Our Culture is in Need of an Art of Exposure

Richard Sennett

One difference between the Greek past and the present is that whereas the ancients could use their eyes in the city to think about political, religious, and erotic experiences, modern culture suffers from a divide between the inside and the outside. It is a divide between subjective and worldly experience, self and city. Moreover, our culture is marked by hard struggle whenever people seek to make inner life concrete. This sets us off not just from our own origins but also from non-European cultures nearer in time whose masks, dances, ceremonials, shrines, sacred grounds, and cosmologies connect subjective life to physical things.

This divide between inner, subjective experience and outer, physical life expresses in fact a great fear which our civilisation has refused to admit, much less to reckon. The spaces full of people in the modern city are either spaces limited to and carefully orchestrating consumption, like the shopping mall, or spaces limited to and carefully orchestrating the experience of tourism. This reduction and trivialising of the city as a stage of life is no accident. Beyond all the economic and demographic reasons for the neutralised city there exists a profound, indeed 'spiritual' reason why people are willing to tolerate such a bland scene for their lives. The way cities look reflects a great, unreckoned fear of exposure. 'Exposure' more connotes the likelihood of being hurt than of being stimulated. The fear of exposure is in one way a militarised conception of everyday experience, as though attack-and-defence is as apt a model of subjective life as it is of warfare. What is characteristic of our city-building is to wall off the differences between people, assuming that these differences are more likely to be mutually threatening than mutually stimulating. What we make in the urban realm are therefore bland, neutralising spaces, spaces which remove the threat of social contact: street walls faced in sheets of plate glass, highways that cut off poor neighbourhoods from the rest of the city, dormitory housing developments.

Our culture is in need of an art of exposure; this art will not make us one another's victims, rather more balanced adults, capable of coping with and learning from complexity.

The wall between inner and outer life arose in part from our religious history: Christianity set Western culture upon the course that built a wall between the inner and outer experience. The shadows cast by that wall continue to darken secular society. Moreover, attempts to unify the inner and outer dimensions simply by tearing down the wall, making the inner and outer one organic whole, have not proved successful; unity can be gained only at the price of complexity.

The exposed, outer life of the city cannot be simply a reflection of inner life. Exposure occurs in crowds and among strangers. The cultural problem of the modern city is how to make this impersonal milieu speak, how to relieve its current blandness, its neutrality, whose origin can be traced back to the belief that the outside world of things is unreal. Our urban problem is how to revive the reality of the outside as a dimension of human experience.

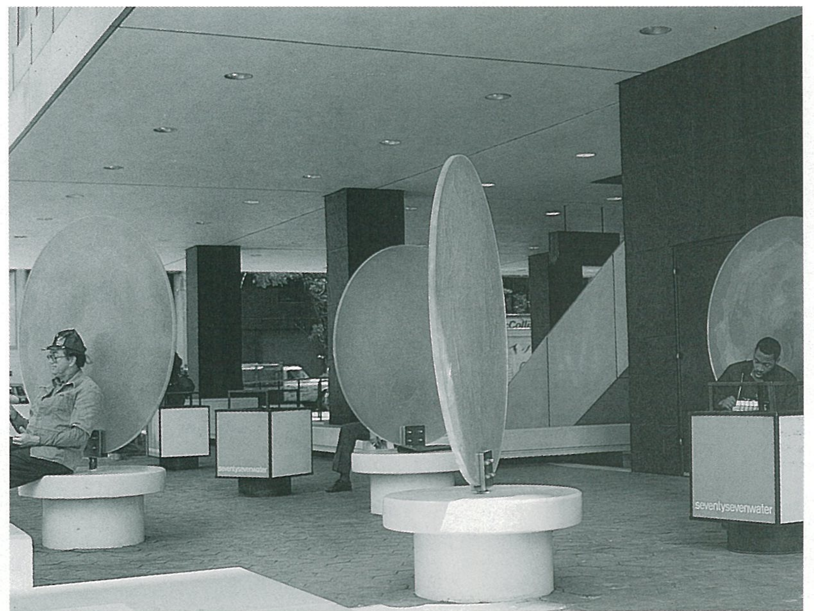
Our culture is in need of an art of exposure; this art will not make us one another's victims, rather more balanced adults, capable of coping with and learning from complexity.

A city ought to be a school for learning how to lead a centred life. Through exposure to others, we might learn how to weigh what is important and what is not. We need to see differences on the streets or in other people neither as threats nor as sentimental invitations, rather as necessary visions. They are necessary for us to learn how to navigate life with balance, both individually and collectively.

The belief that the interior is the true scene for inner life is a legacy, in secular society, of an older Christian ideal. But now this interior space of the soul has become a space for a new kind of inner life. The home has come to seem so necessary a refuge because of the modern secular idea of human character: that it is malleable, and that its most significant moulding moments happen early in the life cycle. To mould a young human being, you must protect it from destructive outside influences. This belief, self-evident to us, was not at all self-evident to earlier ages, who practised what would seem to us a shocking disregard of the young. The fact that so many children died in the *ancien regime* before reaching adulthood had tended to mute intense feelings about them. With improvements in child care and through

medical advances like vaccination, it became less emotionally dangerous to care intensely about one's children. And economics dictated that one do so. In ages governed by the inheritance of property and place, bloodlines are how the family relations are impressed upon property, position, and power. Ruskin's was an age in which inheritance of social position and property had cracked apart; it was instead animated by entrepreneurial striving; the formation of that strength of aggressive, tough character in the male child was an urgent matter. Moreover, the length of time that both boys and girls seemed to need in order to develop themselves stretched out from ten years to twenty. The time of childhood was divided, like the space of the house, ever more elaborately. All the stages of human development seemed, by the time Freud wrote, to proceed in a gradual unfolding, physical, mental and psychological, each step consequent for the future.

The notion that character develops and reveals itself in an interior marked by the division of labour spoke logically in the nineteenth century from the new importance placed on childhood development; partitioned shelter was necessary for this prolonged, difficult, perilous process. By contrast, the mixed confusions of a crowd, a street, a smoke-filled bar, seemed no place for the protracted process of developing a baby into an adult. The stimulations of the street lacked the sequential order of the rooms of a house. Self-development and the exposure to the city's differences thus became opposed in visual terms: the linear, interior order of unfolding, distinct scenes as in a railroad flat, versus the outside chaos, the



street like a collage; the shelter of the sequential versus exposure to the synchronous. We still see in terms of these oppositions. In sum, the *émigration intérieure* was a voluntary withdrawal dictated by dislike of a shoddy, materialistic society.

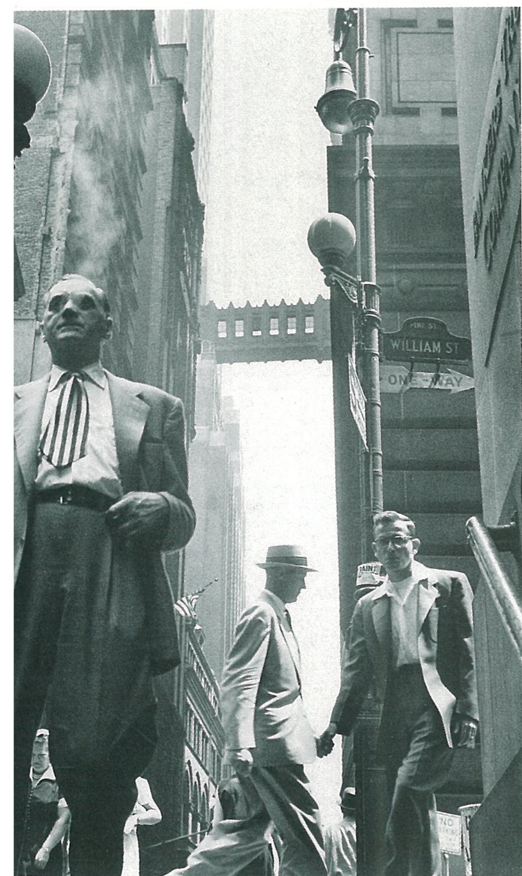
Rockefeller Center does not prompt the word that comes easily to mind in looking at much modern architecture. Rockefeller Center is not 'inhuman.' It is not experienced as a space of domination, it is not perceived by New Yorkers as a space of power. This much-loved ensemble instead arouses a sense of comfort. It is by walking from the deadly stillness of Rockefeller Center's side streets at midnight into the noise and hustle of Sixth Avenue that one feels suddenly exposed and vulnerable, even though the dark side streets are in fact more dangerous than the swarming open spaces around the nearby bars and hotels. What is most important about this space is that it is empty. This visual emptiness arouses a peculiar sensation of authority.

The space of authority, in Western culture, has developed as a space of precision: that is the guidance it gives to others. In the Christian cities were to be found the root of the desire for legibility that Kevin Lynch celebrated. Those who have dreamed Ruskin's dream or followed in the path of the first *émigrés intérieure* sought for this legibility in a domestic interior. Its sequence of spaces was to provide moral orientation: in a home, adults were to be disciplined in the same way as children in their rooms, trained how and where to separate the functioning of their bodies from contact with other people; how to make

?! This reasoning might still serve modern architecture, but it doesn't seem to apply to the abundance of forms in the language of post-modern architecture. Here we might draw a parallel with the weakening of Protestant tradition, since the economy of production with the highly valued thrift has been replaced by a consumption society with inherent prodigality. Protestant economy pertaining to money and imagery turns into the rebirth of the carnival. In contemporary (European) cities we see excessive tendencies toward the realm of the museum; the narrative, so much valued by you, is being staged for the sake of (tourist) sales only. So, narrative space, advocated by you, becomes an instrument of power as well.

love in the silence and darkness of a room furnished to that end; how to behave when received into a parlour as opposed to a more informal sitting room. It might be said that those who sought to interiorise attempted to build a space of authority for themselves, and they failed.

Sacred interiors were spaces of the Word, of confession and prayer, of submission to God, who would, as Augustine first promised, protect his children. Precision and charity, definition and refuge were indissoluble. Today the secular space of authority is empty; it looks like the side streets of Rockefeller Center. The visual forms of legibility in urban designs or space no longer suggest much about subjective life or heal the wounds of those in need. The sanctuary of the Christian city has been reduced to a sense of comfort in well-designed places where other people do not intrude. Safe because empty; safe because clearly marked. Authority is divorced from community; this is the conundrum of sanctuary as it has evolved in the city. Any New Yorker looks at this conundrum when passing the city's most famous landmark, across from Rockefeller Center. The cultural problems of the city are conventionally taken to be its impersonality, its alienating scale, its coldness. There is no more in these charges than is first apparent. *Impersonality*, *coldness*, and *emptiness* are essential words in the Protestant language of environment; they express a desire to see outside as null, lacking value. They are words that express a certain interest in seeing; the perception of outer emptiness reinforces the value of turning within. But that old unhappiness has left its residue as a certain practice of visual denial, as the acceptance of sensory denial in everyday life to be normal. More than normal – reassuring. Nothing as important as the inner struggle to account. Therefore, one can deal with the outside in purely instrumental, manipulative terms, since nothing outside 'really' matters. In this modulated form, neutrality becomes an instrument of power.**?!**



There is, today, a disturbing sign that the organic, enlightened attitudes do not lead to embracing complexity. We find this in the very fact that many modern planners who subscribe to the organic ideal in cultural terms have given up on visual planning. These planners perceive that architects are absorbed in making signature buildings like designer clothes; they detest modern architects who often put more emphasis on stunning forms than flexible forms adapted to human uses. These planners point out that parts of New York are beginning to look like a fashion parade of styles in glass shirts, brick shoes, and steel hats. In the same way making mega-plans for mega-buildings seems antisocial, this tyranny of definition (whose roots go back to the medieval city) involved in planning on a grand scale. Therefore these planners focus on 'communication'.

The substitution of verbal communication for visual definition echoes with an eighteenth-century ideal of unity. The planners who focus on making people talk about goals, mutual difficulties, and everyday frustrations seek to create communal solidarity. Their hope is that a sense of unity and common resolve will appear among people who have undergone endless nights of talk in rooms furnished with plastic furniture and lit with strong fluorescent light, the participants having drunk too much watery coffee out of papers cups and struggled to keep awake when it is not their turn to talk. Few planners who have pursued this path in the last generation would want to argue that 'the people' best know their own needs; whether or not that is true, it is beside the point. In a society threatened by passivity and withdrawal, to encourage ordinary citizens to talk about social realities is to make the speakers care about one another, or so it is hoped. The old educators would have recognised in this new attitude to 'communication' their values of cultivation and *Bildung*. The point of this verbally-oriented planning is also organic: to achieve solidarity through talk.

The wholeness the Enlightened man looked for he too sought to hear; he believed in the beneficent powers of freely flowing discourse; his coffeehouse (these places were only for men) was where he sought to hear unity. There was a reason for this talk. People came to find out what was happening in the city; a Londoner or Parisian in search of news went in search of coffee. Any stranger had the right to sit and join in the talk, the room awash in tobacco smoke but not in alcohol fumes, as 'libations' were thought to slow the tongue rather than loosen it. The coffeehouses of the Enlightenment were the places where political parties met; these chatting rooms were the original seats of insurance companies like Lloyd's of London, whose members needed to know everything to calculate their risks. Planners of 'communication' are in search of some kind of modern replacement for the coffeehouse.

The Christian city put great value on the inside – on shelter within buildings as on inner experiences.

The Enlightenment city sought to take people outside but on to fields and forests rather than streets filled with jostling crowds. If the Christian pilgrim had difficulty relating his faith in God to the parade of human differences on a street, so the Enlightened planner found it difficult to reconcile his faith in nature with an urban crowd. The reason the polarities matter today is because of what lies in between. Our society is subject to enormously varied and complex stimuli in economic, political, and erotic life. Yet both the codes of inwardness and unity which have shaped our culture make it difficult to cope with the facts of diversity. We have trouble understanding the experience of difference as a positive human value.

This general difficulty is particularly urgent among those who are engaged in urban and architectural design. The planners who have devoted themselves to Enlightened forms of 'communication' work are experts in *Gemeinschaft*. In the face of larger differences in the city they tend to withdraw to the local, intimate, communal scale. Those who work visually and at a larger scale find it as difficult to organise diverse urban scenes as did the younger John Wood. The modern planner lacks visual precepts for how races might be mixed in public places, or how to orchestrate the zoning and design of streets so that economically mixed uses work well. It is equally obscure how to design house projects and schools that mix races, classes, or ages. Human diversity seems something beyond the powers of human design.

The Enlightenment bequeathed a peculiar, indeed surprising legacy to the modern world which has compounded this difficulty. The Enlightened ideal of wholeness has passed into the modern definition of the integrity of well-made things. Thus a conflict has arisen between buildings and people; the value of a building as a form is at odds with the value of a building in use. This conflict appears in some simple ways. It seems wrong to alter or change an old building with an addition at the side or new windows, because these changes seem to destroy the 'integrity' of the original object. Changing historical needs are seen as threats to the integrity of the original form, as though time were a source of impurity. Groups dedicated to urban preservation sometimes speak, indeed, of a city as though it ought to be a museum of buildings, rather than a site for the necessarily messy business of living.

Both the codes of inwardness and unity which have shaped our culture make it difficult to cope with the facts of diversity. We have trouble understanding the experience of difference as a positive human value.

The way buildings are constructed now contributes to this conflict. Buildings now are much less flexible in form than the rows, crescents, and blocks of the past. The life span of a modern skyscraper is meant to be forty or fifty years, though steel skeletons could stand much longer; service stacks, wiring, and plumbing are planned so that a building is serviceable only in terms of what it was originally intended for. It is much harder to convert a modern office tower to mixed uses of offices and apartments than it is to convert a nineteenth-century factory or eighteenth-century row-block to these uses. In this shortened time frame, the 'integrity of form' acquires a special meaning. The original programme for a building controls its brief lifetime of use. The physical urban fabric has thus become more rigid and brittle.

Our eighteenth-century ancestors never meant to bring a world of brittle buildings into being; nor, in the making of buildings, as in the making of constitutions, did they believe there was anything sacred about original intentions and first forms. They wanted, instead, the open window to arouse the public's enthusiasm. But in time the enthusiasm aroused by experiences of unity between inside and outside subsided; 'unity' came to refer to what objects were in *themselves*. The Enlightenment bequeathed to us the anti-social building, its visual values expected uses and changing needs. This is the unexpected consequence of the search for organic unity of form.***?!***

?! *If you really want design to express this diversity, design indeed fails. But, regarding design as a means to absorb diversity, contemporary metropolitan environment might just as well be deemed a success. In the cacophony of opinions, design needs to be non-specific lest nobody feels excluded. In terms of Edward Hall, this implies the necessity of distemic space, supported even by socio-biological arguments. To you, the mix in public space is a need; to others it is a horror. Does your criticism of the integrity of closed buildings relate to the socio-cultural necessity of distemy?*

The architecture that Sigfried Giedion celebrated, for example, is embedded in a tragic irony. The pursuit of the whole has revived the religious break between the spiritual and the worldly. The art of Mies van der Rohe is an art marking this divorce, and it is great art, greater certainly than the work of architects who have made a more conscious effort to reckon with their surroundings. It is forged from the architect's power to see coherence, to create unities, but these powers have passed across the fatal divide in our culture in which the whole becomes the self-sufficient, in which it achieves its integrity through becoming a thing unto itself. They arouse in others an intimate of absence, of untouchableness. This is our experience of the sublime. This religion of art is a faith fatal to those who design environments. For

***?!** Just briefly, why do we need to appreciate the experience of difference? Doesn't knowledge of difference suffice?*

the consequence of this faith is an even greater indifference to the everyday needs of people using buildings, an indifference to use equal to the negligence of Christian otherworldliness. The integrity of an object conflicts with the needs of generation after generation who must somehow contrive to live in it. The story the work of Mies van der Rohe tells, at its most troubling, is that what makes for great art no longer makes for conscience. Unity has lost its moral meaning.

New York should be the ideal city of exposure to the outside. It grasps the imagination because it is a city of differences par excellence, a city collecting its population from all over the world. Yet it is here that the passion of the Parisian poet – that desire for enhancement of stimulation and release from self – seems contravened. By walking in the middle of New York one is immersed in the differences of this most diverse of cities, but precisely because the scenes are disengaged they seem unlikely to offer themselves as significant encounters in the sense of a vivid stimulus, a telling moment of talking or touching or connection. The leather fetishist and spice merchant are protected by disengagement; the admirable women who have made lives for themselves near Gramercy Park are also disengaged, not those needy sort of Americans who feel they must tell you the entire story of their lives in the next five minutes; the junkies doing business are seldom in a mood to chat. All the more is this true – more largely – of the races, who live segregated lives close together, and of social classes, who mix but do not socialise. Nor are the chameleon virtues of the Chicago urbanists much in evidence: people do not take on the colours of their surroundings, the light-hued colours of otherness. A walk in New York reveals instead that difference from and indifference to others are a related, unhappy pair. The eye sees differences to which it reacts with indifference.***?!*** This reaction of disengagement when immersed in difference is the result of the forces that have created a disjunction between inner and outer life. These forces have annihilated the humane value of complexity, even in a city where differences are an overwhelming sociological fact. Sheer exposure to difference is no corrective to the Christian ills of inwardness. There is withdrawal

What is characteristic of our city-building is to wall off the differences between people, assuming that these differences are more likely to be mutually threatening than mutually stimulating. What we make in the urban realm are therefore bland, neutralising spaces, spaces which remove the threat of social contact: street walls faced in sheets of plate glass, highways that cut off poor neighbourhoods from the rest of the city, dormitory housing developments.

and fear of exposure, as though all differences are potentially as explosive as those between a drug dealer and an ordinary citizen. There is neutralisation: if something begins to disturb or touch me, I need only keep walking to stop feeling. Moreover, I suffer from abundance, the promised remedy of the Enlightenment. My senses are flooded by images, but the difference in value between one image and another becomes as fleeting as my own movement; difference becomes a mere parade of variety. This display of difference on the street obeys the same visual logic, moreover, that ruled the construction of the first Modern interiors. These scenes are sequential and linear displays of differences, like the rooms in a railroad flat. Linear, sequential distinctions are no more arousing outside than they were inside. A New York street resembles the studio of a painter who has assembled in it all the paints, books of other artists, and sketches he will need for a grand triptych that will crown his career; then the painter has unaccountably left town.

Writers like Hannah Arendt and James Baldwin represent two poles of response to indifference. At one pole the subjective world is shunted aside so that people can speak to each other directly, resolutely, politically. At the other pole subjective life undergoes a transformation so that a person turns outward, is aroused by the presence of strangers and arouses them. That transformation requires the mobilising of certain artistic energies in everyday life.

The Renaissance man and woman literally saw time take shape in everyday life in the city; these shapes corroded human effort, as in the clock and clock-labour, or threatened the city, as in the cannon and its relation to the safety offered by the city's walls. The people who lived through the advent of these inventions deduced a new force beyond their control: *Fortuna*. Their lives came to be a struggle against the machine goddess of time. More than the forms of the star-shape city or the empty volume of the square in which a public clock has been placed, it is the character of their struggle that speaks to the present. If Le Corbusier's celebration of gleaming machines was foolish, a more humane kind of form-

making – one like Leger's – has to acknowledge that in using and fragmenting and pasting together forms, the maker of them is engaged in a spiritual struggle against him or herself. It is a struggle against the human power to annihilate through regulatory order, to be sure; but if and when one wins this struggle, a person makes things of no permanent value, no ultimate worth, only present meaning. This humane, limited value occupies, as it were, only a small corner of our imaginative and intellectual powers – the humane construction is a small building in a larger city of beliefs, truths, regularities, clarities, and guarantees. The humane is so much less than what people are capable of. That is what we are struggling for – not fulfillment but to be less than we could be.**?!** Against the regulation of time in space, I will therefore propose another form for time in space, which I shall call narrative space – a more limited relation of time and space than the grand unity Sigfried Giedion sought, but one capable of guiding more humane urban design. Spaces can become full of time when they permit certain properties of narratives to operate in everyday life. I will try to show how the narrative properties of space give value to two elements in the city, walls and borders. The experiencing of these elements as narrative scenes is not very satisfying, not very fulfilling, yet embodies humane cultural values.

__?!__ You are an expert in the psycho-pathology of modern life. You describe urban space as a symptom of our obsessions. Space appears to possess great heuristic power in this field. But will the fight against that symptom offer a therapy for the obsession itself, i.e. for the negative consequences of an entire offensive of civilisation?

How, then, to return to the original question about invention and discovery, does a planner invent ambiguity and the possibility of surprise? He or she needs to think in terms of what visually will make for a narrative beginning. To create the sense of beginning, a radical change will have to occur in the framework of urban design. The change must take two forms: a change in the way urban open space is dealt with and a change in the way buildings are made. The open space issue is a matter of boundaries. A boundary cannot serve as wall, because this kind of enclosure is literally deadly: the life of the enclosed place ends when the designer lays down his or her pen. Time begins to do the work of giving places character when the places are not used as they were meant to be. For instance, just as children make the loading docks serve as playgrounds, adults on Fourteenth Street appropriate parking strips for sociable spaces. For the person who engages in this unanticipated use, something 'begins' in a narrative sense. To permit space to become thus encoded with time, the urbanist has to design weak borders rather than strong walls. For instance, a planner hoping to encourage the narrative use of places would seek to lift the burden of fixed zoning from the city as much as possible, zoning lines between work and residential districts, or between industrial and office workplaces. An architect seeking to create a building possessed on narrative power would seek one whose forms were capable of serving many programmes. This means spaces whose construction is simple enough to permit constant alteration; walls of brick are such weak boundaries, walls of plate glass are not. In a novel the beginning erases and effaces; space also comes to life in the present tense by being used to erase and efface – by acts of displacement.**?!** Faced with the fact of social hostility in the city, the planner's impulse in the real world is to seal off conflicting or dissonant sides, to build internal walls rather than permeable borders. Highways and automobile traffic, for instance, are used to subdivide different social territories in the city; the river of racing machines is so swift and thick that crossing from one territory to the other becomes virtually impossible. Similarly, functional disaggregation has become a technique for sealing borders; the shopping mall that is far from tracts of housing, the school on its own campus, the factory hidden in an industrial park. These techniques, which originated in the garden city planning movement to create a peaceful, orderly suburb, are now increasingly used in the city centre to remove the threat of classes or races touching, to create a city of secure inner walls.

The borders in fiction show what is lost in urban planning of open space by treating borders as though they were walls. People who live in sealed communities are diminished in their development. The wounds of past experience, the stereotypes which have become rooted in memory, are not confronted. Recognition scenes that might occur at borders are the only chance people have to confront fixed, sociological pictures routinised in time. It is only in crossing a boundary when people can see others as if for the first time. This experience of displacement and resistance we have in art and lack in urban design. The legacy of the Renaissance experience of time and space is an unexpected one: the humanism of the Renaissance suggests that the sense of 'natality' of which Hannah Arendt speaks, that same desire for present-tense life appearing in the designs of Le Corbusier and Leger, depends upon understanding the relation between places and events as in a narrative, a narrative fashioned around transgression and recognition, a narrative which evolves as people cross borders. The planner of a modern, humane city will overlay differences rather than segment them, and for the same reason. Overlays are also a way to

__?!__ Don't you take it too far? The narrative you advocate seems to be restricted to space and the demarcation of that space. Wouldn't the narrative be more profound if the architect himself manipulates the programmes; especially since you feel that architecture should embrace the programme as flexible as possible? In other words: could your proposal transcend the domain of representation and deal with the content of its programme directly?

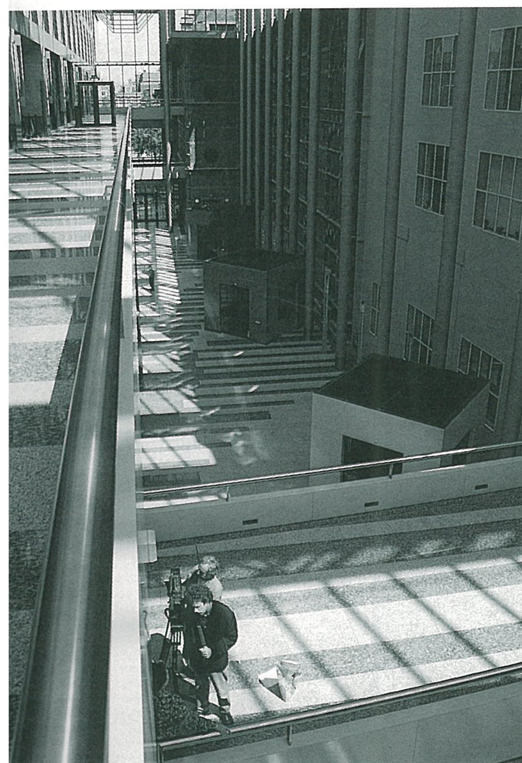
***?!** When a culture is swamped by 'awareness-campaigns' (Environment, Racism, Aids, Sexual harassment, The Other at large), one experiences a growing desire to transform this awareness into a sense of meaning: a condition in which the various 'awarenesses' stop the infighting for the public's goodwill in order to provide this awareness with a certain ring of self-evidence. How can we transform your plea from a sacrosanct endeavour into a naturally operational notion of the other?*

form complex, open borders. Displacement rather than linearity is a humane prescription. This connection between the visual and the social focuses on the experience of limits; it is not, however, an ethos of weakness. Rather, Hannah Arendt's affirmation of the virtue of impersonality, the frustrations of catharsis and identity which appear in James Baldwin's essay *The Fire Next Time*, Serlio's invention of a scene of tragic limits, Leger's painting of the limits of how long things last, the restlessness of the outdoor pilgrimage planned by Sixtus V – all these point to a certain form that life can take in the dimension of the outside, an engagement with difference, an acceptance of impermanence and chance. The Christian dimensions must today be reversed in their value. The inside has come to be a destructive dimension; to flee within, in search of the permanent, the precise, and the guaranteed, is destructive. The outside could be the constructive dimension, as Baudelaire hoped. What the humanist tradition makes clear is that something like a tragic space will give the outside its constructive life, rather than this life coming from the relieving, urbane pleasures sketched by Constantin Guys, or the pleasures of leafy wholeness which animated the age of Thomas Jefferson. Against the expression of the permanent and the precise, the immediate and the imperfect: a contrast between sacred and secular vision. This secular vision implies as well a certain way of making the things which are to be exposed.

A. Bonnema, Headquarters Nationale Nederlanden insurance company, Rotterdam, 1992

The artistic creations of ambiguity challenge what seems a humane idea of relationship in urban design, the idea of designing in context. A design made in the context of other designs seems a sociable creation; it refers to the buildings around it. Quite modest acts of design can make this friendly gesture. In renovating a row of townhouses, for instance, one might keep the doors that were originally used while changing the windows that give directly onto the street, since ground floors work differently now than three or four generations ago. In adding new buildings, one might keep to the height of old ones, even though one does not keep to the same register of floor heights or windows. Such designing in context is like the work that goes on in a live street, a matter of negotiating and balancing. Its principle is change by mutation. In the awareness of differences of time expressed in space, in the respect for what others have done, *context* seems the key word in thinking of how to design a city of difference. Yet spaces regulated according to these gentle principles are not arousing the way an Avedon photograph or Ashbery poem is. Life on the modern street involves the capacity to provoke uncertainty, as well as to account gently the presence of others. This is the art of exposure.

I have used the words 'tragic' and 'humane' to evoke certain qualities of experience. These qualities have to do with the relations people sense among themselves once they are no longer protected, once they are outside. The life of a street is the urban scene par excellence for this exposure, it becomes a humane scene simply when people begin to look around and adjust their behaviour in terms of what they see – a scene of mutual awareness.***?!*** But this awareness can have, as we have traced it, a deeper structure. Turning outward implies a renunciation of certain impulses to wholeness and completion in oneself. Turning outward visually can also lead to renouncing wholeness and completion, or lead instead to another order of probing, restless vision; this is the story first told in the Renaissance when perspectival vision was applied to the making of streets. Turning outward can lead to ways of seeing which make of the fragmented and the discontinuous a moral condition. The attractions of wholeness which are nearest us in time are those of the Enlightenment, but the pleasures of this age seem today much more distant, more foreign, than the sufferings of a much more ancient religious culture. All that is left of Enlightenment wholeness is the affirmation of the integrity of artistic objects, these plans and buildings which have acquired rights against those who must use and inhabit them.



Pi de Bruijn, House of Parliament, The Hague, 1992

Action without the need of completion, action without domination and mastery: these are the ideals of a humane culture. In the very rejection of the cathartic event; the moment of fulfilment, these ideals might seem to lack an essential dimension of tragedy, which is its heroic scale. Heroic tragedy appears in the Greek dramatists, in Shakespeare or Dostoevsky. The limits on a person's control of the world stand revealed in this struggle. Tragedy can also be experienced as something 'far less grand and mythic but more pervasive immediate and intimate'.★ John Keats defined the more immediate experience of tragic vision, in a letter to his brother, as 'negative capability': 'when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.' On a heroic scale, tragedy consists in knowledge of self-limits gained searingly and in great pain; on Keats's more immediate scale, it implies knowledge that comes not through defeat, but rather in paying attention, contemplating differences.

★ Shoben, Edward Joseph Jr., *Lionel Trilling*, New York 1981, p. 216.