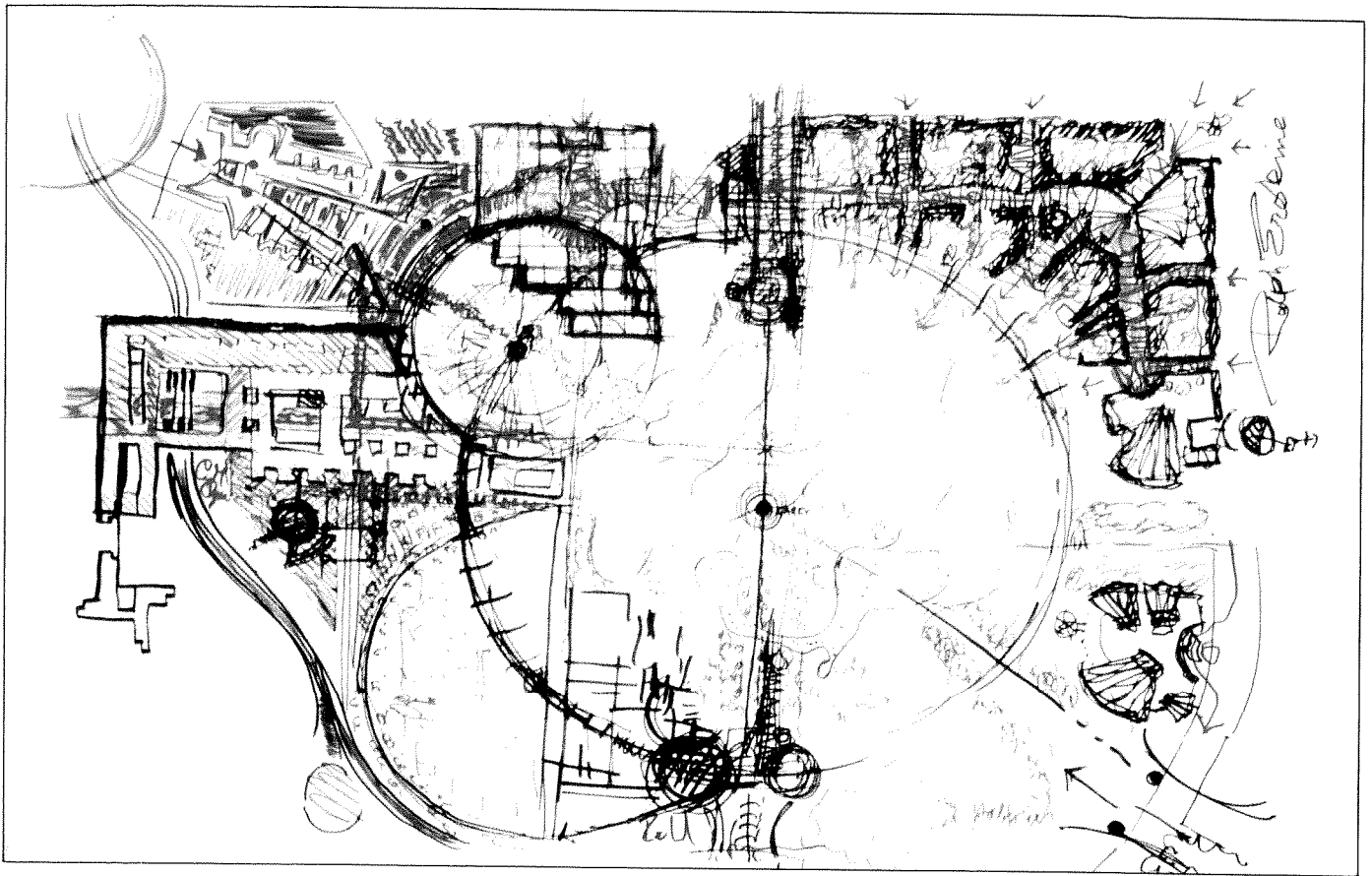


Late October on
the Tucker trail
@ Camp Tucker

**Late October on the Tucker Trail,
at Camp Tucker.**

Lawrence Halprin's drawings are a very special record of his search for forms that can call forth a spirited response in public urban places. Most frequently his studies of natural form and process have captured attention; they reveal, in notations and graphic gestures, the complexity of responses that are so characteristic of unfettered natural environments. The drawings also shed light on how Halprin, time and time again, has been able to shape places that embody the wonder and fecundity of nature, that invite exploration, and that touch depths of feeling that conventional wisdom would not acknowledge.

When I asked for a set of drawings to include in this issue, Larry invited me to go



Fiat Novoli.

through his most recent sketch books. As a preliminary, we discussed the points included in this issue's editorial: that good places are distinct and memorable, often with characterizing silhouettes; that it is important that places sustain exploration and continuing attention; that places should allow for personal interaction; and that places derive from multiple sources and are open to continuous change.

"Yes," Larry said, "that's what I've been trying to get across. Those are all versions of natural processes applied to building; it doesn't matter what you build it out of. We like such things because they come out of biological processes. But I would add that good places always have responded to humor and fantasy."

"Or," I suggested, "to aspiration. All are involved in making something more out of the world than it is."

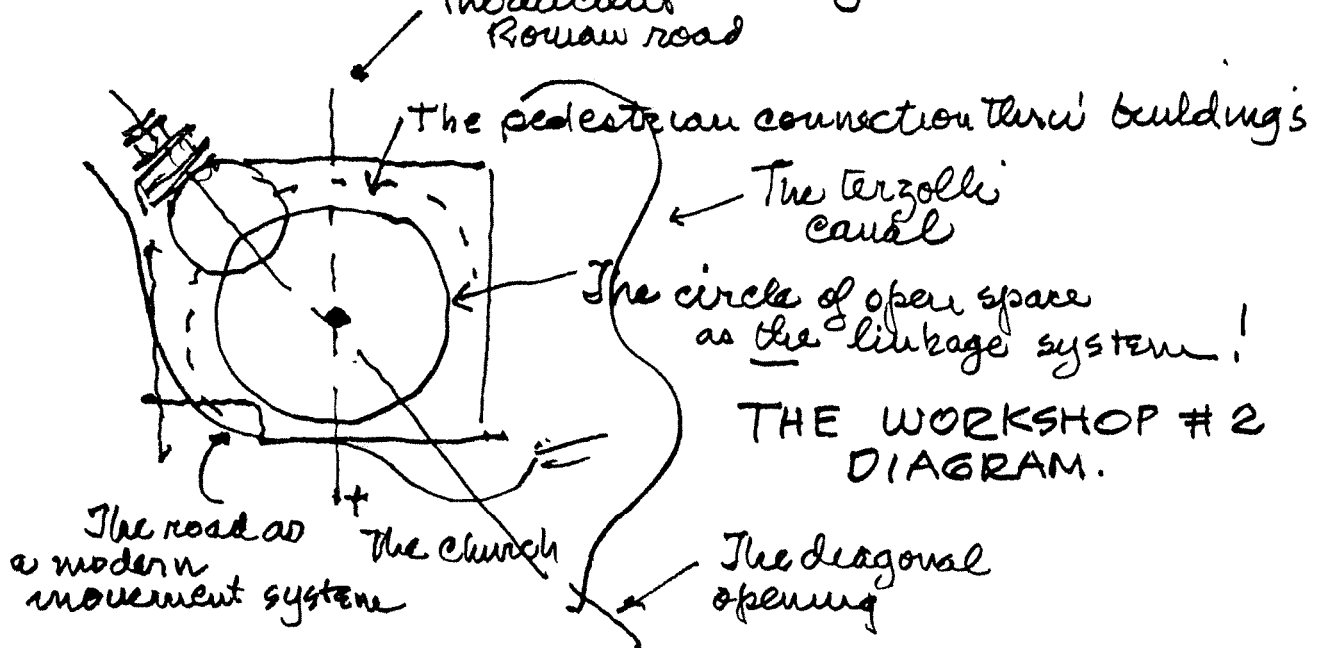
Leafing through the sketch books, it was clear to me that natural forms were not the only ones that Larry explored, and that humor and fantasy were also constant companions. Midway through a recent notebook was a letter to Bruno Zevi outlining some thoughts on a recent project for Florence, the Fiat Novoli. The letter, which we have reproduced on the following pages, offers a nice glimpse into the evolution of an idea. We have also reproduced above the drawing generated from the workshop to which the letter refers as a starting point.

—Donlyn Lyndon



Villa Garzoni.

Dear Bruno -- I am sorry not to have been able to show you the park myself but have asked Galo to explain ^{it} to you for me next week --



At the end of the 2nd workshop the "collective drawing" which was arrived at by a great burst of intense emotion and consensus of the group working as a whole -- set the central open space as a park. The park was left to be designed as a great modern garden serving the needs of the public and there was a strong feeling that its proposed circular form be broken and eroded at the edges so that it not be static!

When I came back to San Francisco I started working with the \bigcirc & it continued to confuse me because it seemed to remain static and too introverted

One of our constant requirements for novels is that it be able to reach out and include the neighborhoods and relate to the outside world as well. The \bigcirc

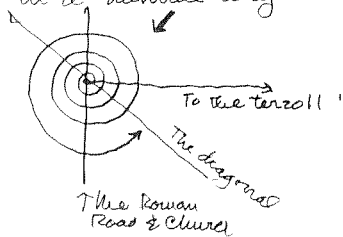
Seemed to inhibit that as well as being fixed and immittable.

So I worked at a way to break out. And the spiral form seemed to do that for me. Its organically (rather than intellectually) derived

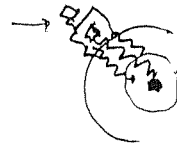


Geometry seemed to both hold the architecture together and at the same time its increasing circular lines are based on forces of growth and change in biology and space.

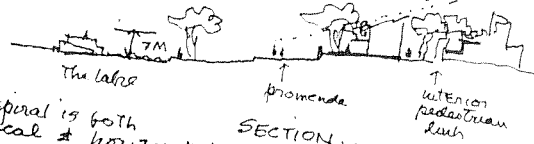
If you add the radial axes based on the gradual increments of .618 modules inherent in all living forms - these gave me the opportunity to reach out into the surrounding areas in a natural way ... all these could be brought together in the Park.



Additionally I have "de-composed" the edges of the spiral form to increase the penetration outward & inward. For example the source of the water fountain eats into the outer spiral & the outdoor amphitheater does the same on the other side of the lake.



One of the main spirals becomes the major pedestrian promenade (and will in addition serve for service vehicles: fire, police etc.) on the park side of the buildings. And the next spiral links all the buildings together as a continuous pedestrian linkage. Along this way internal gardens, plantings and trees will climb through and around all the buildings and up on balconies washing the park and the architecture into a total integration of inside and outside of architecture & landscape.



The spiral is both vertical & horizontal..... SECTION..

Halprin's letter to Bruno Zevi describing the evolution of the design of a park at Fiat Novoli. Courtesy Lawrence Halprin.

Along the pedestrian spiral linkages are to be public uses both in the park and within the building groupings. At the nodal points of spiral and radial paths will be activity centers for various age groups - small children's playgrounds, teen-age centers and seniors ... in addition all along the walkways will be food kiosks sidewalk cafes, gallery spaces, bookstores etc. etc. I am working with the planning department to define these needs and recreational facilities such as bocce ball etc. as well. Thus the park will be able to be not only a physical but a truly social center for the entire area.

I am writing these notes in my notebook for you on a morning flight home to San Francisco & will send them by FAX (as soon as I arrive) as additional descriptions of the material. Halo will show you. Hope you are well again & all my best until I see you in April ... Shalom #188

Jerry BA Flight 287 Tues, Mar. 8 - 88.