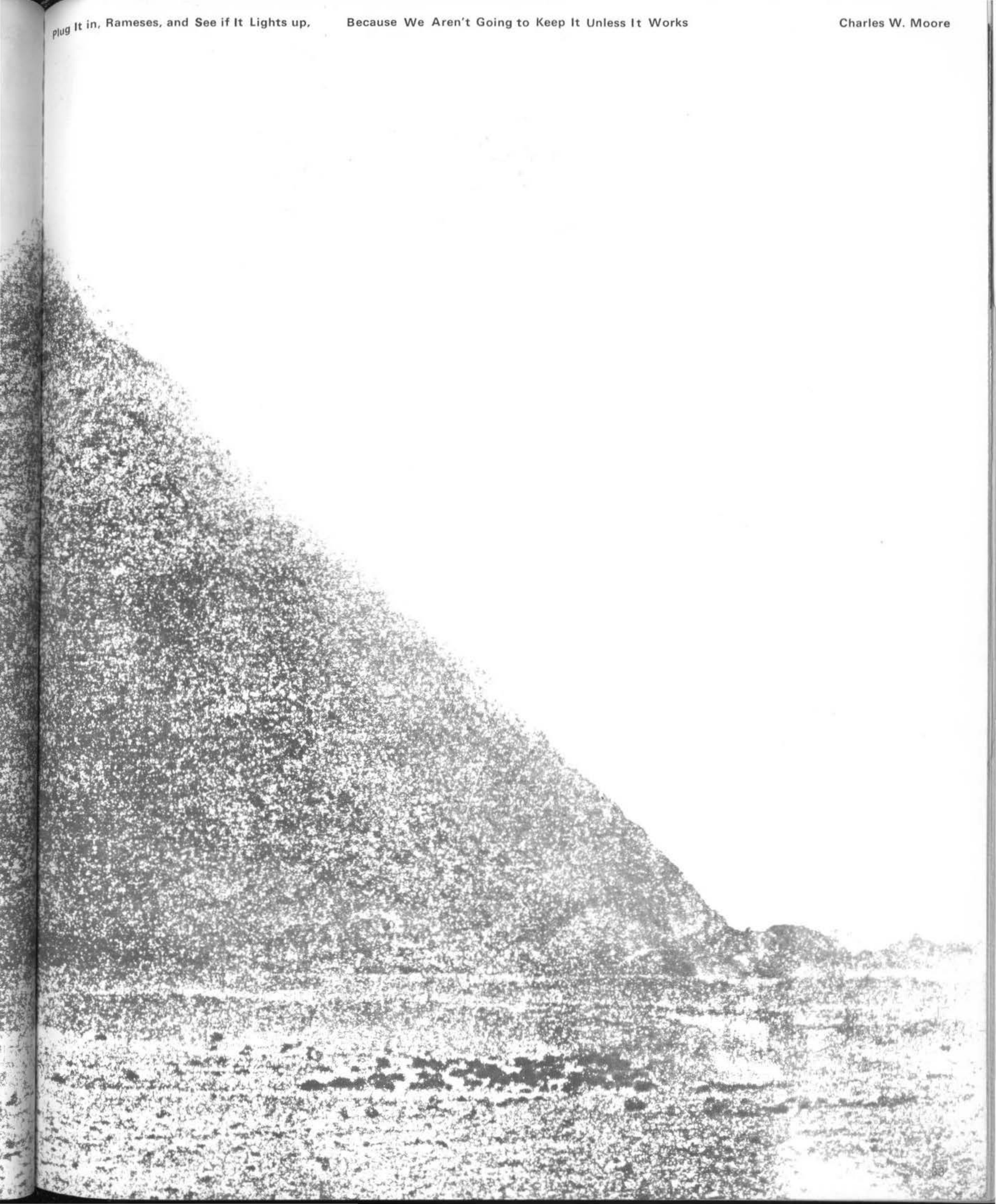
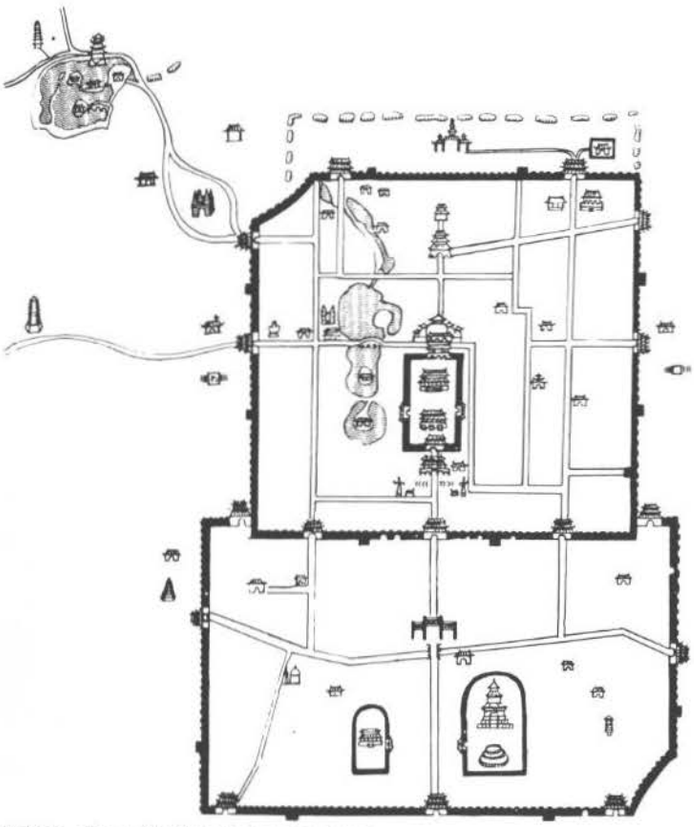
Plug It in, Rameses, and See if It Lights up, Because We Aren't Going to Keep It Unless It Works Charles W. Moore



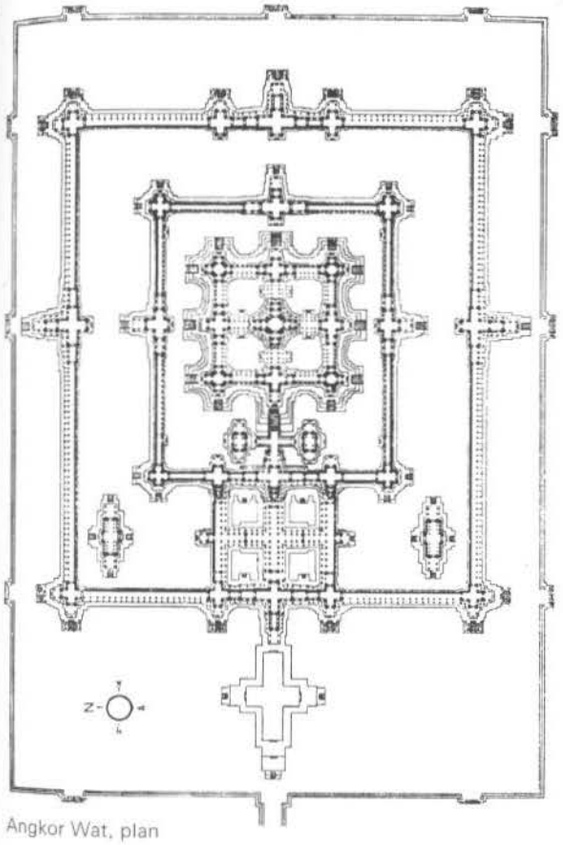


Peking, plan with historical monuments

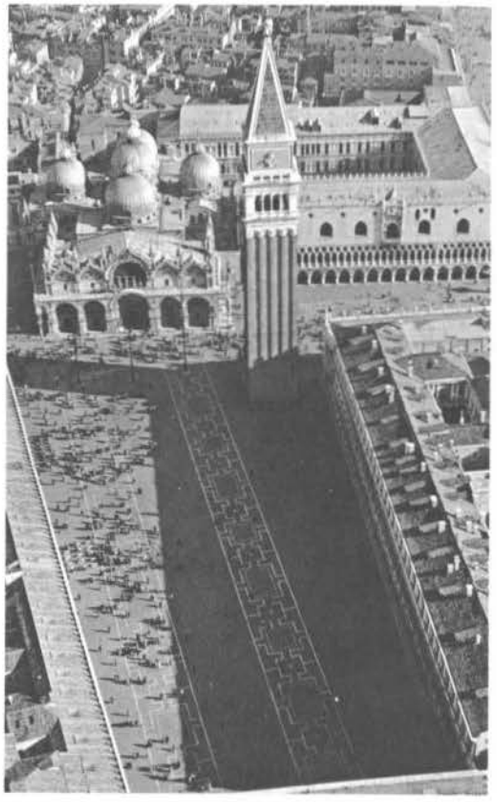
If architects are to continue to do useful work on this planet, then surely their proper concern must be, as it has always been, the creation of **place**, the ordered extension of man's idea about himself in specific locations on the face of the earth to make what Susanne Langer has called "ethnic domain." This, supposedly, will be useful to help people know where they are which will aid, by extension, in helping people know who they are.

The most powerful and effective places which our forbears made for themselves, and left for us, exist in a contiguous space. They work on an organized hierarchy of importances, first dividing what is inside from what is outside, then some way arranging things in order of their importance, so that objects give importance to a location, and location gives importance to objects, as at Peking where an axis penetrates from outside through layer after layer of increasing importance (like the skins of an onion) to the seat of the emperor himself, or as in Hindu towns where caste determined location from clean to dirty along the flow of water which served everyone. The visible order of these hierarchic places was buttressed by the confidence that they shared the order which made comprehensible the world, or the other world, as the temple of Angkor Wat provides with its cross axes and its concentric rings of temples a diagram of heaven recalling the concentric rings of mountains around the seven seas which center on the sacred Buddhist mountain.

Our own places, however, like our lives, are not bound up in one contiguous space. Our order is not made in one discrete inside neatly separated from a hostile outside, in which we are free to structure a visible simulation of our vision of the world. The world that means the most to us, as everyone from Bucky Fuller to Marshall McLuhan has already pointed out, has for the past half century not really been very visible anyway.



Angkor Wat, plan



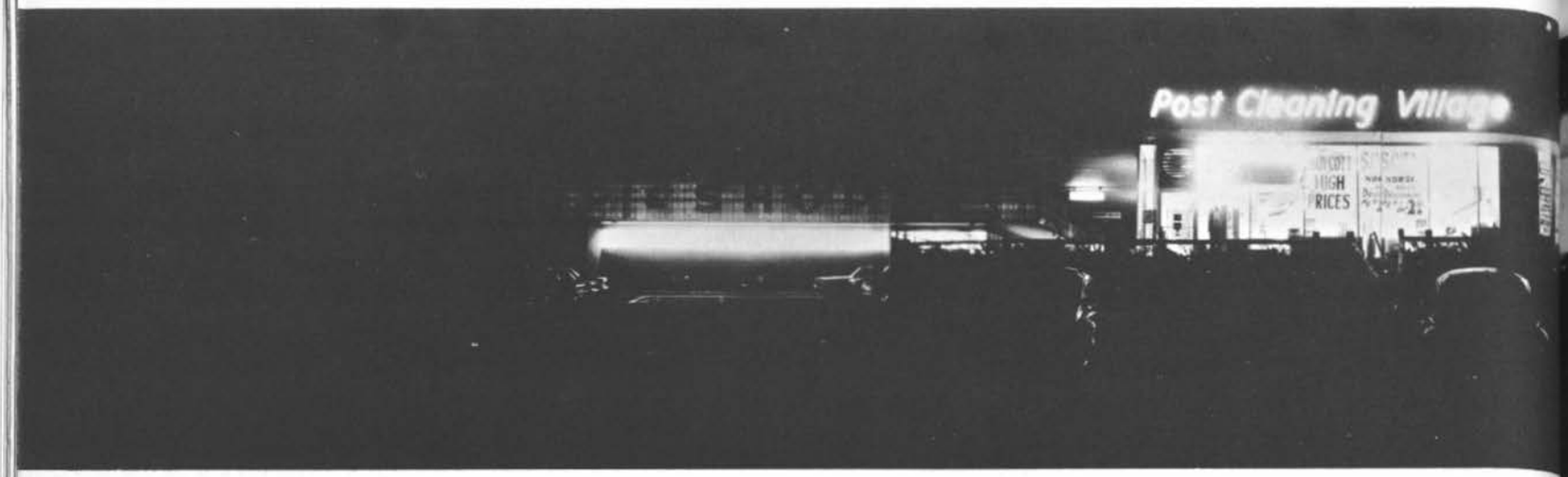
Piazza San Marco, Venice

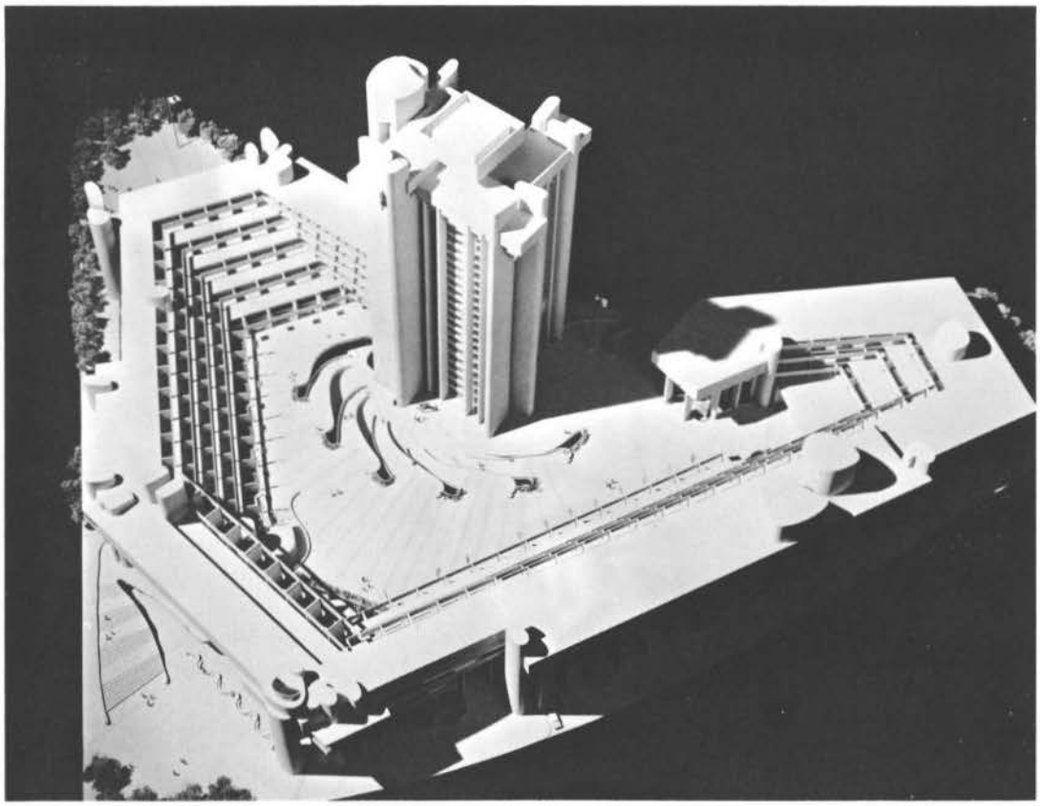
Many of us have stamping grounds which exist in separate places ending at one airport (in my own case Kennedy) to pick up again in some other airport (in my case San Francisco's). At both ends of my territory I know the street names and have even established my ownership of some real estate. Even more important, independently of where we move our bodies at any moment, we have as we all know instant anywhere, as we enjoy our capacity to make immediate electronic contact with people anywhere on the face of the globe and revel in the vicarious pleasure we get from shooting people off the face of the globe in order to make contact with them in outer space.

Our new places, that is, are given form with electronic, not visual, glue. Now this electronic glue, as people nervously joke, has some limitations. It is still argued, for instance, about courtship that although a great deal of preliminary maneuvering can occur over the telephone, face-to-face contact is still required for any real consummation of the activity. It is conceivable that before long this may be an antiquated argument; one could have supposed not many years ago, for instance, that dancing required face-to-face contact, but clearly that notion is passé, and one's partner now in the frug (or the successor to the frug) could as well be under another strobe light in Los Angeles, say, while one is oneself gyrating in a discotheque in New York.

About the time that architects and planners started to bleat about "human scale" as though it had to do, for the first time since Cheops, entirely with man's body and not at all with his mind or his ideas, and to rhapsodize about the pleasures of sitting or strolling in the Piazza di San Marco, the heart of Venice and "the finest drawing room in Europe," people were everywhere changing their effective bodies, electronically extending themselves in whole new ways. And while the Piazza di San Marco has been repeated on urban renewal sites across the United States (complete with everything but inhabitants), the hierarchy of importances from private to monumental has vanished.

Industry went first; the pyramidal hierarchic organization of the corporation of the 1920's has been replaced by networks much better suited to the instant communication and instant feedback possible today, which allow immediate response

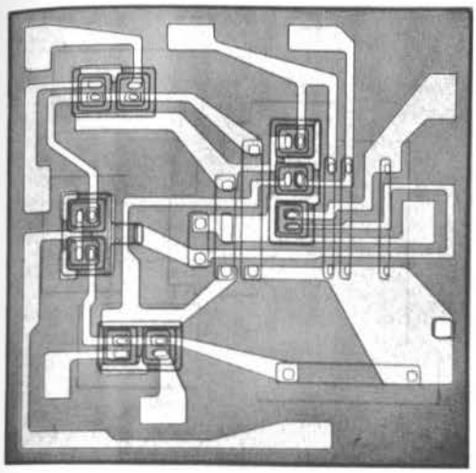




Rudolph, Boston Government Center

to daily market demands over enormous distribution systems, and force the early retirement of executives who can't flexibly cope. The image of the pyramidal hierarchy with someone or something clearly on top, and other successive layers of someone or something else below that, sending their information to the apex and receiving orders back from on high, has vanished everywhere except in the military, in government agencies, and the minds of people looking for some contiguous hierarchic visual order. The pyramids of business, like the pyramids of Gizeh, were built to last without any further help from anybody. The network, on the contrary, needs help. It needs to be plugged in, into the right markets to make money, into electricity in order to light up, into a sewage system in order to drain, into a working social framework in order to avoid immediately being torn down.

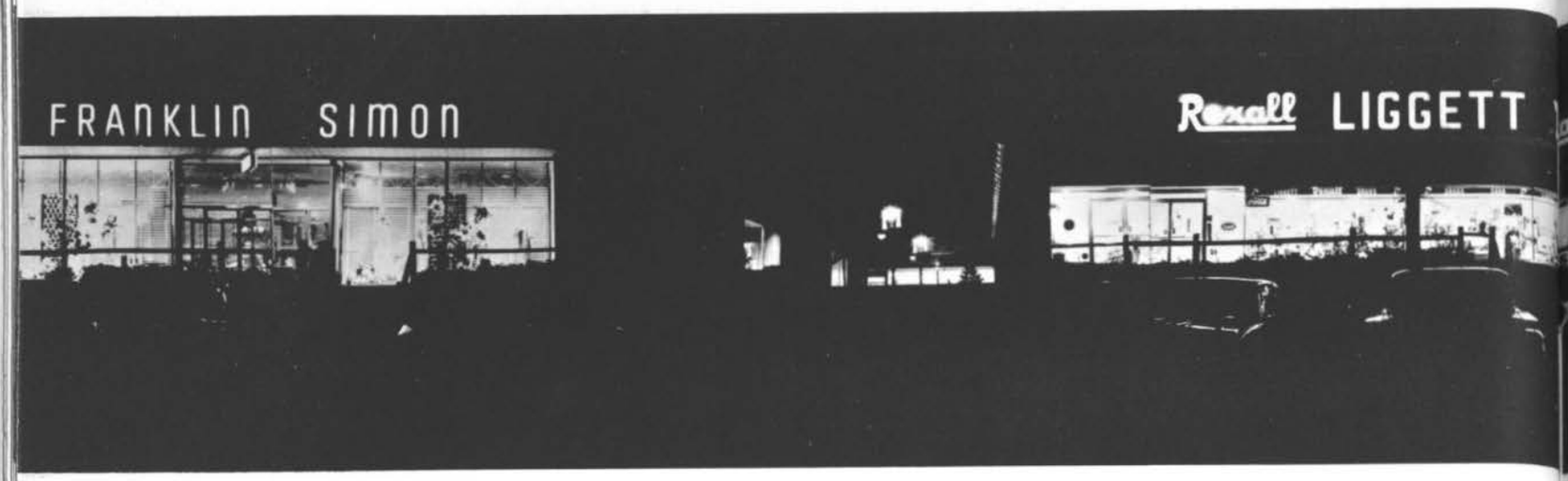
For some time the modern city, like the modern corporation, has been a model of the new unhierarchy. Los Angeles for instance has poured itself unhierarchically across the landscape demonstrating that you can do almost anything you need to do in a city almost anywhere (including rioting: an article of mine in a pre-Watts issue of **Perspecta** had announced erroneously that Los Angeles was a poor place for that). It is curious to note with what consistency architects, and especially architecture students, continue to fly in the face of all the available facts, with the breathless announcement that the only problem worth their consideration is the super-high-density pedestrian urban core of the sort which continues to exist in New York, Calcutta, Provincetown, Carmel, and a diminishing list of other places (all as though problems, too, were neatly ordered in a pyramidal hierarchy).

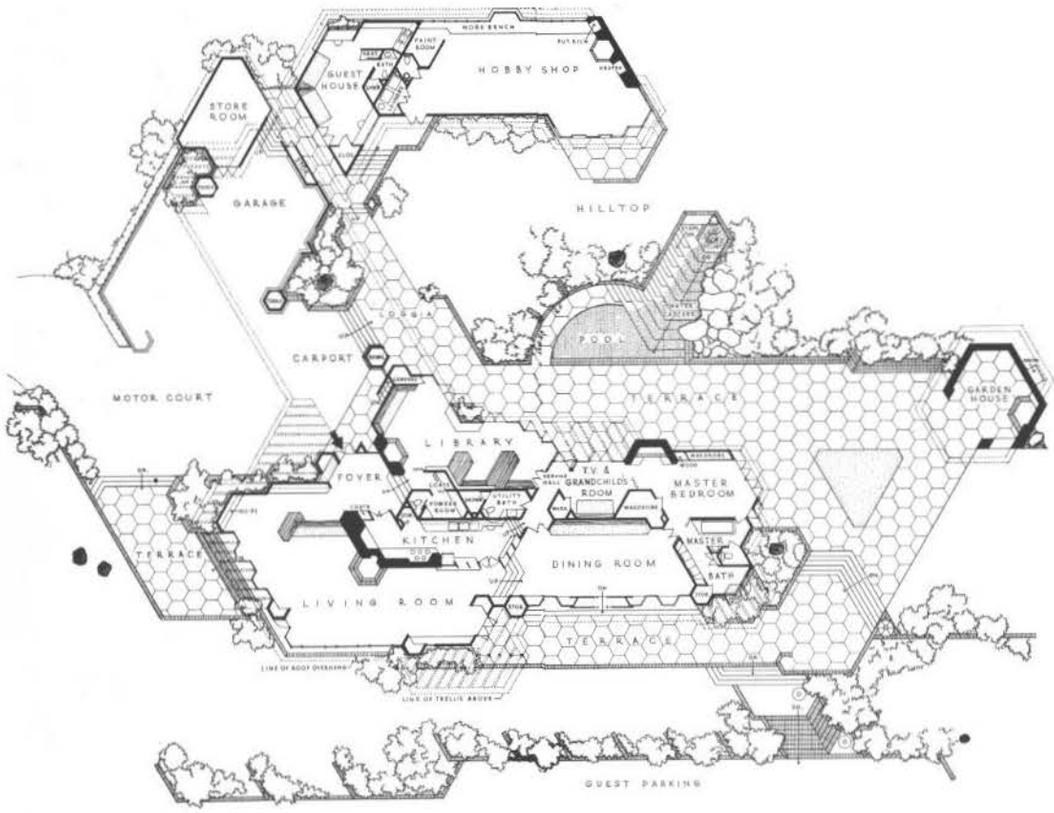


Printed circuit

Los Angeles freeway system

A current British version of this old-fashioned systematizing collected under the appellation "plug-in" and garnished with handsome drawings deserves, I suppose, special mention because it comes across, thanks to those drawings, as an arrangement really quite up-to-the-minute in spite of the clear difficulties of giving credulity to an array of late Victorian linear piping systems which would have put new gleam in the eye of Captain Nemo as he twiddled the valves on the Nautilus. All right, it's very dense, but it seems to be based on the stage of the industrial revolution when mechanization meant repetition, a stage which even Detroit seems to have gotten through, so that those pretty lumpy things seem odd survivors in an aspatial electronic world.

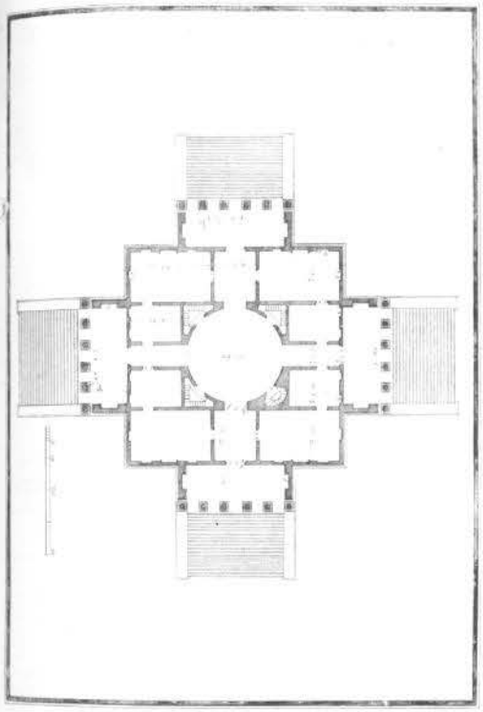




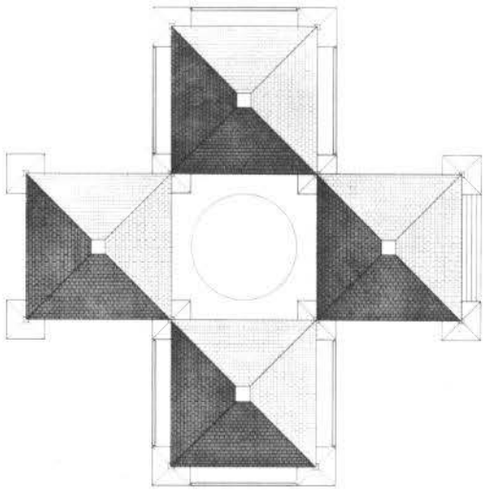
Wright, Hanna House, plan

Where, then, does this leave us? What might architect place-makers do, if anything? In an electronic world where space and location have so little functional meaning, there seems little point in defining cities spatially even in the negative terms devised by those scholars who postulate hollow honeycombs with crowded edges after center cities are deserted. In a world which has lately witnessed the death of the old hierarchies, except in the aforementioned curious hold-out areas, it seems less than germane to consider new environments in terms of hierarchy. It seems less than essential, either, to expose for demolition all the false ideologies to leave on its feet only the one true architecture, the electric architecture (of which there probably aren't any good examples).

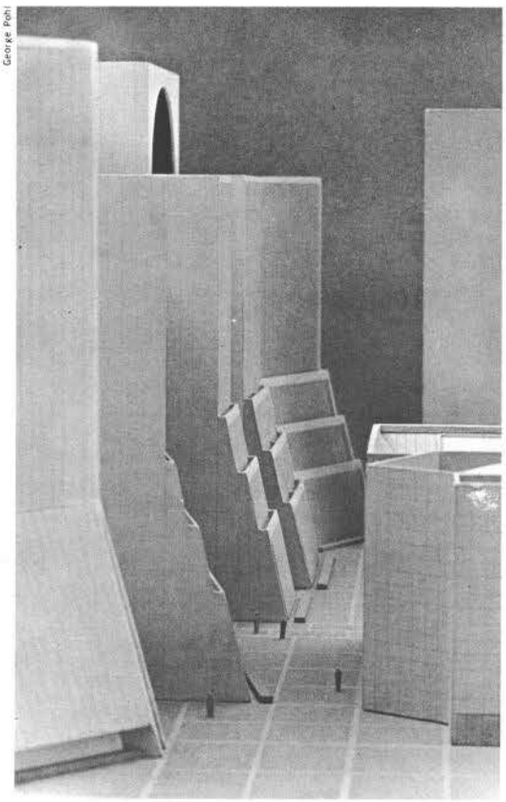
Even at this early point in the new age, however, we can note that the architecture of the past several decades, architecture that could, I think, accurately be called the architecture of exclusion, has not gained control of the physical environment, to make place. The perfectly natural attempts of the last several decades to find order by excluding disorder and confusion and organizing whatever fragment remains into a system is the order which characterizes, for instance, Frank Lloyd Wright's Hanna House, where everything is thrown out which does not fit the "organic" geometry of the hexagon, into whose shape even bedsheets are somehow folded. If we can presume that the point in "organic" order is to make something with life which somehow grows, reproduces itself, and spreads into other aspects of life, then we have sadly to admit that the Hanna House has spawned no legitimate progeny. The very specialness and difficulty of twisting and shoving everything into a geometry so natural for bees and so awkward for our own techniques leave the architect with a lovely geometry which stands apart from everything else, and everything else seems to have the edge. Mies' geometry at the Illinois Institute



Palladio, Villa Rotunda



Kahn, Trenton Bath House



George Pohl

Kahn, Philadelphia Museum College project

of Technology excluded the possibilities not inherent in the 18 by 24 foot rectangular grid from which his campus plan started; this plan geometry has the unusual extra attribute of being almost undiscoverable by anyone on the ground who is not simultaneously looking at a plan drawing.

Palladio's designs which sought by the employment of dimensions based on musical intervals to achieve with geometric order the harmony of the spheres were more than empty games; they were central to the thought of their generation in all the arts, from logic to music. The same geometries applied to achieve four-way axialities in Connecticut suburban residences seem to have failed to bring the whole culture around. The enigma in any revelation that plane and solid geometry together have not solved the environmental problems of the twentieth century must be Louis Kahn, whose geometries begin as formally as Wright's or Mies' or even Palladio's, whose happiest moments with materials seem to occur in primitive mass masonry technologies of Pakistan or India, whose formal enthusiasms appear to be contemporary with those of Caracalla (or Caracalla made magic), but who has cleared the way and served as guide for most of

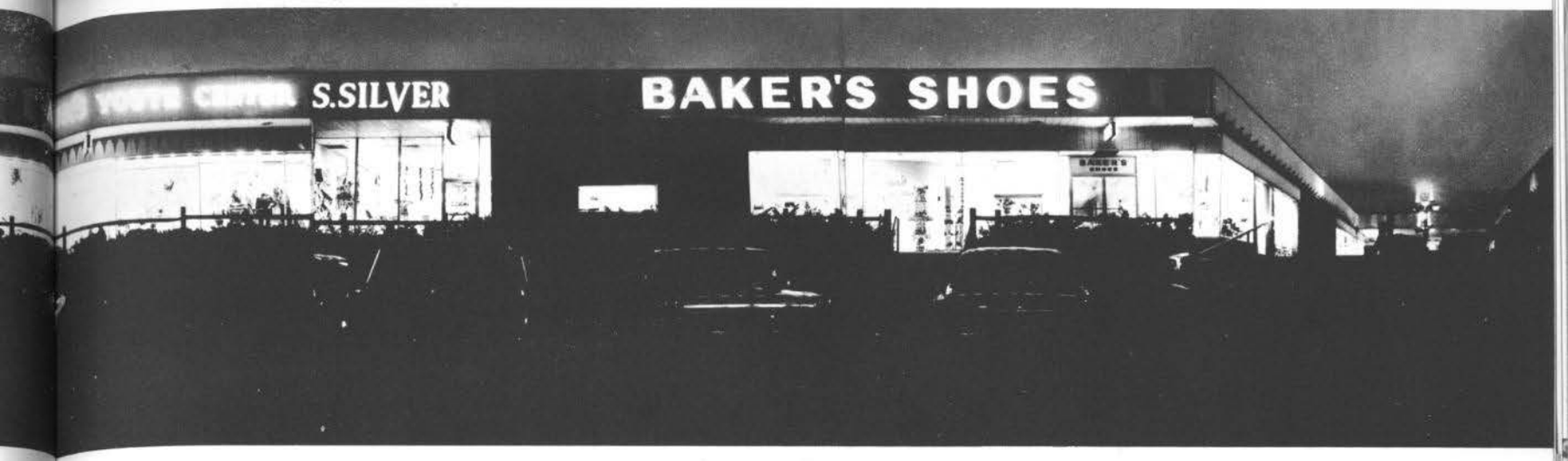
Whitney Avenue Fire Station, New Haven

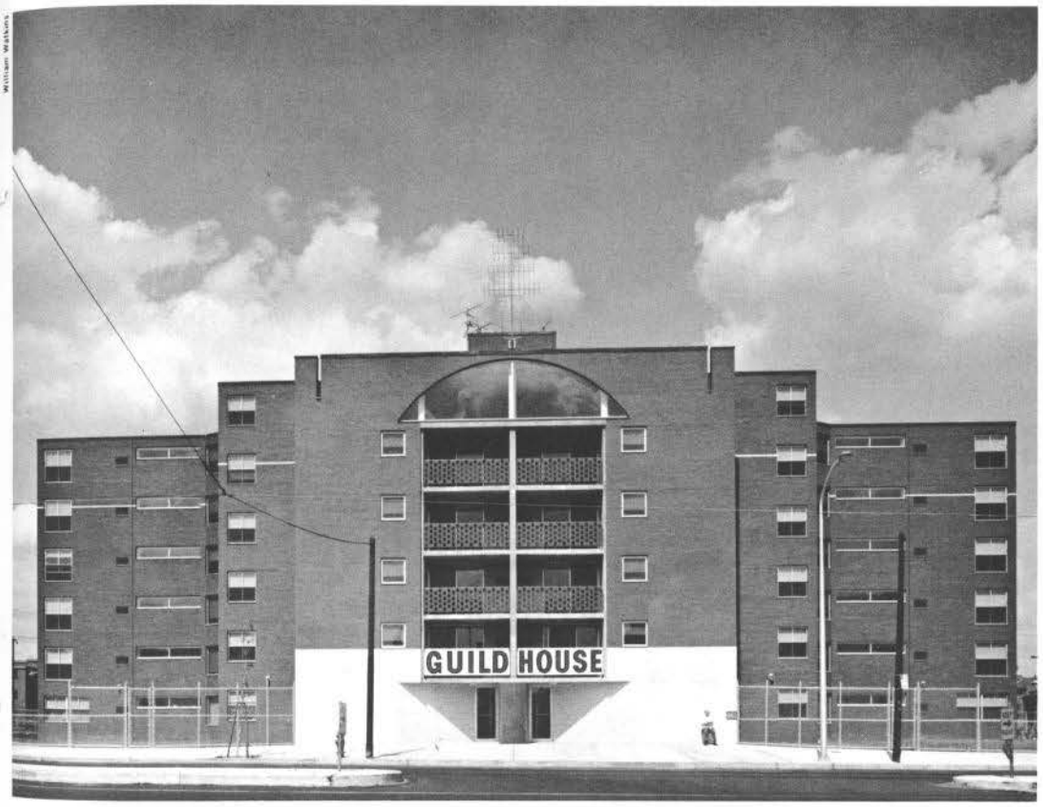
the includers about whom I now propose to speak (and he stays ahead of them). (Maybe the geometry of the Philadelphia Museum School will turn out, after all, to be alive, and will reproduce itself.)

The architects of exclusion have for generations now perfected their art, and built their buildings on the plots assigned them. But somehow the commercial strip which they abhor has arrogated to itself more vitality, more power of growth, indeed more inevitability of growth, than the whole of their tidy output put together.

The manifestation of all this vitality must have some message for us, even as the enormously successful sales of suburban tract houses must be saying something about what people want to live in. I doubt that the message is that the architect who produces at enormous expense a replica of the commercial strip which could have been done as well without him is about to save the world; but it does seem reasonable, after generations of failure on the part of the architecture of exclusion to come to grips with our civilization and to establish a vitality of its own, that the chance should now be given to, or seized by, some architects of inclusion, the includers who, like some playwrights, make their order with as much of life as they can include, rather than as little, who welcome redundancy and depend on it even as the electronic information networks do, and who are willing to accept into their systems of organization those ambiguities and conflicts of which life is made.

Robert Venturi's search for ambiguity is paradoxically probably the clearest instance of a conscious architecture of inclusion. His interests range from the history of architectural composition (with an encyclopedic knowledge of its hallowed monuments) to the popular roadside manifestations of our own time. His Guild House in Philadelphia for the elderly calls at once upon the intricacies of apartment floor planning of the 1920's and the simple palette of materials of 19th century Philadelphia to which is added a kind of commercial formalism with a row of white subway tile which makes a gesture toward the grandest kind of historic composition—making, dividing the whole big lump of a building into base (of white tiles), shaft (of brick) and capital (of brick as well, but divided from the shaft by the





William Watkins

Venturi, Guild House, Philadelphia

Marcia McGinnis

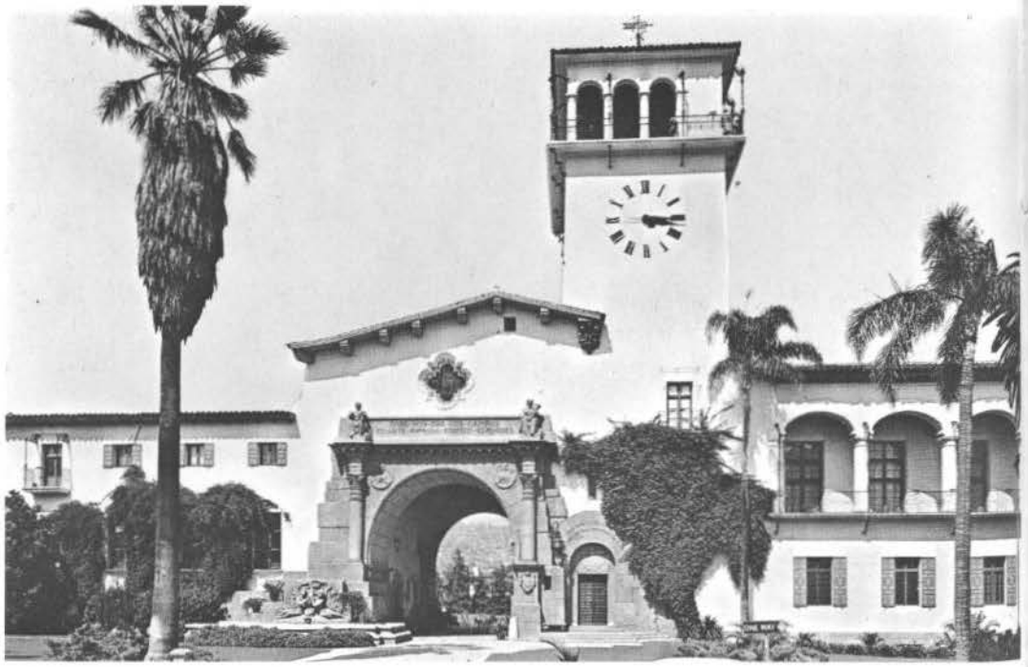
Lyndon, Fashion Fabrics, Monterey-Seaside strip

course of white tile) without ever departing from homely matter-of-factness, so that a gold-anodized television antenna on the pediment above the entrance provides a sculptural flourish at once fiercely ingenious and pathetic (we know how cheap they are). Directly below this flourish the conflicting requirements of entrance and central support fight it out. Behind it, on the back, the unadorned bricks and apparently regular holes state confidently that this is an ordinary housing project.

A set of stores and offices attributable mostly to Donlyn Lyndon on a strip commercial street on the Monterey Peninsula in California demonstrates some of the same sympathies for the vitality of the commercial strip vernacular with the desire to embrace rather than to exclude its life, while its naive forms function in rather sophisticated ways to control the sun's entry.

The Whitney Avenue firehouse of Peter Millard, with its meticulously toilet-trained pipes and conduits, appears at first to have little in common with its gaudier sisters of the strip; yet the architects' attempt to include things, to worry about more conflicts which need to be demonstrated, and more problems which need to be solved, from the relation of the fire station, for instance, to its clapboarded neighbors on a residential street, to the relation of little rooms to the garage for the large fire engines, all involved him in the complexities of his problem with the same immediacy as Lyndon's and Venturi's buildings take on the problems which beset them.

C.P.I. Neighborhood Youth Recreation Center project, New Haven

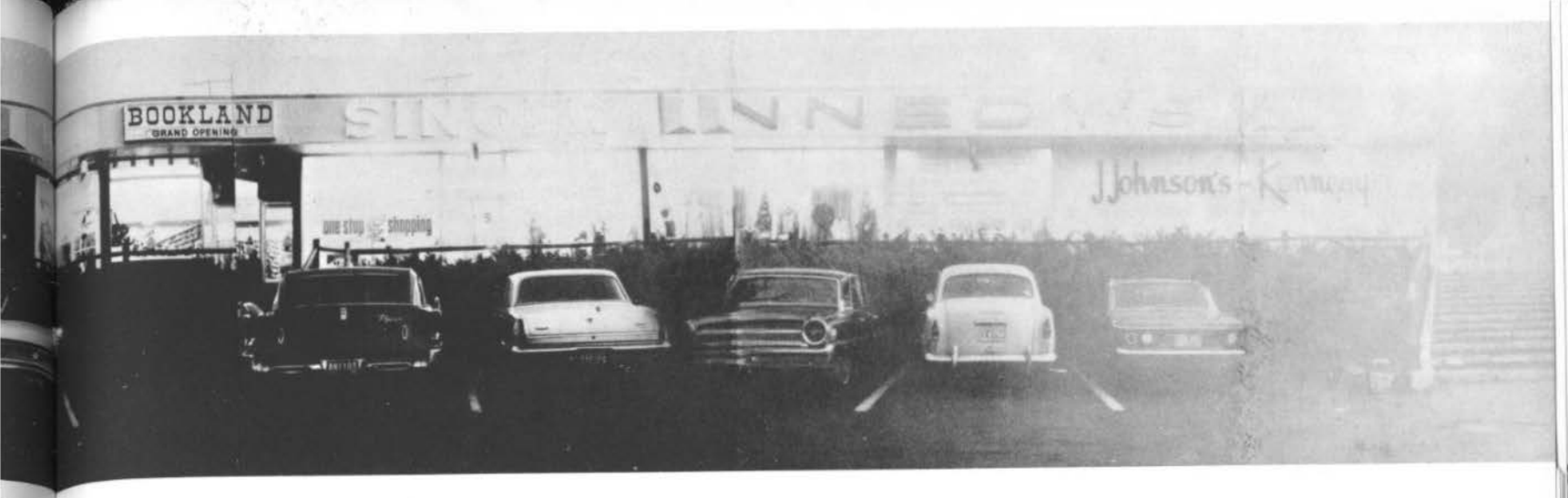


Santa Barbara County Courthouse

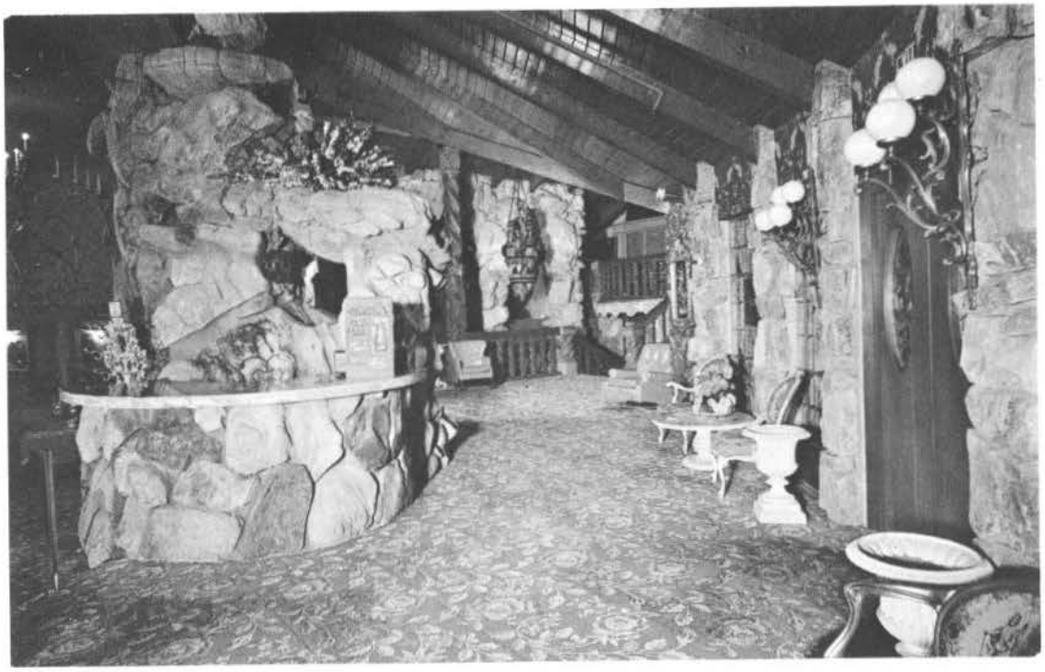
Five of Millard's students (Golding, Ives, Mackall, Michels, Ryan) matched his involvement when they produced for a real client (for a site which vanished after working drawings were made) a club house for teenage dropouts in New Haven, where a concern for the common materials of an industrial slum, the block walls and the pipes and the grilles and the conduit was joined by a concern for the life and the movement of the teenage user whose entrance into the club and his saunter down its steps in full view of all his confreres is as carefully considered as the entrance of his girl from the lady's room down a miniaturized flight of stairs which forces a recall of the Ziegfield Follies of 1933.

That the idiom does not matter all that much to an architecture of inclusion is demonstrated by the Santa Barbara County Court House, of 1929, one of the century's great monuments of the architecture of inclusion. The Courthouse, after decades of criticial abuse, still attracts streams of tourists who come to see it as architecture, to revel not only in its Hollywooden extrapolation of certain vaguely Spanish themes (in what Osbert Lancaster calls Spanish Supercolonial) but also in its syncopated orchestration of window openings, door shapes, and arcade in the white walls which respond as much to the Chicago jazz of the year it was built as to any far away clicking of castanets. People and activities are included here from horseback riders re-enacting an almost nonexistent Spanish past to passersby for whom the building opens up the grandeur of the site and the thrill of the place, whose history may be ephemeral, but whose presence is nonetheless real.

Santa Barbara's inclusion into its fabric after an earthquake in 1925 of an almost mythical Spanish history has been as clear a source of vitality for that particular place as the hopped-up forms of the commercial strip. Our Faculty Club for the University of California at Santa Barbara seeks to include this special vitality as Lyndon's Fashion Fabrics building sought to pick up the vitality of Monterey Peninsula's commercial strip, not to borrow a set of forms, but rather



Madonna Inn, San Luis Obispo



Madonna Inn, San Luis Obispo

to take for our own a dizzily vigorous way of flinging up simple (but lofty) white walls whose crashing incongruities of scale will, we hope, seem eerily comforting in the soft white sunlight, without letting go for a moment of the place's crazy made-up past, but rather collecting the memory of it, even as Le Corbusier's Carpenter Center of Visual Arts is, I think, meant not to be built around a pokey little pedestrian ramp but rather around a form made to collect the image of motion on a freeway, which simply had to be reduced and symbolized in order to get it onto the lot.

That's a sly device, juxtaposing one's own yet unbuilt work with a Corbusier masterwork. It is, however, even more of a pleasure to give notice to a new building with no architect of record which is a moving example of this architecture of inclusion. The Madonna Inn, on the highway south of San Luis Obispo, California, would never get a passing grade in a school of architecture where tastefulness was prized. It was built (and keeps being built) by a family of highway contractors whose involvement with bulldozers and enormous pieces of earthmoving equipment puts them in close touch with huge boulders, which they have, with enormous feeling, piled together to make a gas station and a motel. Entry into this motel, past a rock and down a stair into a dining room upholstered in purple velvet, is one of the most surprising and surprisingly full experiences to be found along an American highway. It may be beside the point, but I don't think so, that in the men's room, next to a giant shell with gold faucets, the approach to a great rock grotto, which serves as a urinal, interrupts the beam of an electric eye and sets going a waterfall down over that grotto. It is disquieting in another way to note that armies of Italian craftsmen are even today meticulously carving grapes into wooden column capitals and beating sheets of copper into shape over tables in the coffee shop. It is not at all disquieting, but rather exhilarating to note that here there is everything instead of nothing. A kind of immediate involvement with the site, with the user and his movements, indeed with everything all at once, with the vitality and the vulgarity of real commerce, quivers at a pitch of excitement which presages, more clearly than any tidy sparse geometry, an architecture for the electric present.