1964 ROME PRIZE · MAN'S QUEST FOR IMAGERY IN THE CITY · DESIGN OF FINE WOODWORK

JANUARY 1965

Cover: Study perspective for bronze sculpture, seven feet in diameter, for the plaza of the Alcoa Building in San Francisco, executed by Charles Perry (see 1964 Rome Prize, p 32)

To Sell Our Product

WHEN members speak about what the Institute should hit harder, the subject mentioned oftenest is "public relations." This catchall phrase can mean anything up to a multi-million dollar advertising and TV program. Since we don't have a million bucks to spend on this commercial route to public relations, we must find methods within our means more suitable for a profession. Recent thinking on this subject evolved the phrase "public demand" as the label for one of our constant goals. The other is "better architecture."

Public demand for what? For architects? No, public demand for the *products* of architects—fine buildings and beautiful communities! When we study the advertising of a successful American company, we see that it first creates public demand for a product, then puts across the message that the public must depend upon that company for the best product of its kind. This concept guides our public relations planning. The Institute is the "company." Its architect members supply society with the product of architecture. The selling job is the AIA's concern.

The total target for our selling efforts is divided into these segments:

1) *The press* and other communications media, to be educated to give more space and better treatment to architectural news at national and local levels. The 1962 Columbia newspaper conference and subsequent regional seminars are a highly successful application of this principle. The final follow-through must be by the AIA member to his own newspaper.

2) *Potential clients,* to be reached directly with professional material demonstrating good buildings as the superior product of architects' services. These clients may be categorized into various groups of decision-makers who act upon the acquisition of buildings for private or public purposes. Last year 20,000 industrialists received a special article on industrial architecture and reprints of the AIA Honor Awards. The national Committee on School and College Architecture does a good job with groups representative of school clients.

3) *The general public,* divided into this generation (adults) and the next (students in school). This mass audience must be reached with movies, film strips, teaching tools and every device for favorable publicity. Results achieved through 1) and 2) are a part of this approach. The ultimate effectiveness of this campaign depends upon chapter efforts, using the tools developed by national programs.

The 1965 public demand program is planned for significant improvement in the tools and procedures for public relations work. Its salient features include:

Supplemental dues projects totaling $50,000:

Press—More regional seminars for newspapermen. A new Columbia conference for TV, radio and consumer magazines.

Clients—Another article on industrial architecture to 20,000 business leaders.

Public—Issuance of the new movie on cities and architecture. A companion architectural exhibit and kits for community action. New teaching tools for giving elementary school pupils an introduction to the interesting "world of architecture."

Our public relations staff is now strengthened by the addition of a journalist. PR Counsel and staff are directed to achieve a big increase in publicity output, public relations tools for chapters and regional PR seminars.

The Institute's national committees are to be strongly oriented to public demand. Some of our committees do not realize the public relations value of what they do, but they can be shown. The building type committees especially have a great potential (in addition to their technical programs) for developing PR material for their respective categories of clients.

The War on Community Ugliness is planned as a grass-roots application of public demand work, employing the movie and other tools to strike home with the story of architecture to local civic organizations of laymen.

There is only one way to get maximum return on every dues dollar spent on public demand. This is through the multiplying factor of use made of public relations tools by the chapters and individual members. Architects are scarcely noted for inherent public relations talent. We are even inclined to look down our noses at our best natural salesmen as "promoters." If only we had 16,000 promoters!

A practical test of our national and local effectiveness is in the making for 1965. We will have the tools for the chapters to launch the War on Community Ugliness, which is literally a nationwide campaign to create public demand for better planning and design. There couldn't be a better time for it. We are aware of the public awakening to the challenges of many such statements as "God's Own Junkyard" and the "Great Society." A mighty ocean swell of sentiment for better architecture is in the making. Like the surfboard rider, we must catch the moment to ride the crest.

WILLIAM H. SCHEICK AIA
Executive Director
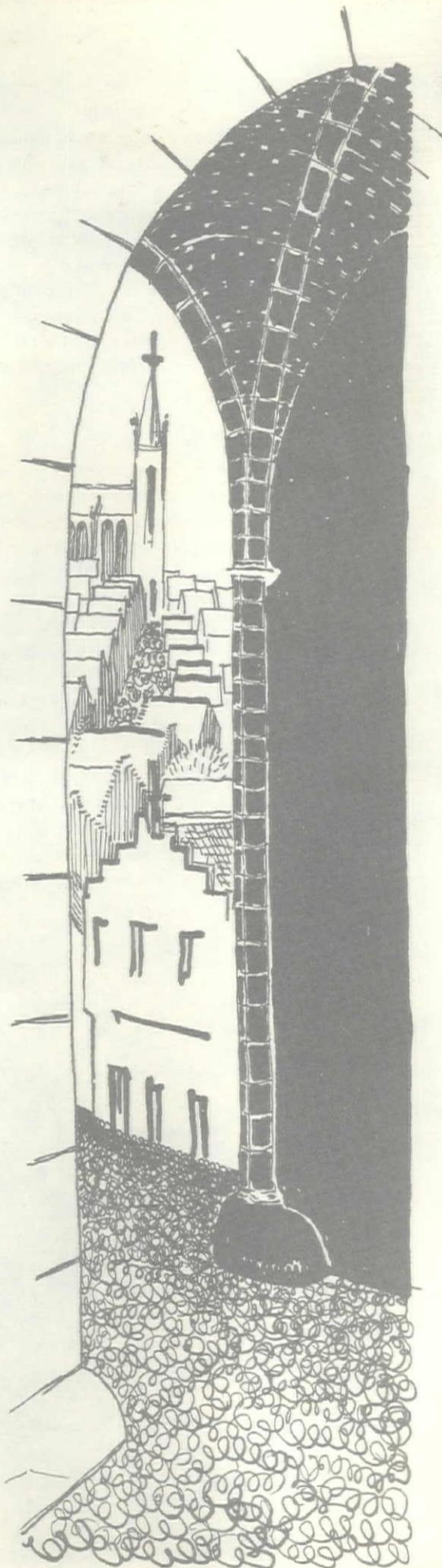
The Meaningful City

BY DENISE SCOTT BROWN

An assistant professor of city planning at the University of Pennsylvania, Mrs Brown explores modern man's search for personal symbolism. Her exposition is an abridged version of a chapter from "Design and the Landscape," a book now in preparation, edited by John B. Frazier

IMAGINE yourself at the gateway to a northern European medieval town. Entering on foot, you leave sun and green for the deep shadow and restriction of the stone archway and emerge on the other side with a feeling of having truly arrived. From here a road rises and gently curves; lines of gables appear above the blocked ground view, leading the eye upward toward the church steeple. Along it houses crowd for space, walling the line of movement. Their hanging upper stories further restrict the street, so that along its length there is no great variety or contrast of space but rather

Sketches by the author
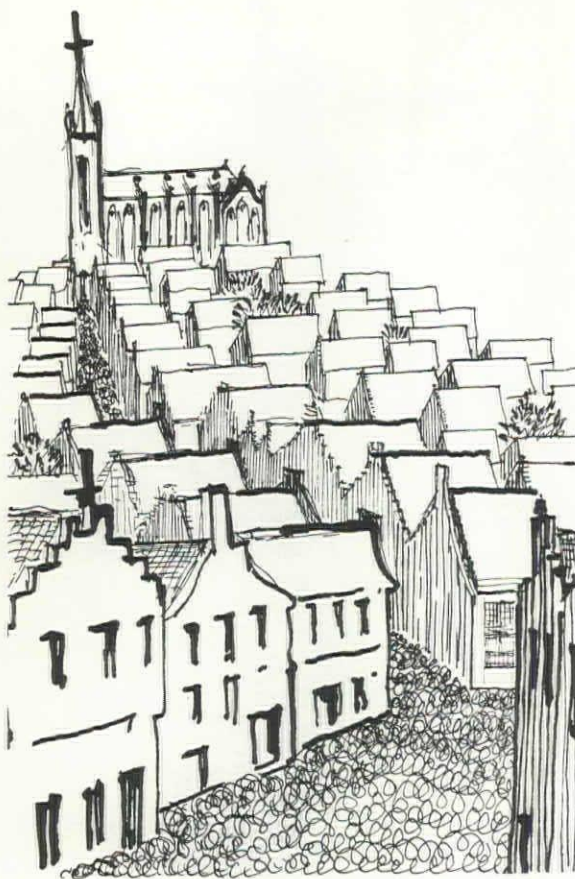
a gentle modulation of one shape into another. The scale is even and human. There are no marked differences between buildings; the burgher's house, warehouse, hospital and old people's home look much alike.

At the market square, where the main routes converge, are found the large, corporate buildings —guild halls, a market hall, a few inns. And beyond, but glimpsed through the arcades of this square, sits the great Gothic church, its stature accentuated by the narrowness of the space around it, like an eagle in a canary's cage.

From the church steeple you can see the whole town. Below lie the cloister and the market square, the ornate roofs of the larger buildings and, beyond them, the pitched roofs of the town houses. All roofs have the same pitch, all are covered with the same tile. Pause, and ponder upon the beauty of "order with variety," and then upon the clarity of the town; note its distinction from the surrounding country; its walls and gateways which say "you have arrived"; the visible differences between main and secondary streets; the immediacy of the relationship between houses and streets.

Imagine, in the same spirit, visiting an American city. This time you will need an automobile for there is no coming to terms with the architecture of expressway and overpass without it. Towers and cranes flash by, bridges and ramps, slag heaps and junkyards; rail tracks, lines of lights, water tanks; old factories, marshalling yards, warehouses; a bridge; a long, quiet pause over the river;

reflections in the water and a view of the city; a thousand crystals and a million lights.

Descend into it; through fringe areas, immigrant areas, slum areas; grid streets, old buildings, fire escapes; store fronts, slums, squalor; then taller blocks, skyscrapers, canyon streets; gray walls, windows, sign posts; red lights, traffic congestion, *slow down—where do we go from here?*

What is significant in our experience in these two cities? What do they have in common and what makes each an expression of itself? What *meaning* or message is each trying to give us as we pass through it?

Perception and Meaning

Although there has been, in recent years, much study and discussion of perception in cities, of the "image of the city" and of what makes city form "imageable" to citizens and why,[1] relatively little attention has been paid to the problem of understanding the meaning which is given by the perceiver to the object perceived. This building with a high, pitched roof and steeple is a church, but these pitched-roof buildings set in open grounds away from the heart of the city are suburban houses. These closely spaced row houses must be near an area of high demand. I understand from the increase in the density of buildings which I pass as I travel this road that I am headed toward the city, not away from it.

Our interest lies in what we *understand* from what we perceive: how the "messages" given us
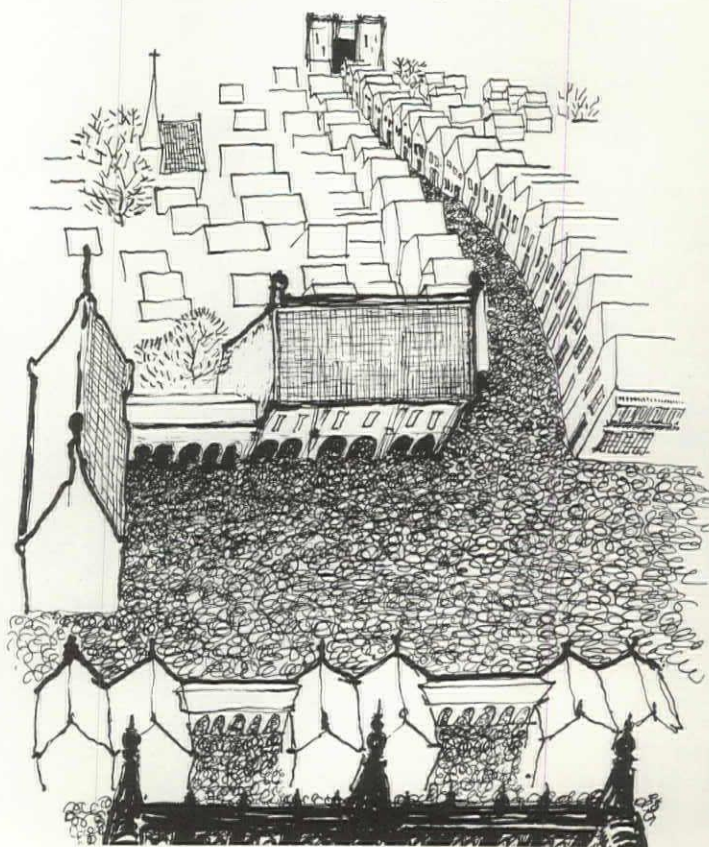
by streets and buildings as we move through the city tell us about the city; help us to know and use it, and understand its *meaningful order*.

We sensed this meaningful order in the medieval city, but did it exist in the American example? There is a condition called *agnosia,* in which the individual perceives with his senses but cannot give meaning to what he perceives. Approaching the city, he sees a fork ahead but cannot discern which is the bypass and which the main road to town. He sees a large, ornate building which could be a bank, a beer hall or a parking garage. To turn left off an expressway he must first turn right. In short: Are the messages given by the American city (and we have tried to point out that they do exist) so disordered and chaotic that city dwellers, to all intents and purposes, become sufferers from urban agnosia? Even if, through our increased knowledge of perception, we understand what makes for "imageability" in the city, is there any value to imageability without "meaning"? [2] How can meaning be conveyed by a city?
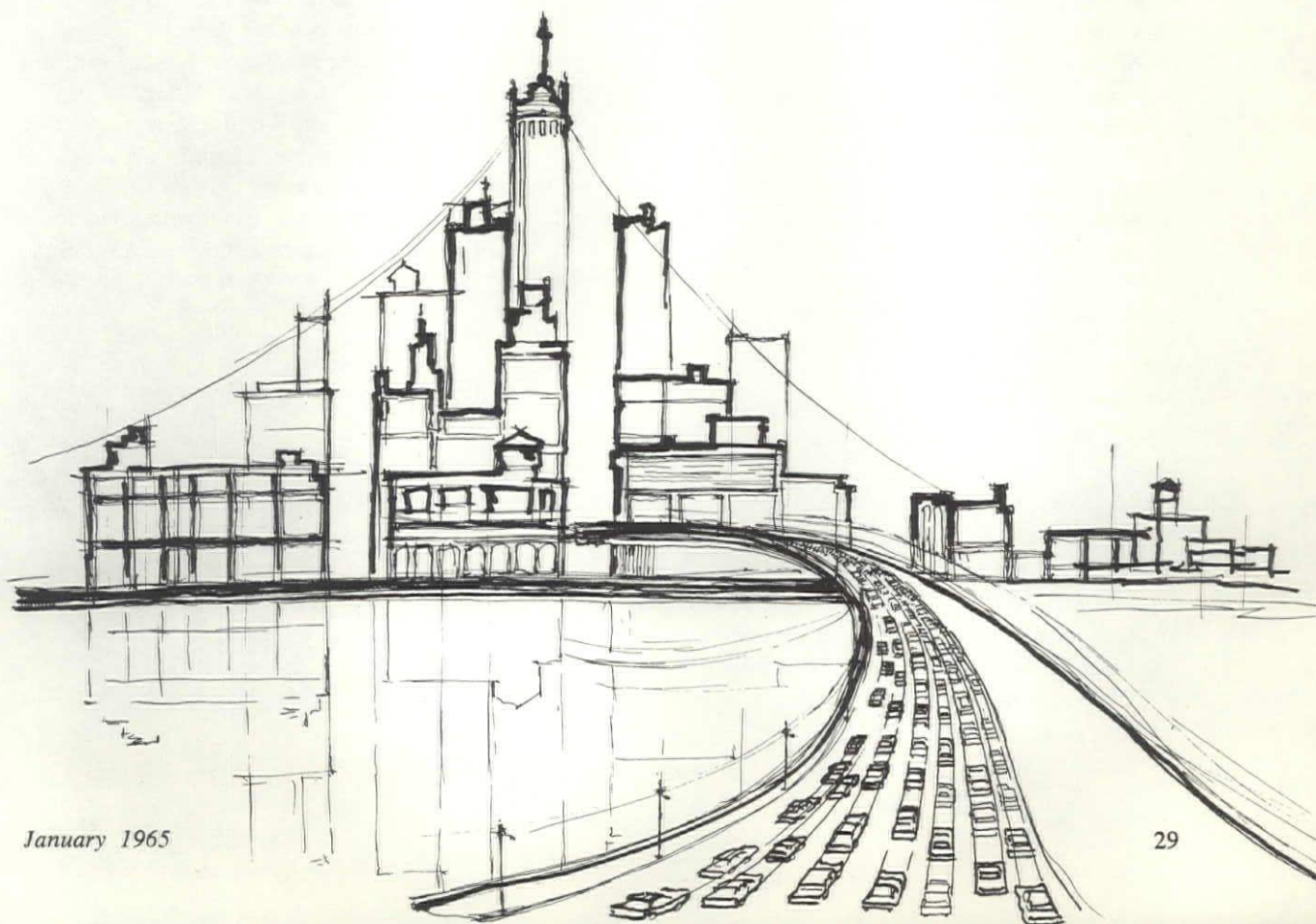
Messages

Let us examine the city as a "message system" to discover the nature of the messages it can give. These messages may exist on many levels. They may be *functional,* helping citizens to find their way and in general to go about their daily business; or they may be expressions and *symbols* for the citizen and for others, of aspects of his civilization—its cultural values and aspirations, its mysticism and philosophy, its institutions, its technology. The messages may be *general* ones, meaningful to all citizens, or *specific* to some groups, or *personal* and individual. But usually these levels are all interwoven.

Thus the walls round the medieval city defended its citizens from enemies, but they show us today the importance of defense in medieval life; for they are so big that they dictate the over-all form of the city. In addition, they strongly set the city apart from the country. Entering the gateway you know life within and without the walls was completely different—and understand thereby something of what escape to the city meant in a feudal society. Compare this with the automobile approach to the modern city, where city boundaries are not visible and one becomes aware only gradually that one is approaching a city, through the build-up of density along one's path. Again, the cathedral at the center of the medieval city with its high steeple and great size relative to the structures around it, clearly shows the prominence and power of religion in medieval life. The skyscrapers at the centers of our cities express the workings of the nineteenth century transport-technology (the railroad having disgorged its thousands of commuters at one point, the city had then to accommodate them at walking distance from that point) and yet

[1] S. E. Rasmussen, "Towns and Buildings," University of Liverpool Press, 1951; K. Lynch, "The Form of Cities," *Scientific American*, April 1954; K. Lynch, "The Image of the City," Technology Press and Harvard University Press, 1960
[2] D. A. Crane, review of "Image of the City," *AIP Journal*, May 1961

they express also certain laws of economics within our society, for city skylines seem almost to trace the curves of the graphs of intensity of demand for space around central points.

The Message-Giving System

What aspects of the city give messages, and by what means?

The first and most obvious is the city's system of *heraldry*—its written and graphic signs. In the medieval towns where few people could read, much use was made of visual symbolism for city signs. Today, although modern traffic signals use this method extensively, and barbers still have striped poles, and although our society has no dearth of visual symbols nor lack of ability to respond to them—as a flourishing profession on Madison Avenue has shown—we have tended to neglect picture imagery for written signs. In general it may be said that positive use is not made of visual symbols, and that the systems of signs and signals in American cities come close to anarchy.

However, the city has other ways of helping us to understand it—ways which are more integral and pervading than heraldry and more rightful to the planner's moulding.

We can tell a great deal from its *physiognomy:* that is, the sizes and shapes of buildings and the spaces around them; their architecture; the textures and patterns of their surfaces, indoors or outdoors. Thus we noted strong physiognomic differences between the main and secondary streets in the medieval town; and in our own gridiron cities differences between streets can be sensed, if not through differences in width and alignment, then through the nature of the buildings along them and, particularly, of the movement upon them. Our society has liked to site an important building alone with a large space to set it off. The hovels huddle right up to the walls of the European cathedral, but the American state house or art gallery stands alone, closing the vista of avenue or parkway; and, with its Greek portico or golden dome, is distinctly recognizable as a building of civic importance.

Architectural elements and architectural styles may in themselves have symbolic meaning. Until recently, banks and insurance companies built heavy Greek or Roman buildings to show your money was safe. Now that modern architecture is respectable, they are as likely to build glass and steel boxes—taking care nevertheless that the great concrete safe holding your money will be reassuringly visible. And, from the sublime to the ridiculous, a "diner" must look like a train; give it Greek columns, and we shall be lost.

There is one other way in which the city gives

messages, and that is by the *location patterns* of its buildings and spaces. The important civic building is placed at the end of the axis or on an eminence; the market square and cathedral on the main crossing at the center of town. Often, the location message depends on a known relationship between a street intersection and a type of building. Even in a strange city you know where to find the "corner store," and, more recently, we have become accustomed to finding shopping centers at major highway interchange points.
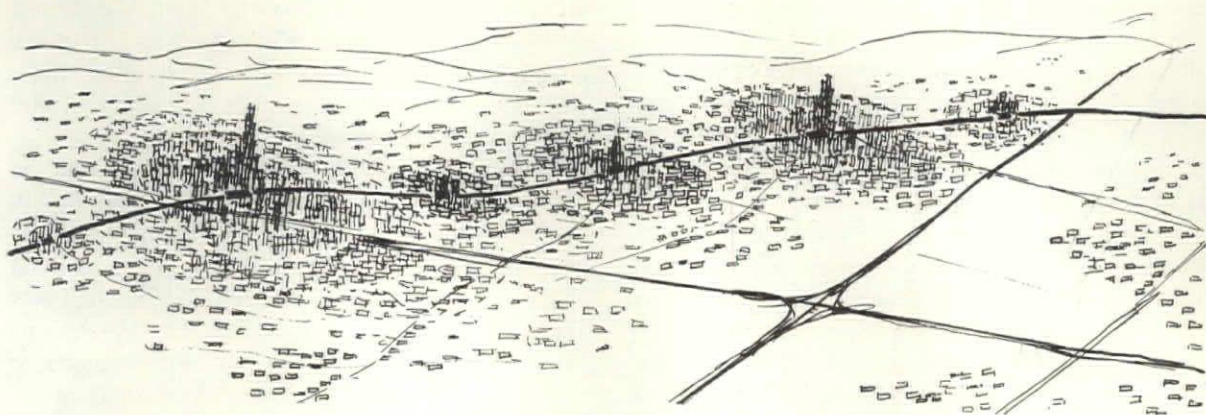
Modern Messages

To sum up, we have seen that there are three basic media for conveying messages in the city: heraldry, physiognomy and patterns of location.[3] We have illustrated our thesis by examples of messages in the medieval city and in the modern American city as it is today with its legacy of symbolism from the nineteenth century and earlier. However, the great difference between the two examples is that while the symbolic messages of the first form some meaningful and imageable whole, those of the second are latent, do not emerge wholly and do not alleviate the condition we have called urban agnosia.

What are these latent factors which exist around us to be recognized and put into a system of modern messages to convey a modern city order? They will have mainly to do with the new *relationships* which are forming between parts of the city as a result of the social and technological changes of the twentieth century.

For example, we have shown how the peaks of activity, building density and land values at transit stops are a result of the nineteenth century railroad technology. A very different relation of traffic volume to land value and building intensity must emerge with the automobile, and has not yet emerged in a comprehensible form, though there are almost as many concepts of what this form should be as there are urban theoreticians.[4] Similarly, the clear relations between walls, houses and halls of the medieval town or between the indus-

trial sectors, slums, "downtowns," parks and "institutions" of the Victorian city, have broken down in our time, since "linkages" can now be made by telephone, and electricity allows factories to spread horizontally instead of vertically, and highways and trucks allow them to follow their workers to the suburbs. Again, although we do not know where these changes are leading, we may have some idea, and can identify some of the factors concerned. Of these, perhaps the most important is movement.

The crux of the problem of city form today seems to lie in the automobile and in our need to understand more fully than we do what should be its place in modern life, and in the city and what should be the relation between movement, especially automobile movement, and perception in the meaningful city.

Movement and Meaning

Are imageability and understanding possible at the scale of the whole metropolis? Certainly, if, as we move through it, we use our memory to relate the perceptions made at different points in time and space.

A road gives us messages as we move along it. The kinds of message given vary with the physiognomy of the road and with the type of movement. Our memory combines sequential messages into more or less meaningful wholes which help us to comprehend a larger area than we can see. But this process is vastly simpler if we are able to discern a structure, and particularly a *rhythmic* structure in the sequences. If architecture is frozen music, urban space perceived in movement is melted music. That is, one's experience when time

and memory are added, is directly comparable to a musical experience.

An aimless walker or a shopper receives a very fine grain of staccato stimuli. He can perceive the detail all around him, but at the same time encompass within his vision the broader range and scale of the larger environment. The walker who is going somewhere finds orientation and pleasure in the combination of small beats into larger and larger. He senses first the quiet tip-tip-tip of railing and balustrade, intimately related to his own scale. This is picked up by the larger beat of porch and portico, then enlarged by the passing of individual town houses, into a firm boom-boom, linking him with the scale of street and traffic.

Traveling a fast commuter line, small-scale detail perception gives way to broad impressions and strokes and general awareness. As we pass from stop to stop we may feel a rhythm of crescendi and diminuendi in activity, sense thereby an hierarchical distribution of nuclei and, behind this, the law relating their sizes to their distances apart.

Rhythm is therefore an important part of the meaningful environment; the more so as its repetitive quality makes it predictable, and especially because the complex rhythmic orchestrations of the city can communicate beyond the purely visual senses, to the deeper unconscious and reflex levels of human perception.

Thus, streets act not only as channels of movement but as "channels of communication and intelligibility." They give utilitarian information about the environment and, as in music, use rhythm to link themes and subthemes; inversions, variations and counterthemes; codas, repetitions and recapitulations into an ordered and esthetically satisfying whole, and make of the city a work of art: for once we talk of city form as a "meaningful whole" to be perceived on many levels and to be "understood" through symbolism, we are very much in the world of the artist.

We have looked at two cities to understand through them something of perception and of the

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[a] In passing we should note that we are ignoring the aural, olfactory, tactile and vestibular aspects of perception almost completely. Although these are all important and at some point may be decisive in what we perceive (and especially in what we *remember*) in a city; they are less susceptible to conscious guidance and design—unless, that is, they reach "nuisance level."

[b] See particularly D. A. Crane's "The City Symbolic," *AIP Journal*, November 1960; "The Dynamic City," *AIA Journal*, May 1960; Louis Kahn's "Toward a Plan for Midtown Philadelphia," *Perspecta II*, Yale University; "Team 10 Primer," *Architectural Design*, December 1962

messages a city can give and the way in which it can give them—laying special stress on movement, for its importance in the city in our time. In so doing we have gained some knowledge of how the citizen is given information useful to him in "getting about." But we have surmised too that this is not the only level of meaning which the city may convey, nor is it the one which gives to the Roman citizen, or the New Yorker, his pride of citizenship. For these most important yet least tangible aspects of the Meaningful City, we must search further, in realms which are less certain.

It is certain that "the unique relationship between the open area of the square, the surrounding buildings and the sky above create a genuine emotional experience, comparable to the impact of any other work of art." [5] But this is only a beginning. We must try to identify the bases for this emotional experience in the forms of the city and the symbolism and meaning they hold; and we must extend this concept to include not only single urban spaces but the whole metropolis.

A Modern Image

What is the image of today's city? The medieval city had its walls and its cathedral. Is our image merely an inheritance from the past overlaid by a disorder of unrelated individual adaptations—beautified perhaps by the fountains and flowerpots of the urban cosmetician? Where are our counterparts for the ancient civic places and the finite, understandable over-all form?

What are our symbols? We have already shown that the question of symbolism is a difficult one. The Japanese gardener, the Indian dancer, the Gothic builder could work secure in the knowledge that each formal element of his art had a symbolic meaning, known and honored by all. There would be no thought of questioning the ancient traditions, and there would be no gap, as we know it today, between "artist" and other people. In a time of great cultural unity "when a period succeeds in developing its natural culture and when this culture is supported by a long tradition, works of the highest quality can be produced by anonymous artists as well as by distinguished ones." [6] At the other extreme, the Roi Soleil and his despotic imitators could ignore the society around them and build whole cities based on their own symbolism.

In an age when the city is "designed" for the most part by the thousands of individuals and agencies which build in it, we have not yet found a philosophy of planning which encompasses the "Thousand Designers" *and* the professional planner, helping their separate decisions to complement and augment each other. We do not lack for vision-

aries; but so far their monuments, in London, India or Brazil, have failed to convince us. We do not lack for symbols, but our efforts to use them are unsubtle and heavy handed. In the planning offices of most cities even this much is not achieved, and the situation goes by default.

Yet the important symbols of the age should be the prime form-givers to the meaningful city. Will the form-givers for our cities be the parts of the movement system, and should they be? If so, what is the gateway to the modern city? Is it the highway interchange, the airport or the subway station? How must these be conceived and designed to fulfill this function? If the deepest meaning of the city in any age is the augmentation of the individual being through his association with others, then where is our meeting place? Where would a great city give civic honor to a great man? Where is the space worthy of his greatness? What is our cathedral? Would the central position of our city hall be a desirable thing if for most citizens it symbolized "what you can't fight"?

And, for the individual, what is the meaning of "home" in the city? What makes the city "mine"? What gives to a group of town houses a larger identity, so that the individual unit does not feel like a slice of life, held in suspension between two party walls, through which the wind whistles?

The Final Image

We have talked till now of general symbols common to many people as groups or as individuals. But here is one man's vision of the city:

By nights when the yellow salamanders of the El bend all one way and the cold rain runs with the red-lit rain. By the way the city's million wires are burdened only by lightest snow; and the old year yet lighter upon them. When chairs are stacked and glasses are turned and arc lamps all are dimmed. By days when the wind bangs alley gates ajar and the sun goes by on the wind. By nights when the moon is an only child above the measured thunder of the cars, you may know Chicago's heart at last. [7]

This is what the city may mean for one individual among a million city dwellers. This is the final result, the true nature and meaning of cities and perception. But no one can "design" it. Such personal symbolism and imagery grows with age and increasing richness upon the base of a much more public and general symbolism common to a group of people. Our need is to find that good base upon which subsequent encrustations of meaning and association can form as richly and with as much individual variation as the talents of the population permit—to find that order within which variety becomes meaningful, and the changing whole intelligible and beautiful. ∎

[5] P. Zucker, "Town and Square," Columbia University Press: 1953, p 1

[6] S. Giedion, "Space, Time and Architecture," Harvard University Press: 1940, p 156

[7] N. Algren, "Chicago: City on the Make," Doubleday, NY: 1951, p 86