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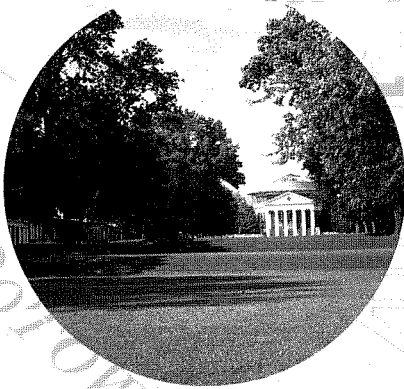
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Pride and Stewardship: Renewing the Mandate for Design Excellence in America's Public Realm

Thomas Walton

The commentaries accompanying this article are edited from discussions and presentations that took place during "Public Service Design Abroad," a conference organized by the National Endowment for the Arts in December, 1993.



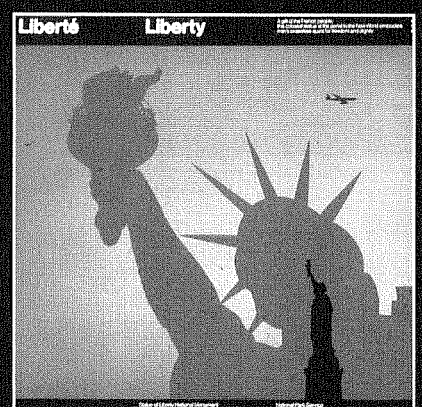
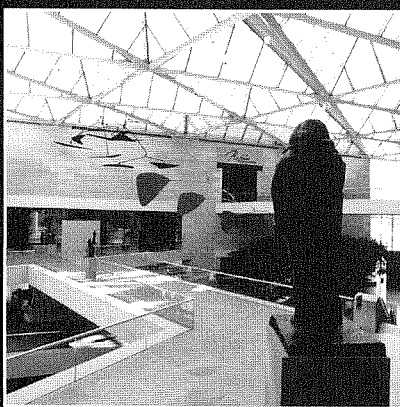
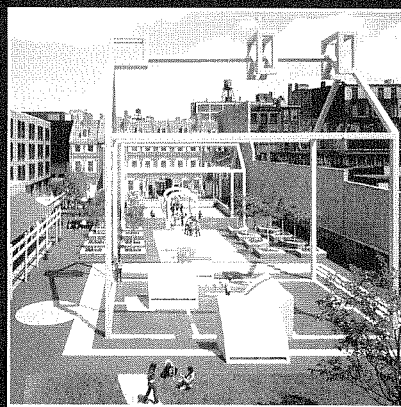
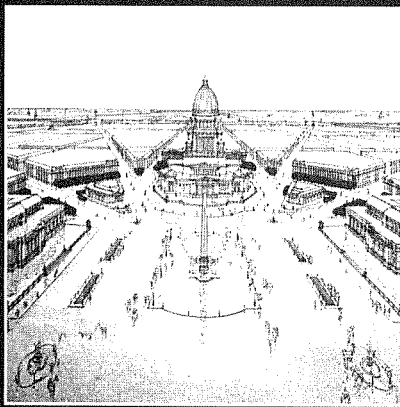
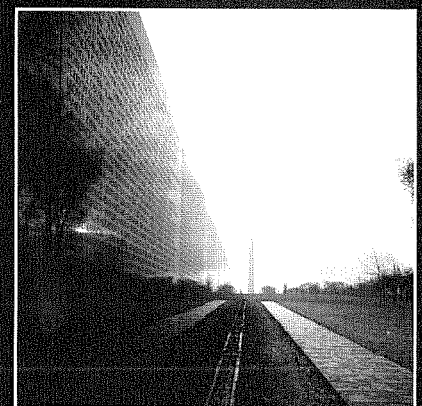
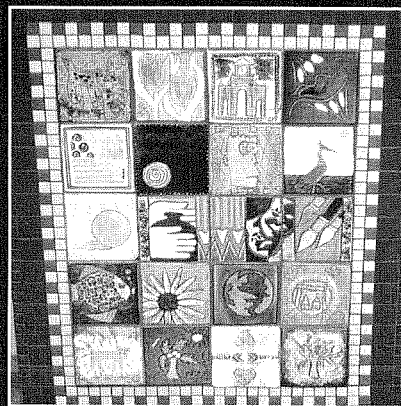
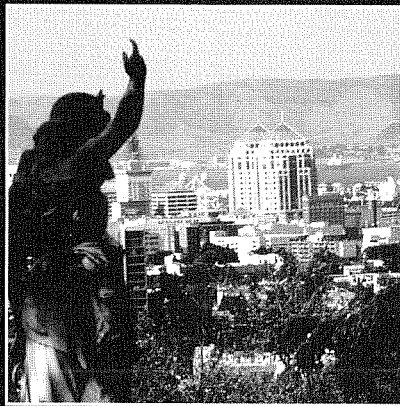
Thomas Jefferson's "academical village" at the University of Virginia, with lawn terminated by library and flanked by single-story dorms. Courtesy Catholic University of America, School of Architecture.

Background: L'Enfant's plan for Washington, D.C., turned the Baroque style to democratic ends. Courtesy Catholic University of America, School of Architecture.

We refer to those who led the American Revolution and helped establish our country as the Founding Fathers, individuals who hold a unique place in history because they articulated principles that, even today, are cited as the groundwork for our democracy and national character. Their legacy touches on our principles of government, economics and individual freedom. Less recognized is their commitment to design excellence, most notably in the development of key public buildings and spaces.

Sophisticated architecture, landscapes and household objects are often a sign of personal wealth, power, education and social status; they also comprise part of our cultural legacy. But when Thomas Jefferson wrote that "Design activity and political thought are indivisible,"¹ he seems to have been arguing that design could be a means of conveying the values and priorities of a democratic nation. Thus, Jefferson's architecture sought to put Americans in touch with the ideals of the Enlightenment. His state capitol in Richmond, Va., for example, borrowed from the elegant proportions and details of the Maison Carée, an ancient Roman temple he had seen in his travels through southern France.

Jefferson was equally aware that issues beyond style had to be addressed in the quest for democratic design. This is why his scheme for the University of Virginia is especially significant. A central library (whose profile was inspired by the Roman Pantheon) is surrounded on each side by a single story of colonnaded dorm rooms and five larger pavilions designated as classrooms and faculty housing. The buildings frame an open, tree-lined hillside that continues to be used as a magnificent outdoor room for strolling, recreation, study and contemplation. Jefferson's com-



(Top row) Oakland federal buildings (National Endowment for the Arts); Corpus Christi, TX, bus center, tiles made by local residents (© Project for Public Spaces); Vietnam Veterans Memorial (NEA).

(Second row) Perspective from City Beautiful-era plan for Chicago (Catholic University of America); Benjamin Franklin birthplace monument (NEA); Zurich, Switzerland, train station (Donlyn Lyndon).

(Third row) National Gallery East Wing (NEA); Metro Center Station, Metrorail, Washington, D.C. (Hanan A. Kivett), Statue of Liberty National Monument poster (NEA).

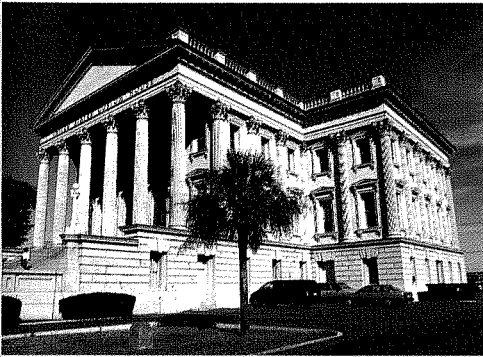
(Left) Hotakubo Housing, Kumamoto, Japan (Fumihiko Maki).

position, which he called an “academical village,” expressed a defiant confidence in the future of the fledgling country. It seems to have captured important aspects of the national character — a love for and desire to master open space, a scale that invites individual exploration, a sense that all are welcome. All this underscores the notion that in a democracy, quality design is a universal standard that could infuse even the tiniest hamlet with enduring beauty.

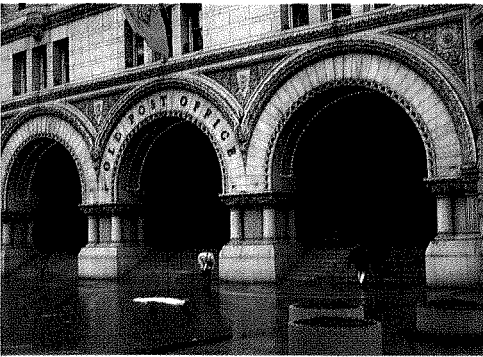
Jefferson’s architectural interventions established the fact that good government could and should be reflected in designs that incorporated pride and democratic values as well as cost and function as priorities. Styles might vary project to project and from era to era, but the principle that public servants should be stewards of architectural and landscape excellence for the benefit of all citizens was clear from the earliest moments in our history.

Sharing this conviction, George Washington commissioned a plan for the new capital city, Washington, D.C., in 1791. Pierre L’Enfant’s Baroque program cleverly transformed an order associated with royalty and centralized government power into a symbol of democracy. Broad, diagonal boulevards linked the prominent sites selected as the seats of the three branches of government; they also connected a generous number of circles and squares designated as public open space for District of Columbia citizens. Washington also endorsed open competitions as a method for soliciting designs for the White House and Capitol building.

During the nineteenth century, both the country and the federal government were growing. To facilitate the government’s expansion, the stewardship of design was transferred from the domain of presidential patrons to professionals in the Treasury Department’s Office of the Supervising Architect. New customhouses, post offices and courthouses became symbols of economic vitality and civic pride in communities, large and small, in every corner of the country. Often, these were the most prominent structures in a community and, especially in the west, were intended to reflect the inevitability of America’s manifest destiny.² These commissions received special attention from



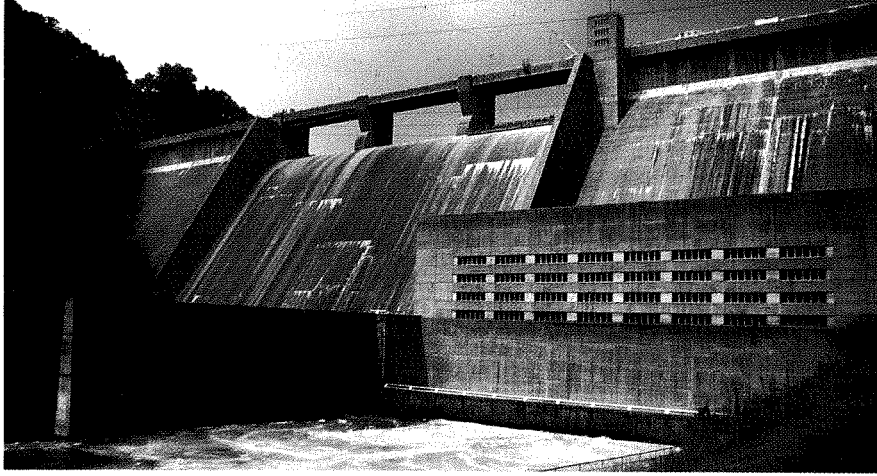
Charleston, S.C., customs house. Courtesy Catholic University of America, School of Architecture.



Romanesque main entrance of Washington D.C.’s Old Post Office. Courtesy Todd W. Bressi.



Main court, World’s Columbian Exhibition, Chicago, 1893. Courtesy Catholic University of America, School of Architecture.



Norris Dam, a project of the federally-chartered Tennessee Valley Authority.
Courtesy Todd W. Bressi.

both Congress and local citizens, politicians and the press; people might have disagreed on details of budget, style and design, but seldom on the need to develop a distinguished project. Comments by Acting Mayor John L. Sneed at the cornerstone ceremonies for the Frankfort, Ky., courthouse and post office in 1884 reflect this sentiment. He pointed out how the building would “prove a handsome ornament to the city,” and then noted warmly how the townspeople “fully appreciate and are duly grateful that this evidence of national prosperity has been placed within our limits.”³

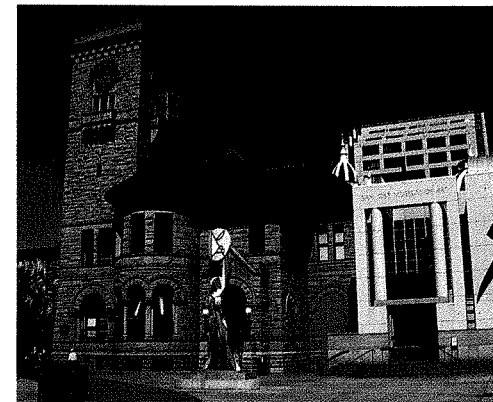
Back in Washington, D.C., the litany of nationally significant undertakings was highlighted by construction of the State, War and Navy Building, the Pension Building and the Library of Congress. A chaste Neoclassicism was initially the favored style but, as tastes changed and design matured from a gentlemanly endeavor into a distinct profession, each supervising architect attempted to provide his own definition of excellence. A more eclectic collection of profiles and facades, from Second Empire to Italianate to Romanesque Revival, came to be the norm.

State and local governments were also increasingly active in the arena of public design. Many impressive state capitols were built during this era, and the architecture of city halls (Philadelphia’s exuberant Second Empire edifice comes to mind) started to complement federal structures in terms of quality, grandeur and civic pride. Communities across the country, inspired by the vision and leadership of landscape architects like Frederick Law Olmsted, either improved or created parks whose pastoral designs reflected the long-simmering tensions between the nation’s agrarian and urban roots. Bridges, street lighting, paving projects and millions of dollars of other infrastructure investments helped reshape muddy towns into modern cities.

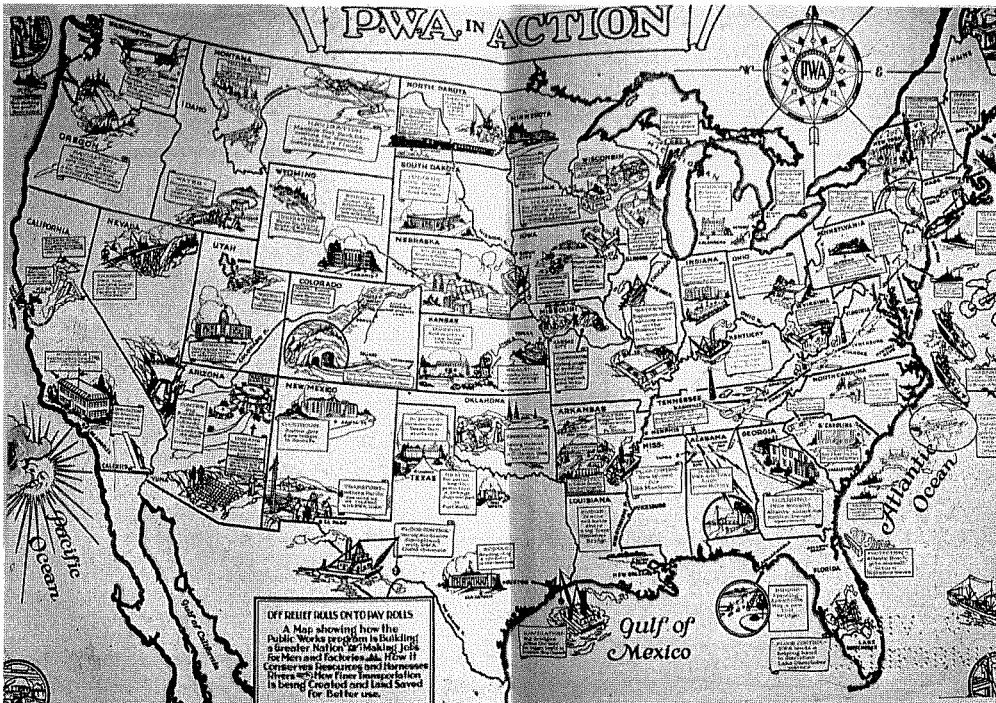
By the late 1800s, notions of public design had matured into an American Renaissance. The emphasis on single elements was replaced by a holistic view that combined architecture, landscape, ceremonial streets and neighborhood amenities — much of it a response to what many people perceived to be the ugly and chaotic results of laissez-faire urban and industrial growth. The inspiring World’s Columbian Exposition, a temporary yet startlingly elegant “white city” of Classical buildings, parks and promenades became the prototype for other fairs, civic centers and urban planning proposals developed in the early twentieth century. Elaborate urban designs for Chicago, Washington, D.C., Cleveland, San Francisco and even Manila (capital of the Philippines, a U.S. territory after the Spanish-American War) followed. And in 1901 Beaux Arts design was officially blessed by the supervising architect as a matter of policy:

*The Department, after mature consideration of the subject, finally decided to adopt the classic style of architecture for all buildings as far as it was practical to do so... The experience of centuries has demonstrated that no form of architecture is so pleasing to the great mass of mankind as the classic ... and it is hoped that the present policy may be followed in the future, in order that the public buildings of the United States may become distinctive in their character.*⁴

World War I, shifts in tastes, changing economic circumstances and a new sense of social purpose spelled the end of the American Renaissance. During the depression in



Former San Jose post office, now an art museum, with recent addition at right. Courtesy Todd W. Bressi.



Illustrative map of Public Works Administration projects.
 Courtesy Todd W. Bressi.

the 1930s, public stewardship of design excellence expanded into a host of new areas. With hope of reducing unemployment, improving the quality of life in communities and restoring pride in America, the federal government created an alphabet soup of innovative (and controversial) New Deal programs — the Public Works Administration, the Works Progress Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Federal Arts Project among them. These agencies launched countless projects, from airstrips, swimming pools and schools to slum clearance, housing, dams, interior design, graphics, painting and sculpture.



PWA-era courthouse in Boulder, CO.
 Courtesy Todd W. Bressi.

While this dramatic scope of work was subsidized with billions of federal dollars, most programming and design were turned over to local leadership. This shift encouraged stylistic diversity, including experiments with Modernism, and significantly reduced the supervising architect's influence. New Deal programs presented a unique opportunity for the federal government to enhance the quality of public design — from urban planning, architecture and landscape, to interior and graphic design — in ways that went well beyond the vision of any previous period in our nation's history.

Contemporary Challenges

Today, the federal government is the largest consumer of design services in the United States. But while the demand for public projects has grown, design priorities and criteria have shifted. Once public agencies sought a reasonable balance among pride, democratic values, aesthetics, function and cost; now they shortsightedly focus on function and cost. Even when public agencies contract with designers based on the quality of their portfolios, projects must be executed within tight, often unrealistic budgets and at the lowest possible price. Agency heads know what happens when they make exceptions to the minimum-cost rule and are scrutinized by the media and ultra-sensitive taxpayers.⁵

Regaining Confidence in Public Service Design

A conference about design as a public service carries with it an assumption that the public sector has value. It also assumes government has a responsibility for the welfare of its citizens and can improve their circumstances.

However, in a democratic society, government cannot function without general agreement about the legitimacy of its actions, especially if it is to act as a patron of design. In a society beset by increasing tribalization, such consensus is difficult to achieve. Rather than becoming a global village, we have become segregated into various cultural components, each of which seeks legitimization of its own point of view at the expense of all others. We are no longer required to interact with others simply because they are fellow citizens.

In Europe cities are taken seriously as an integral part of a nation's self image. In America, we can find no comparable optimism; the word "urban" has become code for social unrest and disorder. Similarly, "public" is a pejorative — public schools, public housing and public transportation are all regarded as inferior to those in private hands.

This is coupled with a recurring cynicism about government and its ability to solve problems and deliver services. The voting majority assumes projects sponsored by government are inherently wasteful and inferior to what can be accomplished by the private sector. Government is often perceived as a police force, not as an agent of change.

Added to this is the emphasis television places upon product, distorting the purpose of professional life. It is now assumed designers make products whose primary significance lies in their value as determined by the marketplace. Brand name recognition, a concept first applied to consumer products, is now sought by design professionals. Sir Richard Rogers spoke scathingly about the architecture of the market-

place, denouncing the mindset that regards a building solely as profit-making devices, conceived to last for 20 years and then be replaced. That mindset is completely inconsistent with the idea of *public* places: Government is badly represented by structures made by a disposable culture.

Against this complex and negative background, the conference considered an astonishing range of activities. Architecture, planning, art history, public art, advanced technology, transportation, environmental issues, graphic design, restoration and real estate development were all discussed. And in *all* of these presentations it was assumed that public meant good.

In fairness it should be noted that government in the U.S. can mean good. Distinguished restoration efforts remind us of the splendid buildings that have been built by our government in earlier times. Unfortunately, we get somewhat sentimental about how successful our restoration of these buildings has been, failing to note that if we took better care of our buildings, restoration wouldn't be necessary in many cases.

A positive recent development is the use of public-private partnerships to solve problems. By building consensus, creating new alliances among different groups and tapping different sources of funding, these partnerships have realized projects that the public and private sector have lacked the financial muscle or leadership to achieve by themselves. Such approaches can expedite results and achieve quality more surely than conventional systems of management.

Our society must identify a common purpose so that the patient, civilizing work of building confidence in the public realm can begin. While the grand dreams and visions of the fifties and sixties now seem sentimental and misguided, it is not sufficient to say a larger,

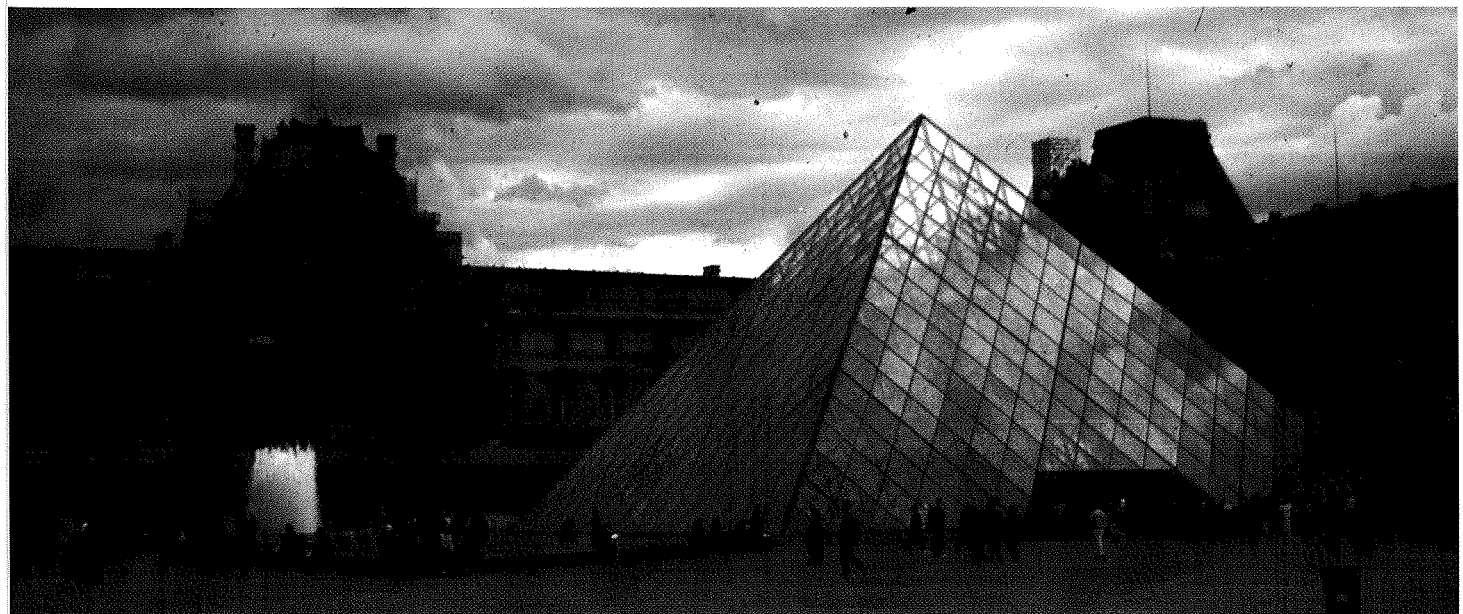
more generous idea of society is impossible for this generation.

Our great resources of wealth and talent *can* be used to construct a new definition of the public sector, one that enhances our common experience and provides the leadership now irrationally expected from democratic ideals. We must recognize that we have a common destiny, sharing interests the economic, cultural and social future of America. Nowhere is this more evident in the architecture of the public realm.

— Hugh Hardy



Atrium, Los Angeles Central Library renovation and expansion.
Courtesy Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer.



Pyramid atop underground addition to the Louvre, Paris. Courtesy Todd W. Bressi.

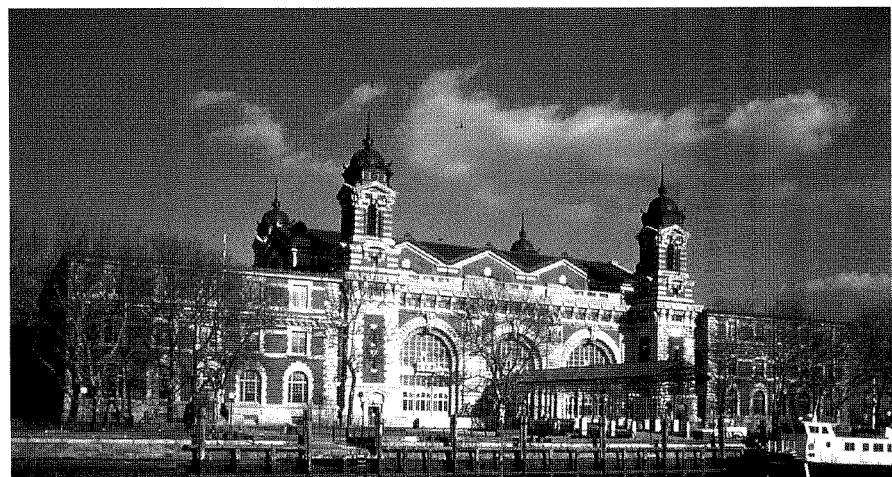
Design in the total context is one of the most strategic economic tools a country has. Those countries that have recognized this have done very well by it. Look at what the Japanese and Germans did in the automotive industry during the 1970s and 1980s. They captured large shares of markets worldwide. How? They did it by design, absolutely. We see European and now Japanese railroad companies today offering solutions to the U.S. by design. We see J.C. Decaux tackling an area of great concern, and again it's through design. If there's anything that designers in this country should be concerned about, it is why we haven't maximized our design potential in this country. We have excellent design capacities but have not fully utilized them.

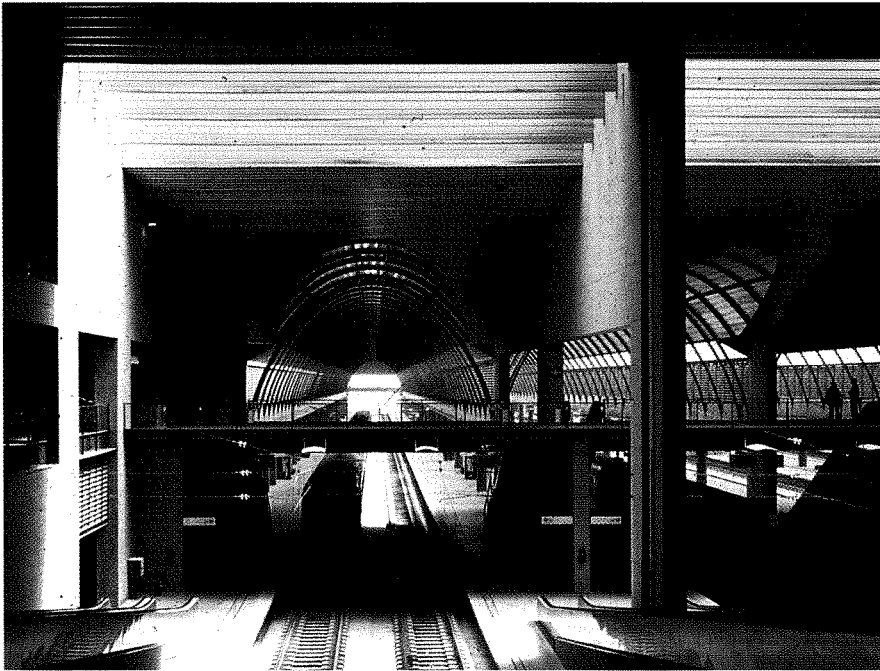
— Robert Blaich

Ellis Island Main Hall.
The entrance canopy
was added during the
restoration. Courtesy
National Endowment
for the Arts.

In truth, Americans have always been healthily skeptical about government power and spending. But today, we seem to have little understanding of the value and meaning of investing in the public realm. The importance that post-war development patterns, both suburban and urban, place on the private realm is the clearest evidence of our abandonment of public places. Increasingly, Americans are moving to places where the streets, infrastructure and open spaces that once bound us together are under private control — in some communities, even city hall is moving to the shopping mall. This has not only had profound consequences for our landscape but also weakened support for attentive, meaningful design in what remains of the public realm.

Not everybody has given up. In several European countries and Japan, quality design in the public realm appears to be the norm. Last December, to explore why this is the case, the National Endowment for the Arts convened a symposium, “Public Service Design Abroad.”⁶ U.S. public officials and designers listened to the experiences and saw the results affected by their international colleagues. The three days of presentations and discussion pointed towards several lessons for renewing the American commitment to public design excellence.





Seville's train terminal is a striking example of the use of light to express movement and space. Courtesy Ortiz and Ortiz Architects.

The U.S. General Services Administration has started staging competitions for the design of federal buildings.

Lesson One: Recognize that Quality Makes a Difference

The voices at the forum were quite diverse. Speakers came from France, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and other countries. They included business executives, government officials and designers. And they shared thoughts not only on architecture, planning and urban design but also on graphic and industrial design — reminding us of the wide range of disciplines that shape our public environment.

One maxim was repeated again and again: The quality of public design can make a tremendous difference. Good design can enhance the presence of the public realm and the value people place on it. It can encourage citizens to nurture their involvement in society — to become active not only in public places but also in art, culture and politics.

The speakers illuminated many cases in which design has been integral to the success of public places. Raymond Turner, the British Airport Authority's design director, described how London Transport's carefully planned and executed design program (which touched everything from stations to vehicles to uniforms to posters) sustained the transit system's identity, respect and popularity for much of the twentieth century. Josep Acebillo, planner and architect for Barcelona, emphasized that public investment in infrastructure like parks, plazas, highways and communication networks can be a catalyst for private investment and universal pride. Jacques Cabineau explained how the French policy of staging design competitions for public projects has resulted in better architecture because the program and goals for a building are more thoroughly researched before design begins and because a broader range of talent has access to commissions.

Clearly the public benefits when government — at the national, regional and local levels — explicitly promotes design excellence. In the U.S., government has a uniquely wide range of opportunities to do this — there are myriad agencies at the national, regional and local levels that either develop projects on their own or fund projects sponsored by others. The case studies from abroad indicate that it is still possible for government to exploit design as a way to instill pride, improve the level of public service and deepen the appreciation of the public environment.



General
Services
Administration

**Excellence in
Public Architecture**

COMPETITION

AFC service is still being solicited for a new federal complex to house the Internal Revenue Service and the U.S. Courts in Brooklyn, NY. The facility will contain approximately 15,000 gross square meters and associated parking. The selection of the AFC will focus on the key designer as the initial level of selection, and the use of a design competition and project team qualifications as the final level of selection.

**Stage I: Initial Selection
Submit Designer Portfolio**

Officers/Designers will be evaluated on their design results regardless of sector of contact that resulted in:

- Past Performance on Design
- Philosophy & Design Intent
- Key Designer Profile

Designer portfolio will be evaluated on the above criteria that depict responsive designs, clear understanding of design philosophy, and depth of effort and simple solutions to complex design problems.

**Stage II: Final Selection
Design Competition & Project Team**

A minimum of three designers will be selected to complete a project team and participate in an anonymous design competition. A stipend will be provided to these designers in compensation for the competition.

Qualifications

Details of this solicitation will be posted in the Commerce Business Daily (CBD) advertisement which will appear in mid-March. Designer portfolios are due to the CBD on or before April 29, 1994.

Letters of interest or inquiries can be directed to:
U.S. General Services Administration
Karasik Area Team Room: 621
The Wanamaker Building
100 Park Square East
Philadelphia, PA 19107-3300
Attn: Mr. Lloyd J. Jenkins (215) 656-6112

Limitations

Designer and entire project team must have their principal office within a 500 km (312 mile) radius of Brooklyn, NY.

What would happen if we had a day without design? How many of us think about design as an integral part of our life or as a convenient part of our life? If we could raise the public's consciousness about design, whether as professionals or as individuals, or whether government takes responsibility for conveying the message, that might help build a cohesive design culture.

— Alan Brangman

Public Design, Public Education

Q.: In the U.S. there are few places where the average person can get information regarding public projects. Can't we disseminate more information about specific buildings as they are going up and when they're completed?

Joan Goody: Using construction fencing as a series of changing exhibits would be an excellent, informative way to inform passersby about the history of a building and what was being done at the time. This could be written into the contract of every government project, that there will be money for some sort of elaboration presented on the construction fencing and some sort of exhibit when the project is over. Architects love to show off, and you can get them to do that pretty cheerfully.

Donlyn Lyndon: One point at which people do become interested in architecture is when a project is about to appear on their doorstep. If every project that the federal government sponsored could have within it a requirement that there be some piece of informational, educational prepared is placed on public display, that would reach a lot of people.

Beyond that, I think we tend to look at public reviews and workshops as troublesome processes that we have to get through. I would urge that we begin to look at those processes as opportunities to build a level of understanding about what's going to happen. Often when a group that is

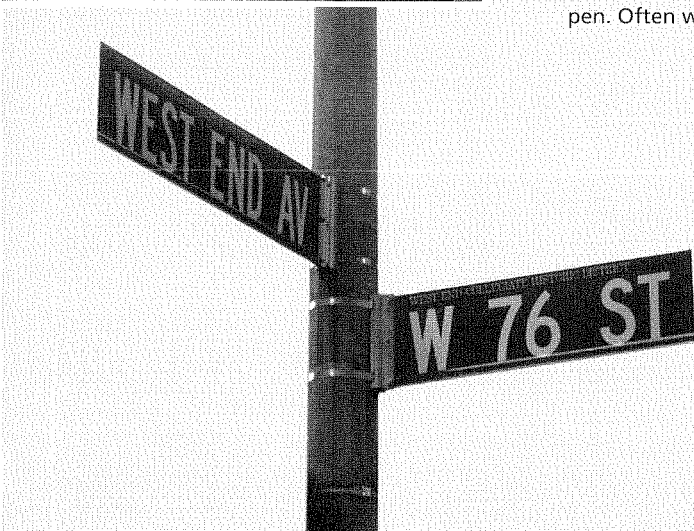
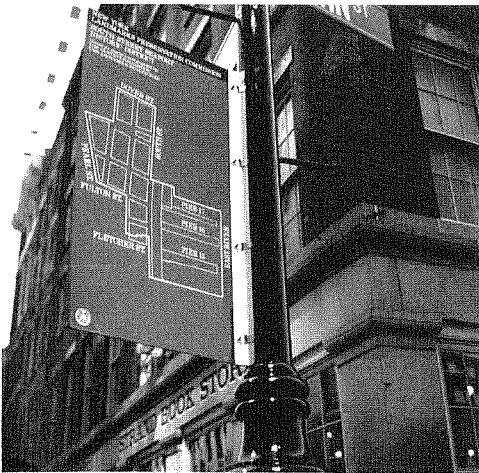
opposed to a proposal comes to a meeting, its members are not ready to listen to the other side. With patience, you'll find that a public body that is hearing arguments and can be changed in the way it thinks about a project. All of that public interaction, all of that discussion generated by freedom of speech, helps us learn more from each other.

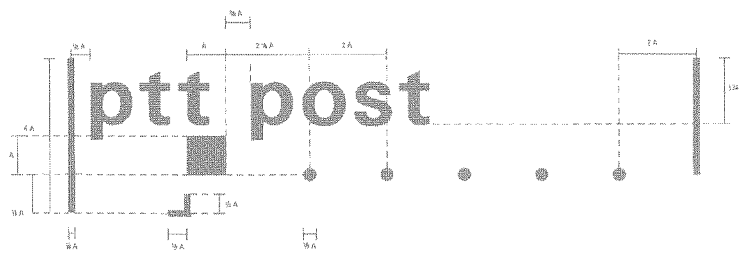
Roger K. Lewis: One practice that has been fairly successful in the suburbs and exurbs is the charrettes that Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk have led. They are architects, but they mainly plan towns and subdivisions. Their mode of operation is to organize multi-day workshops and, very intentionally, to invite the participation of anybody and everybody who might have an interest or concern with the fate of a particular piece of land. This not only produces a plan but also is a process of enlightenment and education. When the plan is put up on the wall everybody can look at it and feel a little bit of ownership.

Sir Richard Rogers: Government should set an example not only by commissioning public buildings but also by increasing an awareness of architectural culture among all age groups. All cities and regions should have a forum where members of the public can make their opinions clear to architects and to the government. This should be addressed in education and school curricula — not that there should be a subject called architecture, but curricula should be informed by interrelated subjects like geography, history, technology and art.

(Below) Street signs in New York City not only identify historic districts but also help build a constituency for historic preservation. Courtesy Todd W. Bressi.

(Right) The Environmental Simulation Center in New York City enables citizens and planners to explore alternate scenarios for architectural, planning and urban design proposals. Courtesy Regional Plan Association.





Lesson Two: Establish Leadership and Build a Design Constituency

Two complements to developing a rationale for design quality are establishing leadership and a building constituency for outstanding public design. This can involve not only government officials but also designers and individual citizens who have a variety of options for influencing design.

Innovative leadership can emerge from many quarters. Sometimes it clearly rests in the hands of an individual. The Kumamoto, Japan, “Art Polis” program, in which leading architects from around the world are being commissioned to design some 50 public facilities, was launched by the prefecture’s former governor, Morihiro Hosokawa. In The Netherlands, the design of many government projects is overseen by an appointed state architect; Barcelona’s remarkable transformation in the last decade was orchestrated by Acebillo and city architect Oriel Bohigas.

In Europe, government agencies and public service corporations often take the lead in sponsoring extraordinary design. The Dutch Postal, Telegraph and Telephone (PTT) system uses design to communicate its cutting edge position in the communications market. Its facilities are as inviting as they are efficient. Its presence in the community in the form of postboxes, public telephones and vehicles has been developed to improve the streetscape and reduce clutter. Its general commitment to quality in everything from forms to uniforms, from high-tech equipment to artwork, speaks about a successful, people-oriented, can-do attitude that helped PTT make the transition from a government agency to a profit-making private organization.

Even with aggressive leadership, quality public design flourishes best when there is a public that demands and appreciates it. The French competition system has stimulated a lively debate concerning public architecture. Moreover, it has become the norm to have cities and towns graced with the most innovative and extraordinary public structures. British architect Sir Richard Rogers, a designer of the Centre Georges Pompidou, commented that “culture is the fourth strongest vote getter in France, where design is simply part of the political discussion.”⁷ (One could imagine Rogers wished there was a similar kind of enthusiasm in England.)



In France, there really is a cultural vote. President François Mitterrand, in a private conversation, once said to me, “You have to remember, Mr. Rogers, that culture is the fourth biggest vote getter.” I’ve been trying to figure out what the other three are ever since! Until we make architecture a vote getter or a critical part of the political discussion, then it will be very difficult to put architecture where it should be. When I say architecture, I mean the built environment, but it can also be the green environment.

— Sir Richard Rogers

(Above) Logo for The Netherlands Postal and Telecommunications Services; PTT postbox.

(Left) Paris’ Pompidou Center was a presidentially-sponsored project whose design was chosen through a competition. Photo by Martin Charles, courtesy Richard Rogers Partnership.



The Keeper of the Street

Street furniture is now considered to enhance the streetscape, and advertising is no longer perceived as a visual pollution, but more as a factor that can enliven the streetscape. Our company's philosophy is based on two main elements. The first is to invest in good design by working with the top architects and designers in the world. The second is to invest in maintenance, which is the key element to the success of any street furniture program.

We hope San Francisco will be the first U.S. city to have our street furniture, including automatic public toilets that will be accessible to everyone, even those with disabilities. We would like to have newsstands and integrate in those public service kiosks some interactive video systems where people on the street will be able to make transactions,

such as buying tickets to see the Giants or paying parking fines.

One of our major goals is to help reduce street clutter — for example, news racks, those little boxes that are placed at intersections. In San Francisco I counted 23 boxes lined up at one intersection. The First Amendment is a good one, but it makes it impossible for cities to get rid of these boxes. The solution is to have them integrated in the vertical kiosk like a soda vending machine.

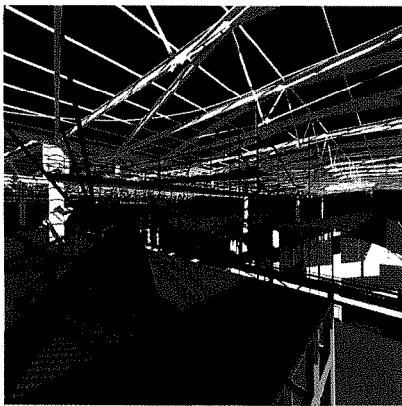
Most people in the cities where we work today have the impression that there is no vandalism because they never see a bus shelter or kiosk that is broken. There is a lot of vandalism, but we repair it so often that people don't notice. Our experience is that when you clean the equipment often, and don't let the glass panels remain broken for

more than 24 hours, the rate of vandalism goes down.

Every piece of street furniture is checked every day, and we clean each piece at least once a week. In Amsterdam, we have graffiti busters, people on motorbikes who can remove graffiti more or less immediately. We also developed a "pooper scooter," which can collect dog pollution on any sidewalk, grass, in public parks. In Paris we collect 3.5 tons of dog pollution every day with 120 bikes.

Street furniture wouldn't work if there weren't a maintenance service to take care of it. If a nice piece of design is being vandalized, then it's even worse than having bad design.

— *Jean-François Decaux*



Le Fresnoy media school, Tourcoing, France. Attic space used for workshops and informal screenings and presentations. Courtesy Bernard Tschumi Associates.

Parc de la Villette's design involves systems of movements and activity nodes that interact on several scales. Courtesy Todd W. Bressi.



Can this type of leadership emerge in the U.S. government? In small ways it is beginning to appear. The architecture division of the federal government's General Services Administration, for instance, has devised a new process for selecting professionals that rewards design ability rather than technical criteria, and other agencies are using charrettes and competitions to search for the best possible design ideas. The National Park Service has been noted not only for its architectural and landscape design but also for engineering and graphic design. And Amtrak (a government-sponsored corporation) is completing a sensitive restoration of historic train stations on its Northeast Corridor line.



At a grassroots level, countless groups across the country are espousing the virtues of historic preservation, river and creek restoration, neighborhood improvement, park development and other causes that highlight the importance of design. Such efforts have helped assure the passage of legislation and programs concerning environmental protection, historic preservation and community revitalization — and in turn these efforts have been boosted by federal support.

Perhaps these separate enterprises can be woven into a broader constituency, a crescendo of voices that includes community leaders, consumers, business executives, builders, manufacturers, bureaucrats and design professionals. Together, these groups can insist on an agenda addressing design excellence that spans large-scale federal initiatives to the tiniest neighborhood pocket park.

Lesson Three: Initiate Activity at Many Scales

What is remarkable about public service design is the wide range of scales at which it can occur: national monuments, city landmarks, neighborhood improvements, infrastructure networks and more. Each establishes a public presence in its own way, and each poses its own challenge for design creativity. Public agencies should be aware of and attentive to this full range of opportunities and responsibilities.

There is certainly a place for what the French call *grands projets* — the Louvre addition and other endeavors that gain international attention. They can transform the dynamics of a city, as Bernard Tschumi's Parc de la Villette has in a formerly industrial section of Paris. And they can provide a sense of pride and identity, as did Kumamoto's Art Polis project and the improvements made for the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona.

On the other hand, giving equal attention to less glamorous things — local museums and exhibits, neighborhood schools, bus stations, the graphic identity of a small town, pocket parks, street furniture — is equally important. Barcelona spent the decade before the Olympics reinforcing its historic fabric by creating scores of catalytic public spaces. In Paris, competitions are staged for housing projects and innovative “industrial hotels” on infill sites. Santiago Calatrava, famous for the way he melds architecture, art and engineering in bridge design, has lavished his talent on bus shelters, canopies, warehouses, balconies and other small-scale projects.

At a grander scale, public design can create a cohesive image across the diverse regions of a country. During the nineteenth century, courthouses and customhouses



Every project that government at any level undertakes should see itself as linking to a larger pattern, improving that pattern and helping inject life into it. This strategy can be embedded in projects of the smallest scale and still have consequence. We see this obviously in the Barcelona examples; it also seems to be true of Parc de la Villette, where small actions configured within a larger picture inject energy into that place.

— Donlyn Lyndon



(Above left) Standard transportation symbols developed by the U.S. Department of Transportation and the American Institute of Graphic Arts in the 1970s.

(Above) Restoration of historic streetlight near Gaudi's Cathedral Sagrada Familia, Barcelona. Courtesy the city of Barcelona.

(Left) Santiago Calatrava's communications tower for the 1992 Olympics, Barcelona. Courtesy the city of Barcelona.

Putting Preservation in Perspective

Q.: What strikes me is the way European architects relate to their historic architecture. It seems they see architecture as an evolving process, part of life beginning in the past and continuing today. Therefore, they use old buildings as a foundation upon which to build something new, rather than something to protect to the point where any and all retrofitting is discouraged.

Washington D.C. is a good example of the latter situation — if we're going to move ahead in doing excellent design work here, we need to look at the extent to which we are hampered by a paradigm of historic preservation, which does not allow progression.

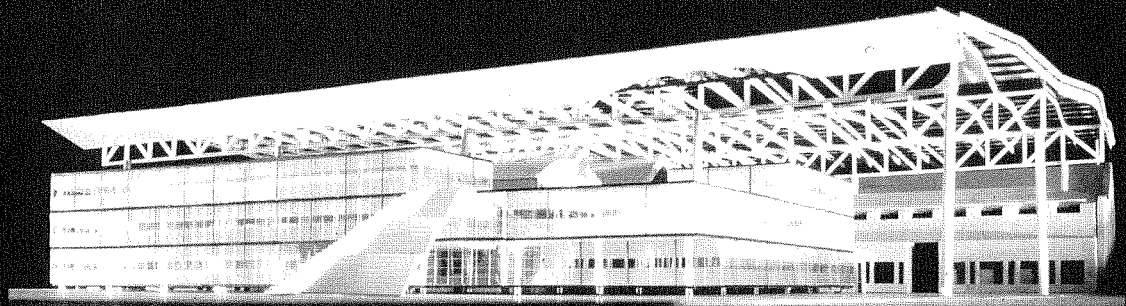
Roger K. Lewis: I've concluded that here in Washington, at least, we're in a period during which people are very concerned about our architectural legacy, young though it is. They are con-

cerned not only because that legacy might be threatened today or next week, but also because of what might happen fifty or a hundred years from now. I think the preservation movement has its zealots, who are not always confronted. But at the same time there have been extraordinary abuses, and certainly in this city there were egregious abuses. There was a period when people were seriously talking about taking down the old Executive Office Building and getting rid of the Old Post Office.

Joan Goody: Do you think some of the preservation movement is a sign of a disappointment in the contemporary architecture that we produced in the 1950s and 1960s? It's interesting that France produced as much terrible architecture as we did in that period, by some admission it is even worse. While

we retreated, their solution was to turn to competitions to try to get better contemporary designs. Certainly what we saw is far more daring than most of our public or private sector design.

Steven M. Davis: The reaction has been like a pendulum that has over-swung. We don't have the legacy that Europe has; we don't have a thousand years of fabulous building and construction tradition to build on. More and more projects are going to position restoration in a more balanced perspective, having to do with the need to renovate those 1950s and 1960s buildings that are no longer doing their job. I spend most of my life right now trying to figure out what to do with the World Trade Center and its plaza, which are only 23 years old.



Le Fresnoy, an art and media school in Tourcoing, France, designed by Bernard Tschumi. Structurally weak historic warehouses are supported from the canopy above, and the space between the canopy and the original rooves is used for workplaces and informal screening areas. A computer rendering of that space can be seen on page 14.

Courtesy Bernard Tschumi Associates.

established a federal presence throughout the United States. Today, transportation projects can accomplish this. The Swiss, for instance, devote a great deal of energy to road and signage design, studying problems from aesthetic, safety and environmental perspectives as they strive to create approaches that are locally sensitive while maintaining a national image of impeccable engineering. Postal agencies, the most ubiquitous public service, can pull the country together through the design of graphics, customer service and processing facilities, vehicles and, of course, mailboxes and stamps.

Lesson Four: Today's Challenges are Similar to and Different from Yesterday's

A theme that helped unify the symposium presentations was tradition. Some speakers noted that their countries' current commitment to quality design grows out of a deep cultural tradition. Kees Rijnboutt, The Netherlands' chief architect, and R. D. E. Oxenaar, his colleague from the Postal, Telegraph and Telephone system, tied recent developments in Dutch design to the Renaissance and the early twentieth century de Stijl movement. In France, the similarity between the *grands projets* and the pride that built the chateaux is evident. Barcelona's urban awakening and its celebration of the 1992 Olympic games is the latest release of generations of Catalan creativity and energy.

But if looking to the past provides useful precedents and a foundation for future work, another message was that tradition should also provide the confidence to explore new directions. The success of projects like the dramatic bridges and kinetic buildings by Santiago Calatrava and the visionary Parc de la Villette validate the importance of taking risks and encouraging innovation in the realm of public design.

It will be important to mesh future design directions with the new challenges public projects face. We now demand much greater sensitivity to environmental and historic resources; should we also seek design that is reflective of (or created by) a wider segment of our diverse population? We are concerned about using design to advance improvements in economic and social conditions; how can this be meshed with aesthetic considerations? We also require much more citizen involvement in reviewing designs (a factor that figured in the abandonment of Tschumi's la Villette-like plans for a park in Queens, New York); to what extent should public service design also involve public education about design and about the broader physical environment?

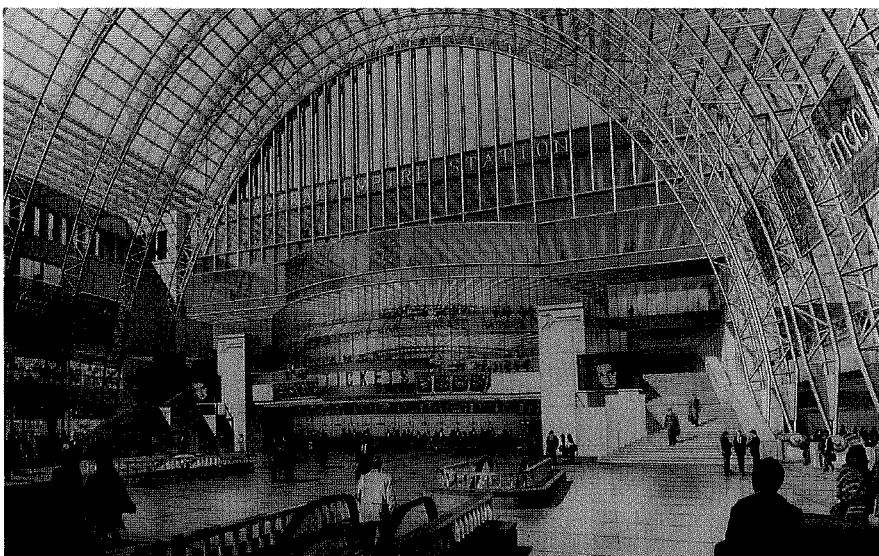


Proposal for rebuilding Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, commissioned by New York City's parks department, was subject to exhaustive public review and ultimately did not win political support. Courtesy Bernard Tschumi Associates.

Parc de la Villette is 125 acres and cost nearly \$200 million. To hold together this energy, there must be somebody — a civil servant, politician or bureaucrat — with the authority to carry such a project to the end. In France, such people have the authority to determine a course of action without necessarily having to ask the opinion of 25 committees and local resident groups. This is a very tricky balance between democracy and authority; in America it would often be considered authoritarian.

I was involved with a large park in New York City, Flushing Meadows Corona Park. By the time we had developed a proposal, we had to appear in front of more than twenty committees. Each was not coordinated with the others, none had any political force or mandate to try to bring these groups together. It is, of course, very difficult to arrive at good design with this lack of focus.

— Bernard Tschumi



Proposal to convert Manhattan's former General Post Office into a new Amtrak terminal has interested people who still recall the grandeur of McKim, Mead and White's Pennsylvania Station, demolished in the '60s. Courtesy Hellmuth, Obata, Kassabaum.

Each year I teach an architecture studio that is made up of some of the most talented young people from around the world. Many of the foreign students, who are the top of their respective classes from wherever they might have come, plan to go back and work in government offices — for the city, the transit department, the PTT, or some other agency. They see excitement, innovation and possibility in the public sector there. Unfortunately, not many American students come to Harvard with the idea that when they graduate they are going to go get a job at their local redevelopment authority.

— David Lee

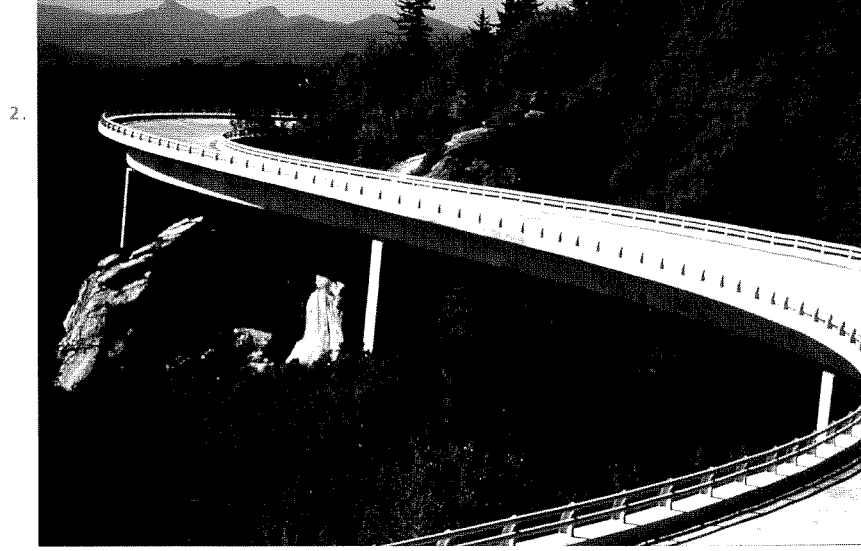
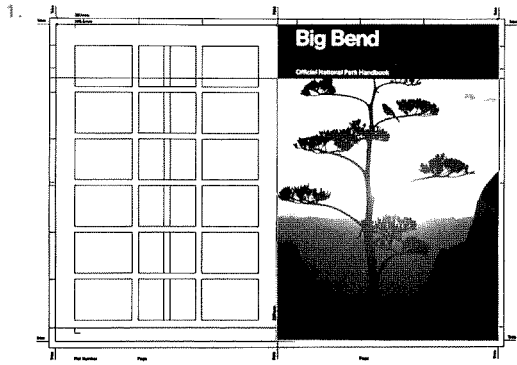
Similarly, there are new actors in design. One of the most promising directions is the creation of public-private partnerships, which have operated on many scales. They offer the promise of working more flexibly than traditional government agencies; in their financing and decision-making they often can take greater risks. But they also can blur the line between public and private, confusing citizens about their stake in the public realm. Privatization of government building construction or of the maintenance of our streets might produce effective, assured results, but it risks further undermining our confidence in the capacity of the public sector.

America's challenge is restoring its healthy skepticism of government while shedding its cynicism about the public realm. We must recall our government's past support of excellence in design, build a constituency for continuing this legacy and seek out leaders that support it. As this framework develops, we will be able to inaugurate a diversity of initiatives confronting the challenges of our cities and our suburbs, of new information and communications technologies, and of complex environmental problems. Some of these efforts will be funded and developed at the federal level. Others will receive federal support but be worked out under regional and local jurisdictions. Still others will emerge entirely from local mandates for excellence.

These contributions may be different from those promoted by the Founding Fathers, the Office of the Supervising Architect, the talents that emerged during the Beaux Arts Renaissance and the depression-era federal efforts involved with design. Nevertheless, they can suggest the pluralism of American democracy, foster a sense of pride and stewardship in the public realm and in public service, encourage human interaction, and reflect a balance aesthetically between tradition and innovation. If we look carefully enough, they will offer us the first glimpse of a new design tradition.

Notes

1. Thomas Jefferson, as quoted in Benjamin Forgey, "The Jeffersonian Approach," *The Washington Post*, 19 December 1993, p. G2.
2. It is telling, for instance, that the customhouse and post office in Portland, Oregon, was begun in 1869 before that city of 9,000 people even had a railroad or paved streets. See Lois Craig, et al., *The Federal Presence: Architecture, Politics and Symbols in United States Government Building* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978), 122.
3. John L. Sneed, *Kentucky Yeoman*, 5 February 1884, as quoted in Craig, 167.
4. Report of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury, 1901, as quoted in Craig, 236.
5. For example, the Federal Triangle project (previously known as the International Cultural and Trade Center) in Washington, D.C., has been roundly criticized as the costs have almost doubled from \$362 million to \$656 million. See Kirstin Downey Grimsley, "Federal Triangle's Points of Contention; Delays, Rising Costs, Changing Concepts Beset Project," *The Washington Post* (5 December 1993), p. A1.
6. "Public Service Design Abroad" ran from 8-10 December 1993 in Washington, D.C. It was sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts, Design Program, with support from the General Services Administration, Public Buildings Service, the Department of the Interior, National Park Service, and the Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration.
7. Sir Richard Rogers, remarks at the Public Service Design Abroad conference, 10 December 1993.



1. "Unigrd" used for National Park Service graphics and publications.

2. Linn Cove Viaduct, Blue Ridge Parkway.

3. Day care center in Social Security Administration building, Baltimore.

4, 5. Proposed Southpoint Pavilion, Roosevelt Island, New York City. Design by Santiago Calatrava Valls • Mitchell\Giurgola. (Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation)

6. Stone griffin sculpture, part of a seven-mile project along I-476 in Radnor, PA. Photo by William Reimann. (Townscape Institute)

7. Pershing Park, Washington, D.C. Photo by Carol M. Highsmith. (Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation)



Photos courtesy National Endowment for the Arts unless indicated otherwise.

