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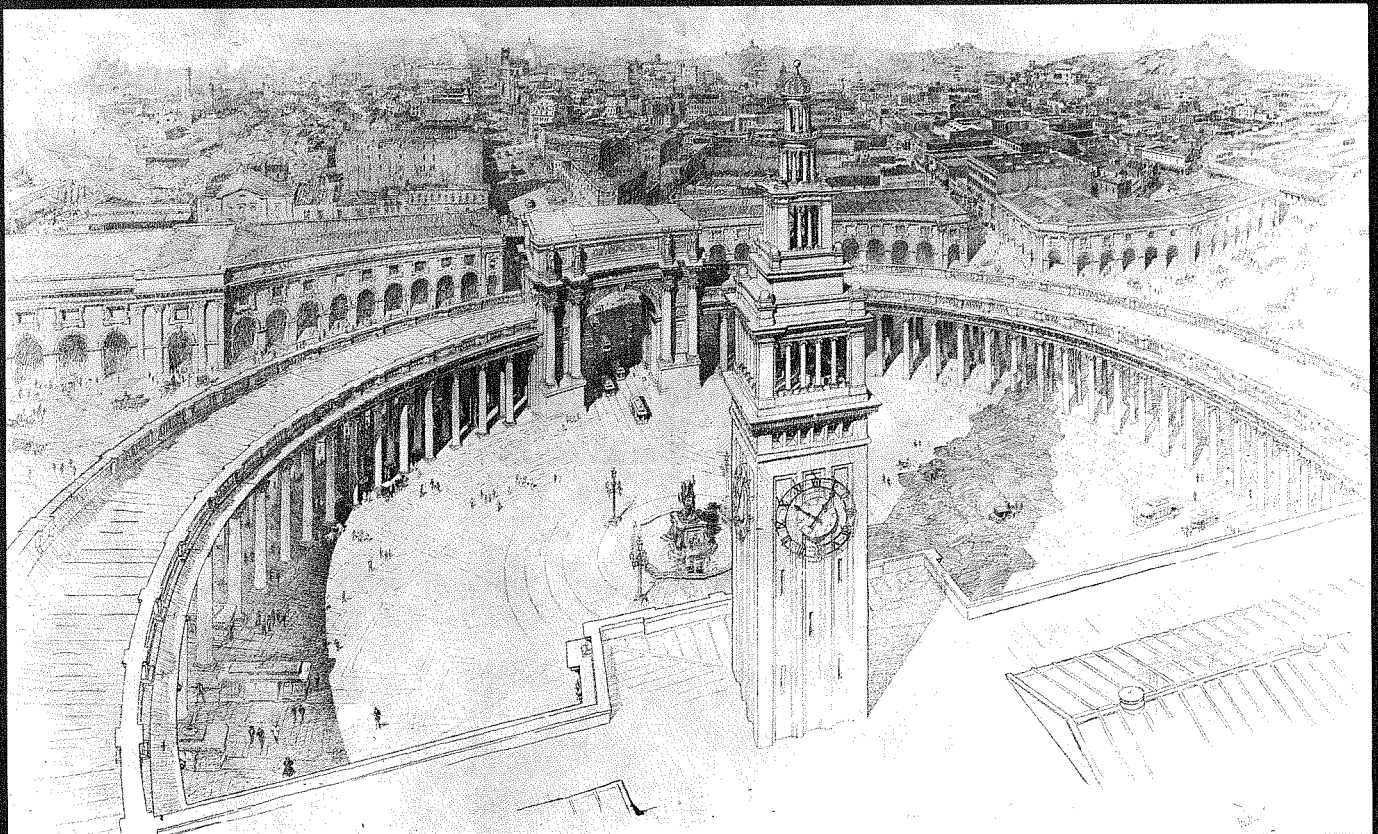
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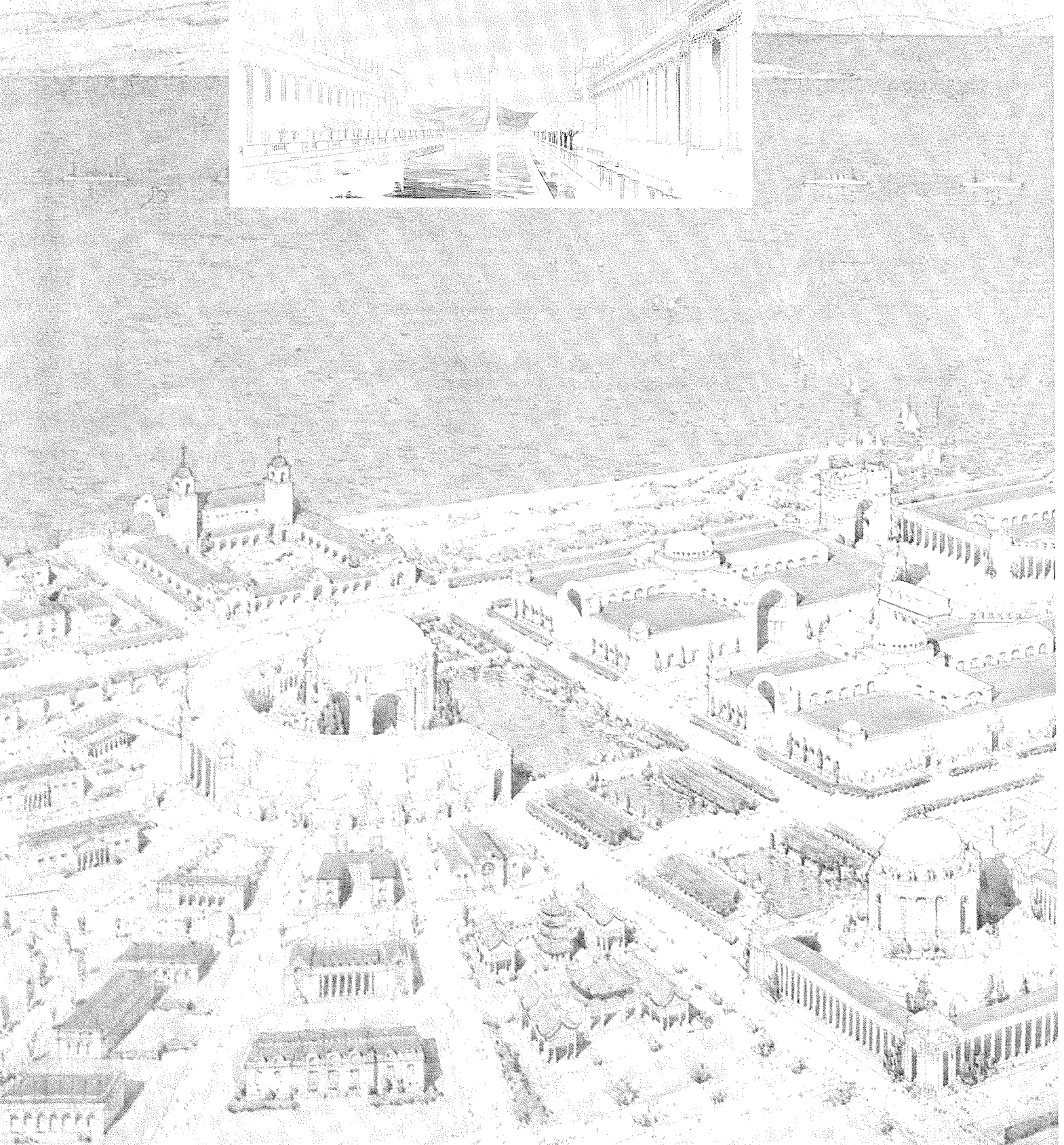
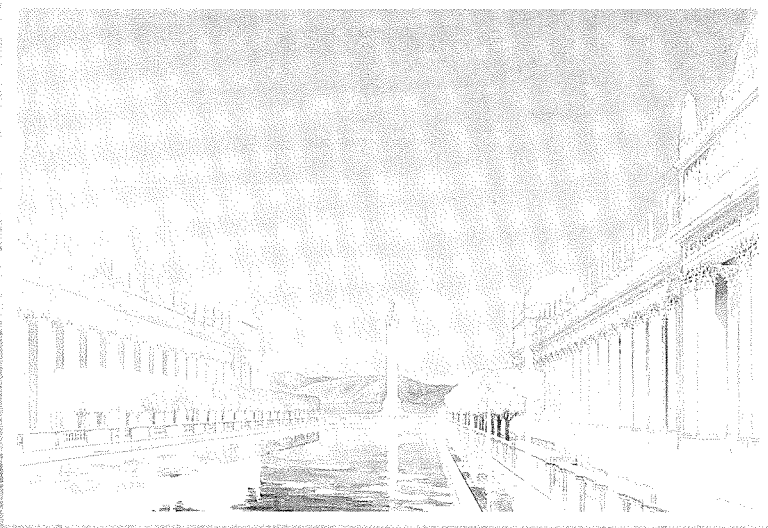
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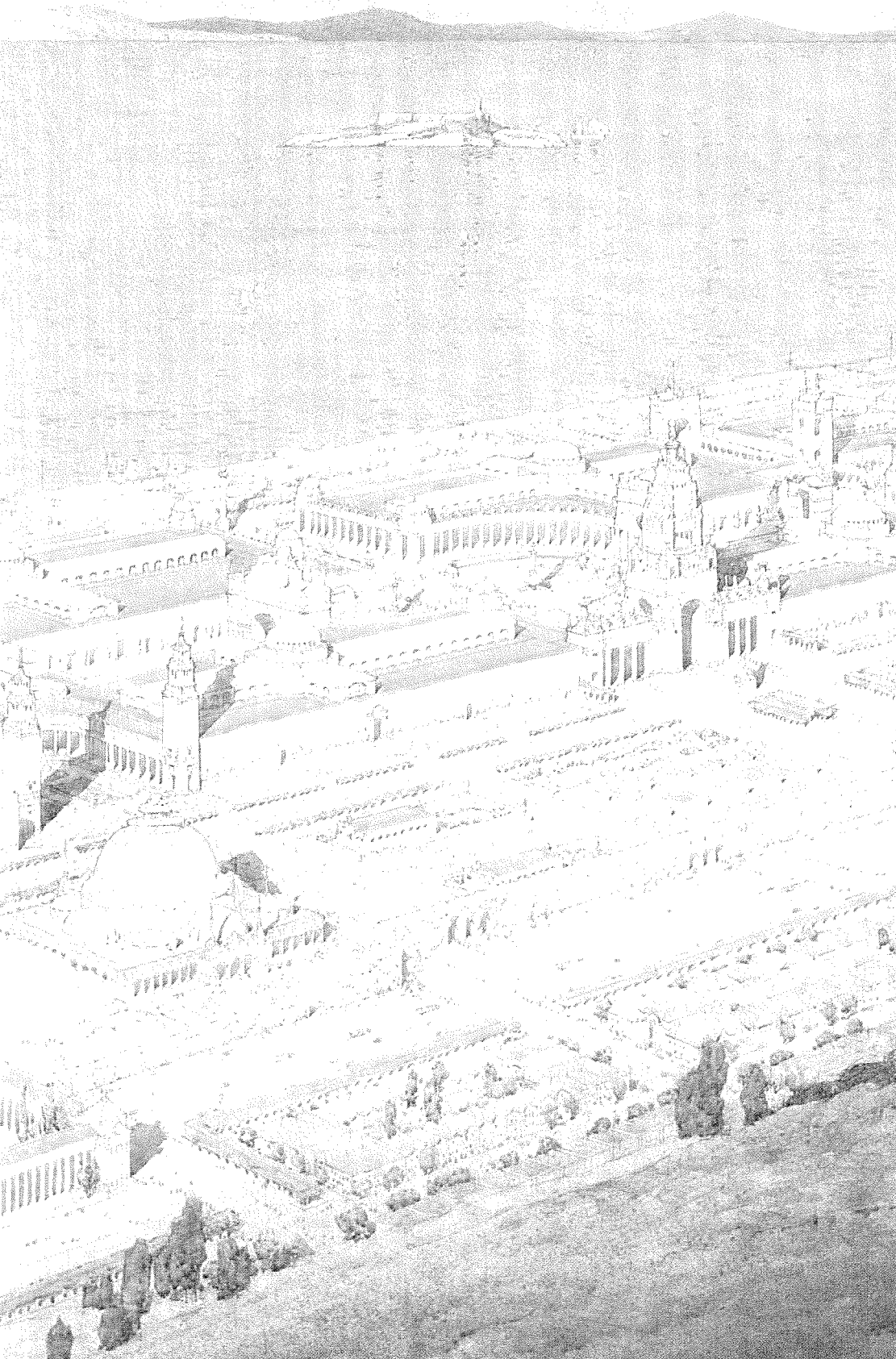
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VISIONS OF MOVEMENT: Exhibition Notes

Donlyn Lyndon and Neema Kudva







Opening page: *Proposed Peristyle and Arch at Foot of Market Street, 1897.*

Drawing by Willis Polk.

Courtesy Documents

Collection, College of

Environmental Design,

University of California,

Berkeley.

Bird's Eye View of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, 1913.

Watercolor by Jules Guerin.

Courtesy San Francisco

Exploratorium.

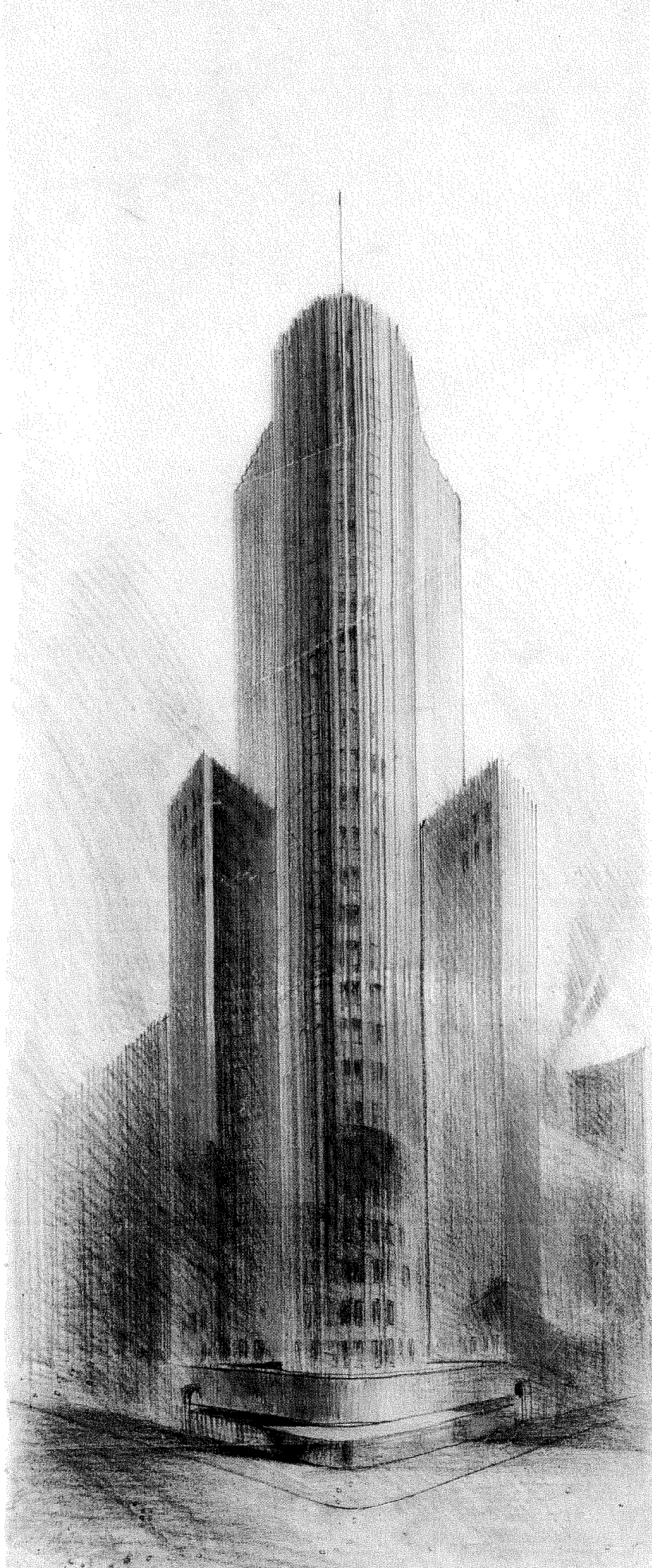
Inset: *Court of Honor, c. 1912*

Watercolor by Jules Guerin.

Courtesy San Francisco Public

Library.

From the splendid, spacious grace of parade grounds to the confined painted green of a Ping-Pong table, the spaces projected in the *Visionary San Francisco* exhibition held at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art are structured by anticipated patterns of movement. Their purposes range from marshalling a social order to prompting an apotheosis of play. The images of these spaces, whatever their subject matter, vary dramatically in their scope — from grand, encompassing visions of purposeful change in the beginning of this century, to insular images of perfectibility within an environment gone to hell (or uncontrollably on its



way) as the century closes.

The ways in which these various images, spanning a century of planning for the city, envision patterns of motion in the futures they project provides a telling commentary on the preoccupations of their times.

In the early, grand images derived from the Beaux-Arts tradition, movement is a spectacle, paced to the appreciative eye, measured by the regular cadence of marching columns and rows of trees and contained within spaces that are visibly terminated by landscape features and monuments: known places to go. These measured settings help us to imagine the marchers, strolling gentry, carriages and touring cars. They are places to inhabit at leisure and with enlightenment in mind. The surroundings are full, abundantly elaborated with sculpted forms, framed openings, decorative surfaces and the animating flicker of sun and shadow falling on buildings and landscape.

In Jules Guerin's renderings for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915, streams of people move from the city's gridded fabric into the Exposition grounds through gates in green walls that separate the grounds from the city. These paths meet the main longitudinal axis and cross

it to move out to the water's edge. While the brooding presence of the Palace of Fine Arts, marking the end of the main axis, remained to become the very symbol of San Francisco, the vistas along the cross-axes were eventually transformed into streets and woven into the more mundane domestic avenues that replaced the Exposition.

In Guerin's watercolors of the courts, columns march along to the rhythms of people's feet. Paths skirt the edges of the courts, moving along colonnades that form a space of transition between the still forms of the buildings and the open ground. The experience of the court is ordered by the placing of paths along edges that counterpoint the axial, structured outlook to San Francisco Bay and its wondrous colors.

In the 1920s the public realm, with its places of celebration and repose, disappears from the drawings. The imagery exalts instead a new type of building that thrusts itself into the sky; the movement of people on the ground becomes secondary to the invisible movement of elevator cabs, shrouded by layers of walls, lifting people into the air. San Francisco's investors had begun a love affair with the skyscraper, which transformed the skyline of their

city. But by the 1970s the affair was rendered mundane, as the proliferating volumes became commonplace and supplanted the hills as the characterizing silhouette of the city. (In 1985 the city, in an attempt to rekindle the flame, passed ordinances requiring that the tops of tall buildings be shapely — that they display at least some signs of infatuation.)

In the middle half of the century, movement (read cars) becomes a critical source of imagery again, but principally as the agent of change, not as a mechanism for enriching peoples' experience in the city. The Motor Car Dealers Association waged a campaign to "tear down the wall" (read "bridge the Bay") that nearly encircles the city, asserting that San Francisco's future lay in its connections to the surrounding region.

The consequences of this were first writ large in the two great bridges (the Golden Gate and Bay bridges) that are such a monumental presence in the city. These vast spans made manifest (as Dan Gregory points out in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition) a new way of seeing the region as a bonded whole, providing visible connections among the region's peninsulas and islands and carrying an increasing number of cars to and from the city.

Perspective study sketches for a skyscraper, 1920s.
Timothy Pflueger, J. R. Miller and T. L. Pflueger.
Courtesy Butterfield and Butterfield.

As a corollary, the ferries that carried commuters to the city were squeezed out of business and the Ferry Building, conceived to be resplendent at the end of Market Street, lost its role as gateway to the city. In turn, even the wonderful glut of trolleys that carried passengers from the ferry terminal along the Market Street spine were shunted underground and out of sight to create a corridor for cars.

Images of these bridges often depict them proudly as progressive, liberating

forces; yet little imagination is lavished on projecting the experience a person would have crossing these exhilarating spans. Nor was movement from the bridges into the city elaborated. Moving off the Bay Bridge into San Francisco required anonymous descent into a warehouse district, or curving on a ramp through a darkened, dismal passage under the Bridge approach viaduct.

The bridges and expanding freeway system gave people the freedom to move out through the

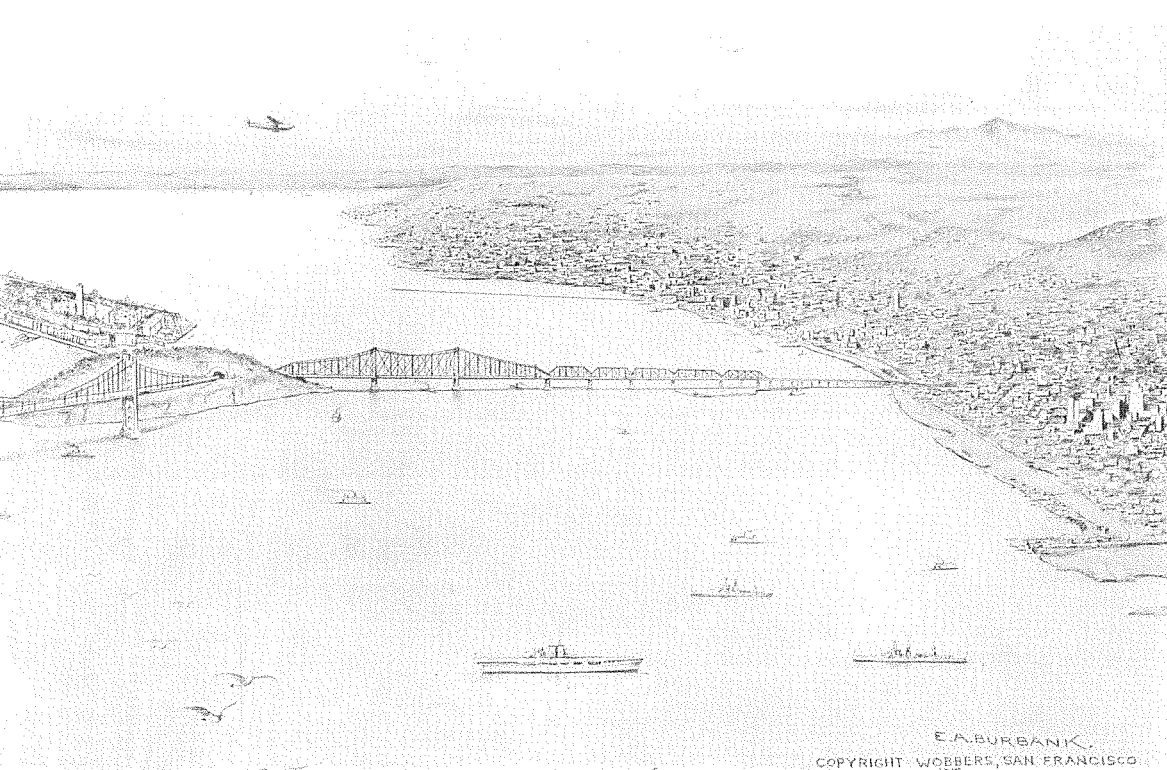
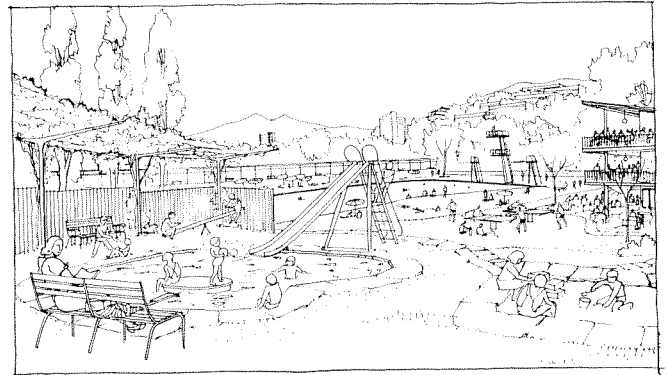
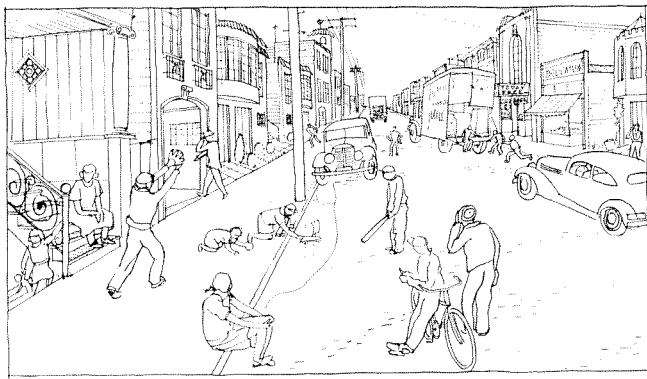
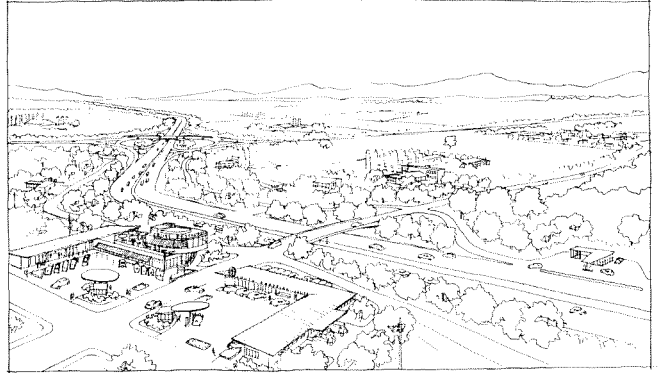
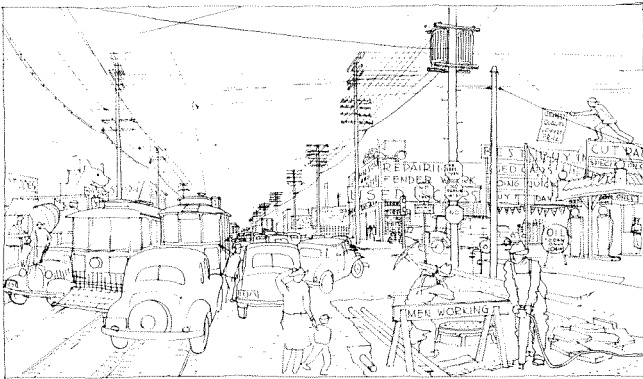
region and search for environments less crowded and less puzzling than downtown. As they did, even the city itself was imagined as an uncomplicated blend of buildings and tended landscape, freed (as in Vernon DeMars' prophetic sketches for a Telesis exhibition in 1940) from the jungle of discordant development and conflicting purposes. They pictured a city of agreements, not differences, of free movement and undisturbed repose, of progressive rationality.

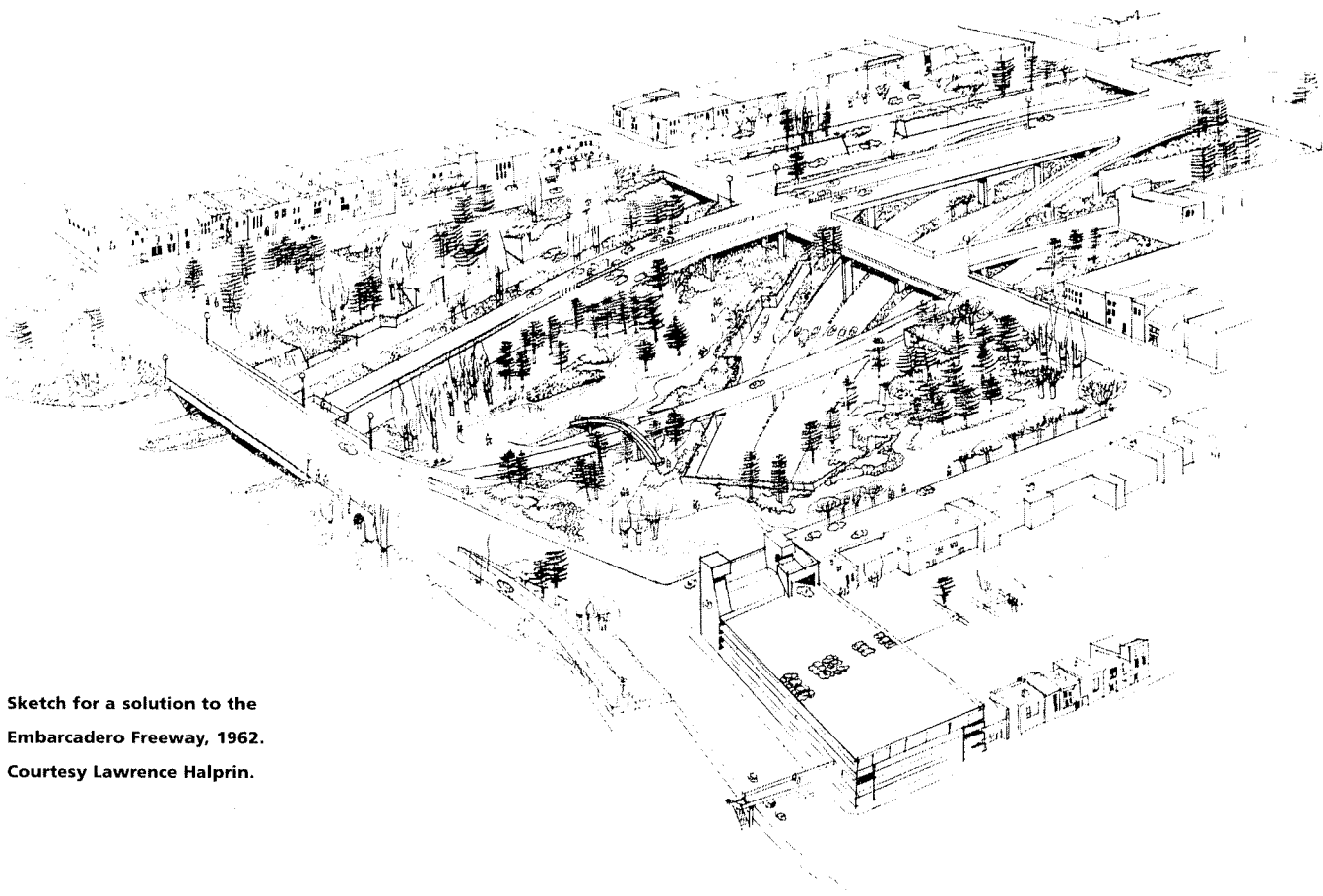
**Site of the Golden Gate-
International Exposition, "A
Pageant of the Pacific," 1938.
Rendering by E. A. Burbank.
Courtesy San Francisco
Archives.**



Vernon DeMars' 1940 sketches contrast the jumbled city with an ordered, tended landscape of the future.

Drawings courtesy Vernon DeMars.



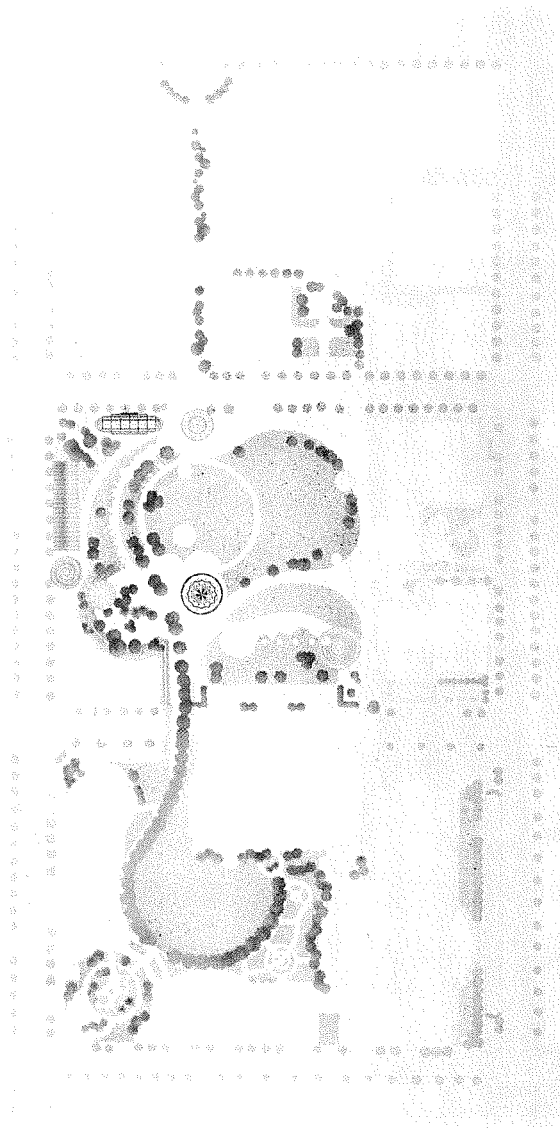


Sketch for a solution to the Embarcadero Freeway, 1962.
Courtesy Lawrence Halprin.

But the great structures and channels that allow for all this movement through the region provided ease and utility for some people while threatening to dominate the daily neighborhood experience of others. Efforts to consider both groups were all too seldom fruitful. As freeways were thrust forcibly through neighborhoods, people genuinely committed to their life in the city rose in political protest and forced ingenious design alternatives, such as those proposed by landscape architect Lawrence Halprin.

The most radical alternative, and often the one that prevailed, was no freeway. Now, in the aftermath of the 1989 earthquake, the damaged Embarcadero Freeway is the subject once again of intense debate and visionary proposals. Some people hope to seize the opportunity to demolish a blight along the waterfront but others fear the loss of access to their businesses. The infamous Cypress Structure in Oakland has already been removed, possibly to be replaced by a park.

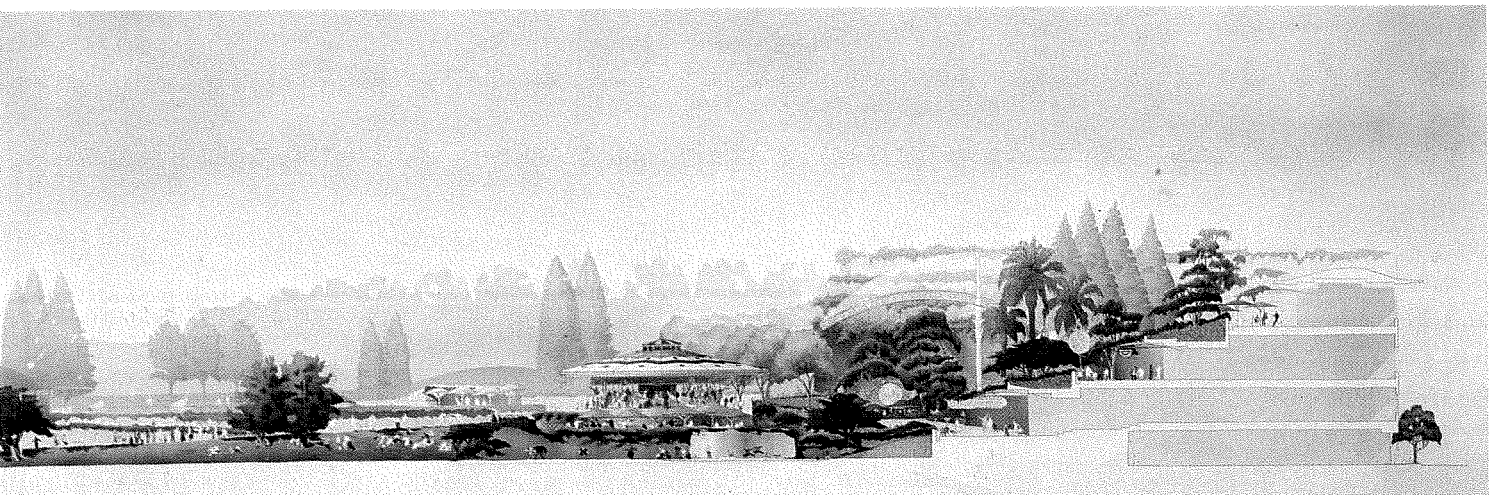




As the end of the century approaches, physical movement no longer seems epic. In the works prepared for the exhibition, movement is rendered as commonplace or as play — the latter symbolized by the giant carousel in Jon Jerde's shopping park for the Yerba Buena project and the tennis courts that structure the green in Barbara Stauffacher Solomon's San Francisco maps.

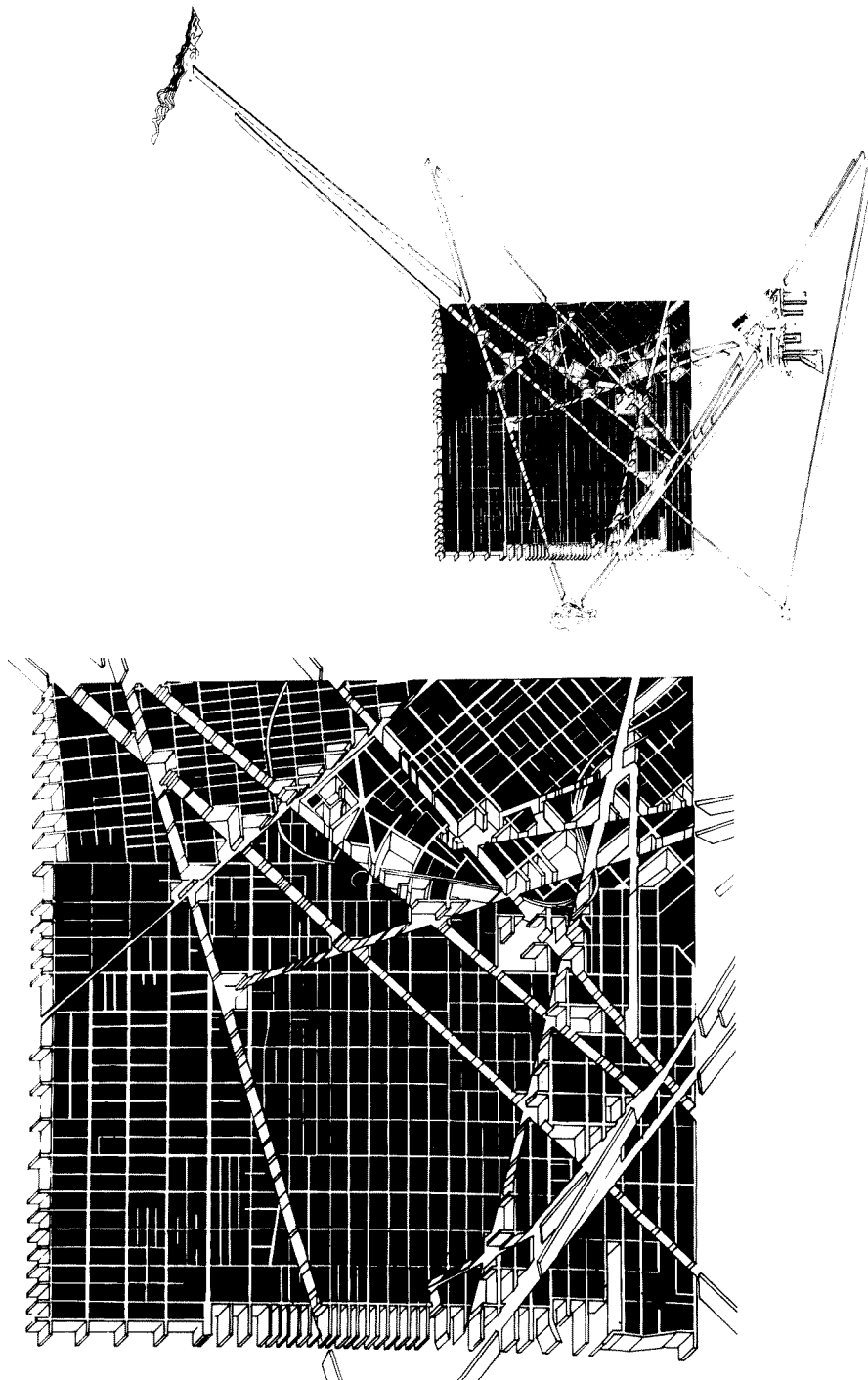
The Jerde Partnership's drawings for the Yerba Buena garden envision an experience that is varied and allows for a constant (read frivolous?) stimulation of the senses. In the age of the automobile, in which to speed along the freeway is one of the basic experiences, the entire atti-

tude towards interaction with the environment seems changed — the environment is regarded as entertainment, accompanied by music and rolled across the windscreen (or tube). In the marketplace sensory stimulation seems demanded at an accelerated pace. Yerba Buena, self-contained, neatly separating the vehicular from the pedestrian, but keeping the pedestrian precinct as one of constant "interest," seems to epitomize a kind of schizophrenia, a desire for the kinetic experience we have in an automobile crossed with a belief in the basic incompatibility between people and cars.



**Plan for Yerba Buena Gardens,
East-West Section/Elevation
for Yerba Buena Gardens,
1989.**

**Drawings by The Jerde
Partnership, Courtesy Olympia
& York.**



Drawing No. 2: Plot. By Diana Agrest and Mario Gandelsonas.

The exhibition pieces and writings, commissioned by the Museum to extend this historical overview into the future, were offered more as comment and provocation than as proposals. As gallery pieces are wont to do, they set out to direct our attention to concepts and characteristic problems rather than to proposals for change.

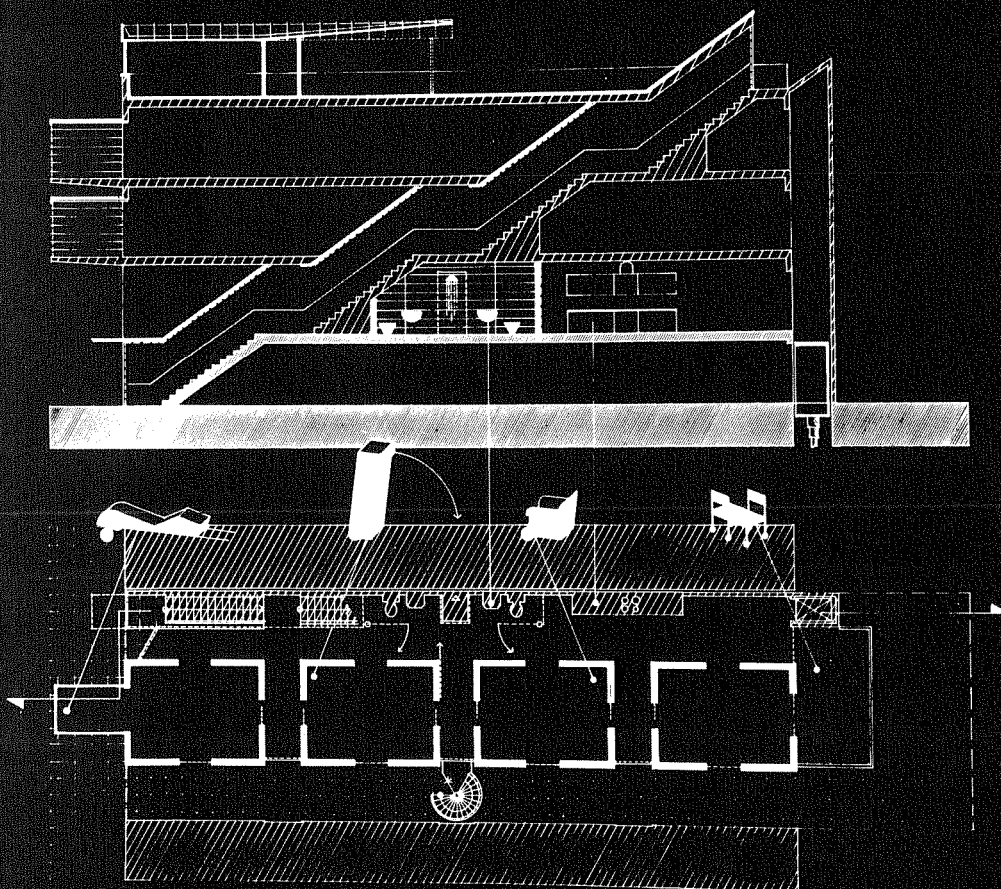
They were also fundamentally uninterested in transportation. (Have airplanes sated the lust for motion?)

In the project by Diana Agrest and Mario Gandelsonas, the freeway is casually converted to a housing site, while in William Gibson's story the Bay Bridge is abandoned in favor of high-speed tunnels

in which experience is irrelevant. The Bridge is appropriated by the homeless and becomes a liberated ramshackle city where an aberrant urbanity survives outside the insular high-tech packages of upscale development that are so chillingly portrayed in models prepared by Ming Fung and Craig Hodgetts.



*House of Flats. Section,
plan and typical furniture.
By Sohela Farokhi and Lars
Lerup.
Courtesy San Francisco
Museum of Modern Art.*



In the exhibit prepared by Sohela Farokhi and Lars Lerup, movement is finally domesticated in a set of wheeled furniture (chairs, lounge chairs and a closet) that offers the secure apartment dweller a semblance of nomadic adventure. In their House of Flats, the spaces of the city are the private spaces of the house, where rooms defy the definition of continued use: Moveable furniture allows you to rename each room as you use it.



The three sails of the flying machine

**The Green Rectangle =
Play-ground. By Barbara
Stauffacher Solomon.
Courtesy San Francisco
Museum of Modern Art.**

Solomon's installation, more a commentary on San Francisco than a vision of the future, captures in its rendering some of the mystery of the city. In Solomon's reading of the city, patches of green occupying parts of the gridiron become areas for play and rejuvenation. Movement is a ritual dance in the only available paradise — courts of play filled with light footfall and the sounds of a racquet hitting a ball. The acts of collective celebration in the spaces of the city are for the most part redefined as the sequestered play of two to four people tracking a ball within a matrix of rules.

In a pessimistic reading these installations are self-absorbed, unconcerned with or dismayed by the collective future. In an optimistic view they can be seen as pointing the way to

an abiding concern for how it is to be in a place, rather than to move on. They can prompt us to explore and understand the character of our society and how it fits with the nature of this very special topography and climate.

Yet in these installations, these latter visions, the light of the sun (purveyor of climatic character), rendered so vividly in the early drawings, plays a lesser role. It is irrelevant to the diagrammatic intricacies of the Agrest/Gandelsonas maps, and it appears only as a source of energy for the solar-powered elite insular towers of the Fung/Hodgetts exhibit. In the Farokhi/Lerup installation, the sun as emblem of nature is supplanted by the ominous forces that shake the earth. These, when they appear, are made to sing, through

an imagined structure of highly strung tension members that brace their apartment building against earthquakes.

Only in Solomon's misty glowing maps and in the written descriptions of Mark Helprin (published in the exhibition catalogue) does nature resume a benevolent voice: "San Francisco has a golden core — of light, color, proportion, of the feel of the air, the fog and the blue of the bay. These are the steadfast perfections around which human endeavor organizes itself even at times without realizing it. They give a common language to science and art. They provide the real continuity of history. And they are the true builders of cities."

