

3 Projects

Author(s): Robert Venturi

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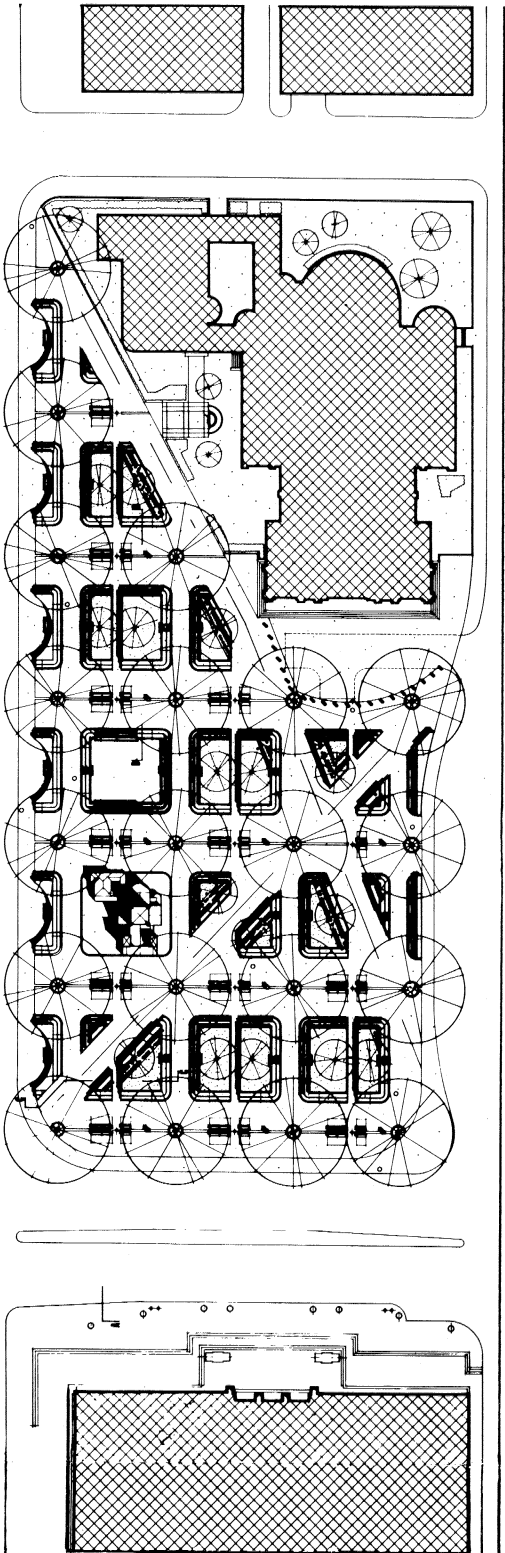
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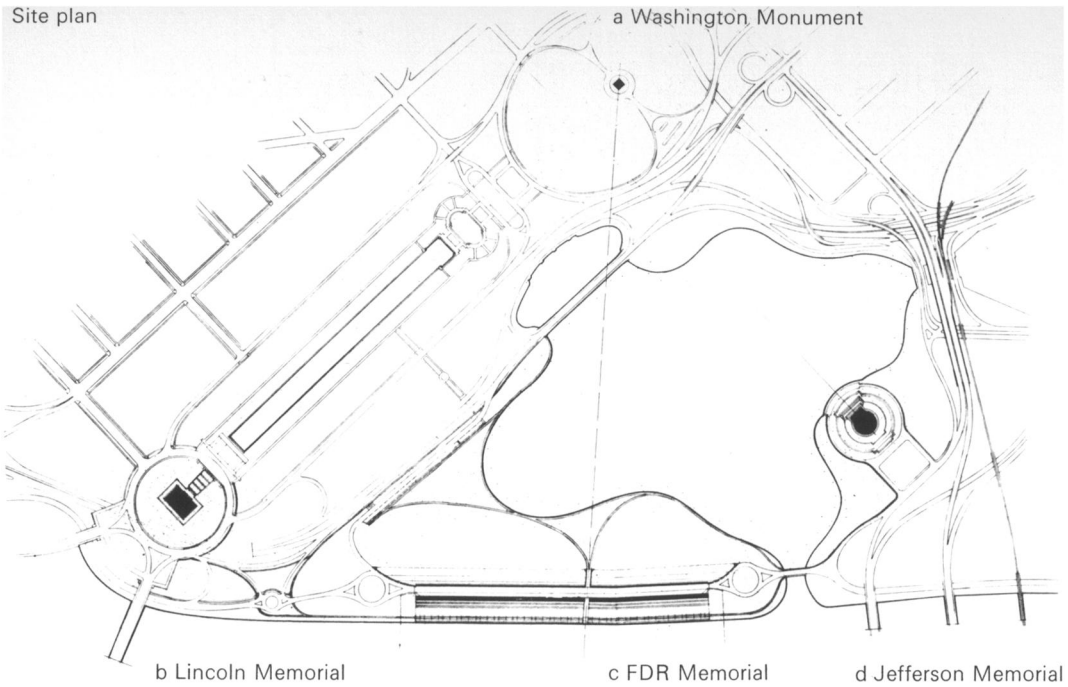
1 Architecture and landscape

2 Architecture and sculpture

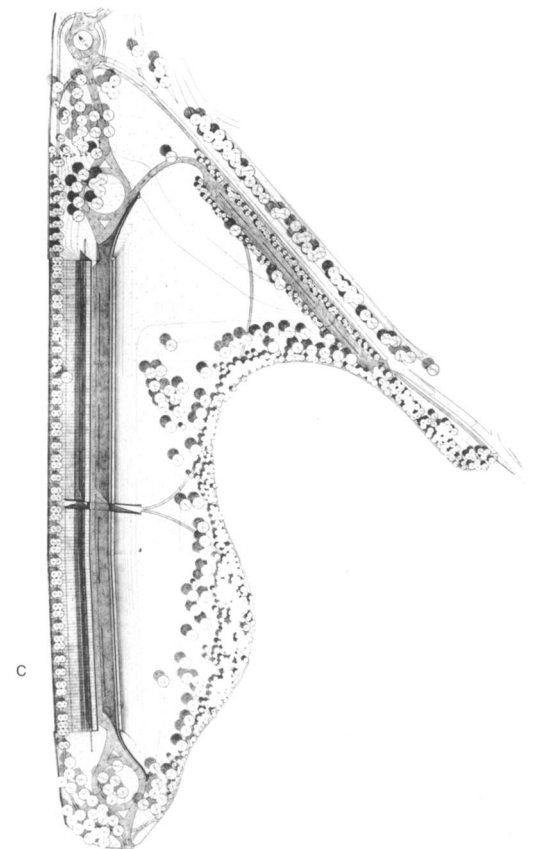
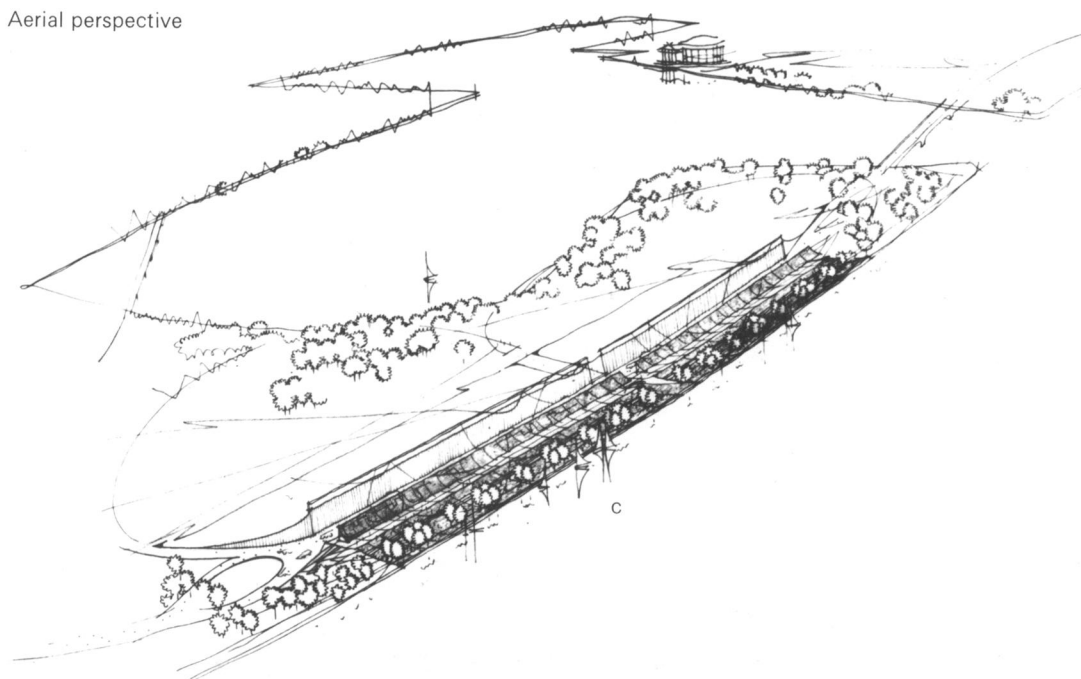
3 Architecture and city planning



All three projects are competition entries which didn't win, they all involve civic scale and they all are architectural hybrids: FDR Memorial project is architecture and landscape architecture; the Fairmount Park Fountain is architecture and sculpture and Copley Plaza is architecture and city planning.



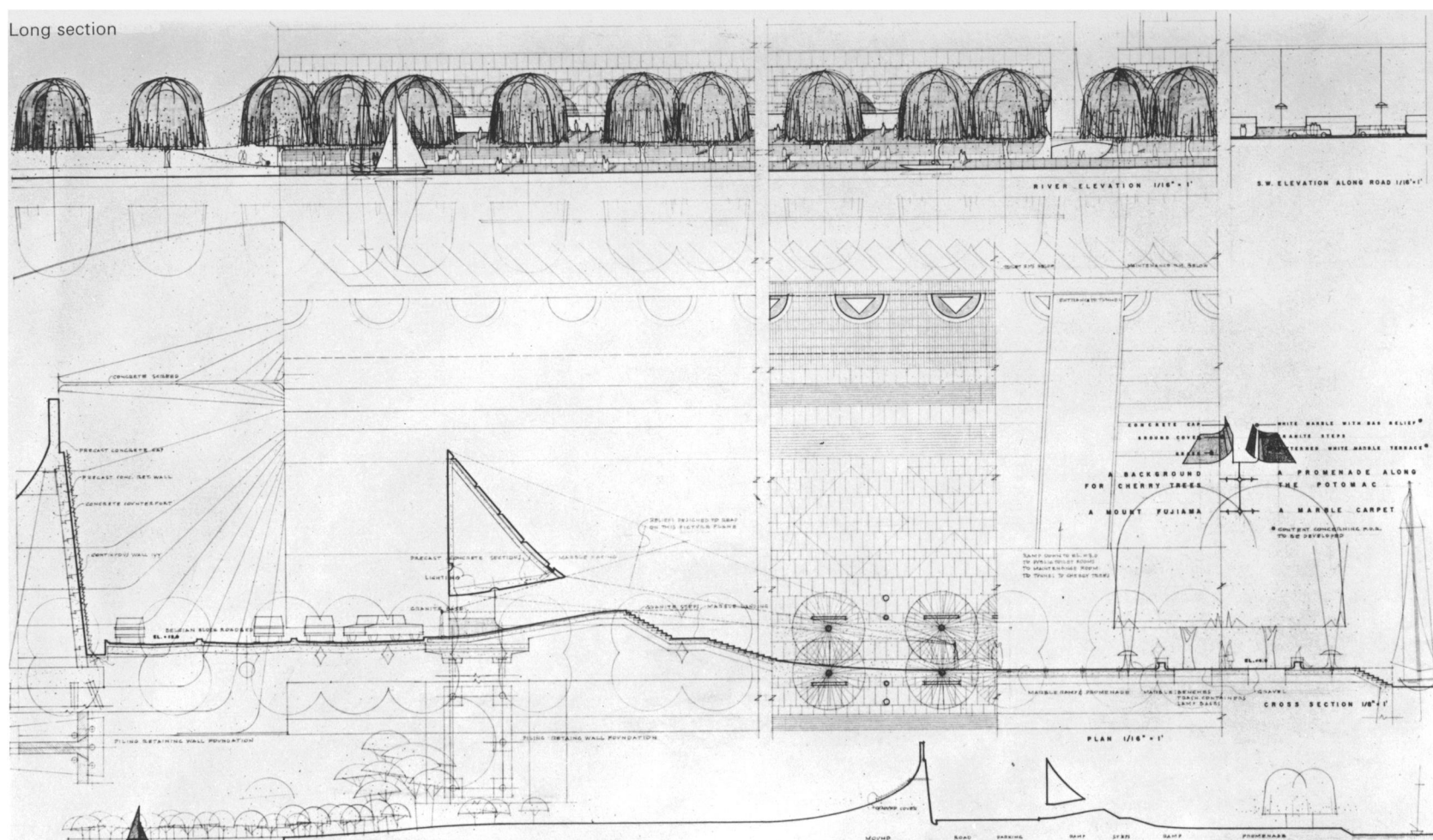
Plan



1 FDR Memorial Competition
 Robert Venturi, John Rauch, George Patton and
 Nicholas Gianopoulos, 1960

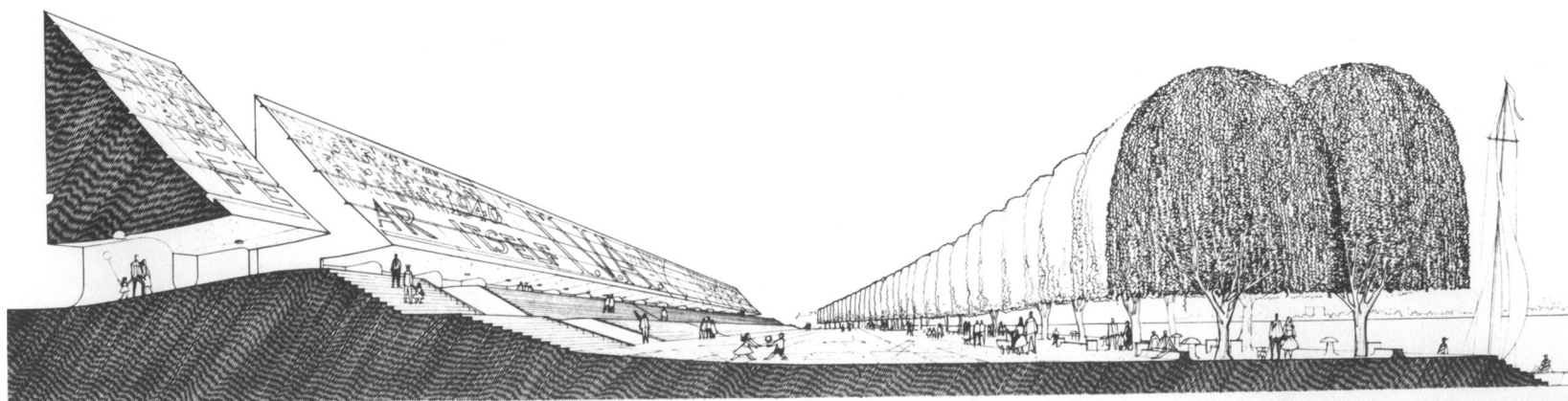
This is a directional earth form that contrasts with and thereby enhances the white sculptural forms of the three major Washington memorials already existing in the neighborhood. It is not a fourth sculptural form next to a parking lot. But it is several other things at once: an open, white marble promenade along the Potomac, which recognizes and utilizes the river's edge for pedestrians; an integral street, which accommodates the visitors' parking and is enclosed by canyon-like walls contrasting with the open avenues around; and, on the other side, it is a green grass mound which is a background for the cherry trees on the basin. The complex curve of the vertical section on the riverside accommodates a multiplicity of ramps, stairs and passages, and a surface in bas-relief, which is interesting closeup—yet by its extreme continuity,

suggested and actual, this curve contributes a scale appropriately monumental and visible from a distance. On the other side the continuous curve in section accommodates varying materials—grass, ground cover, vine and concrete cap in sequence and in relation to the varying degrees of the slope. A variety of spaces is afforded by the sequence of open park: tight vehicular canyon; close, pedestrian passage, and open directional promenade, which is, in turn, relieved by details like trees and benches, and at the middle on axis with the Washington obelisk, by a vision slit spanned by a little vehicular bridge.

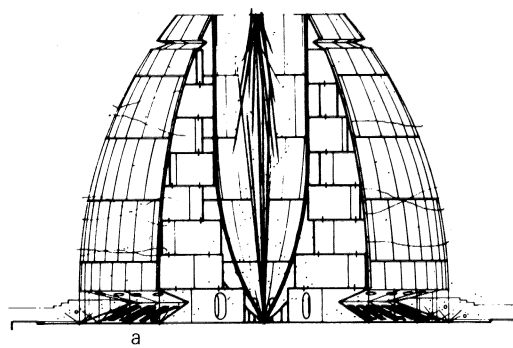
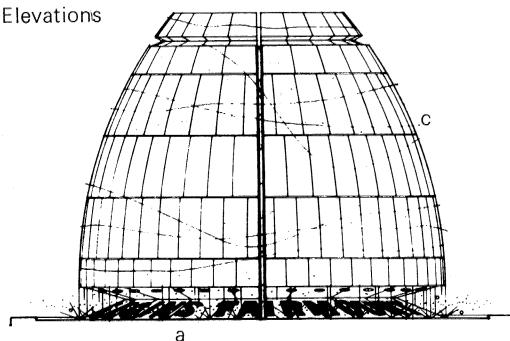


Cross section

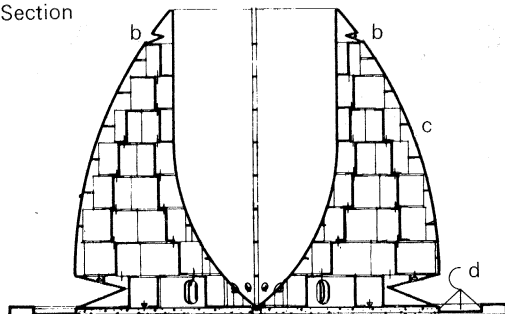
Section perspective



Elevations



Section

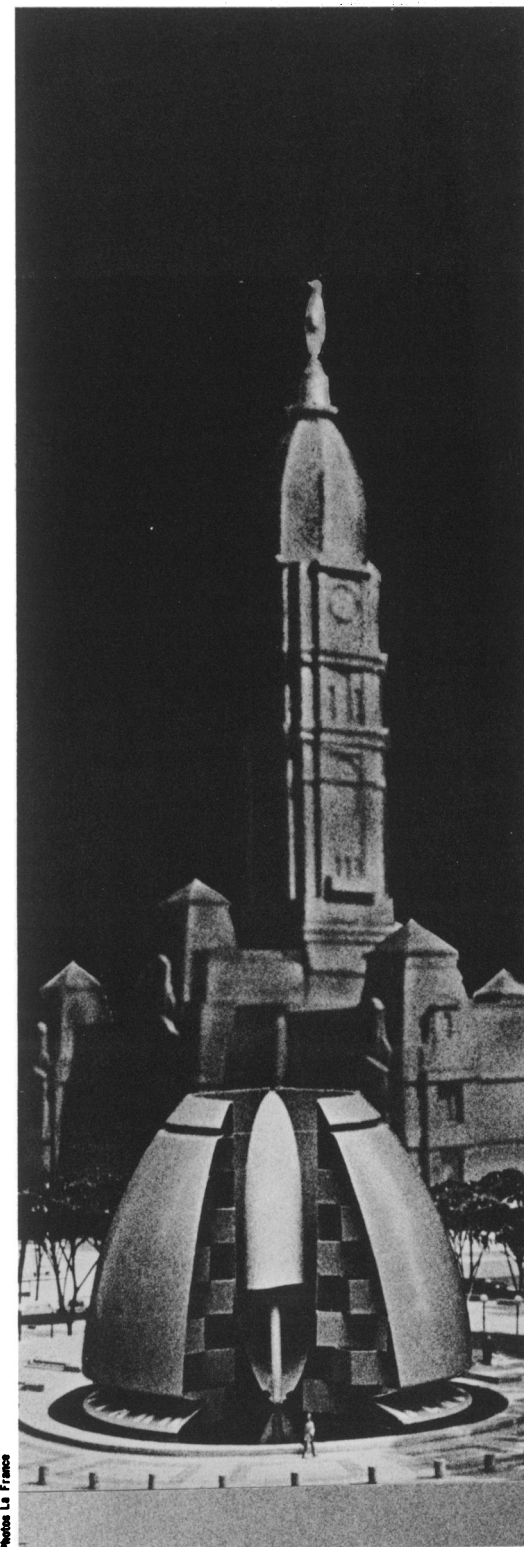
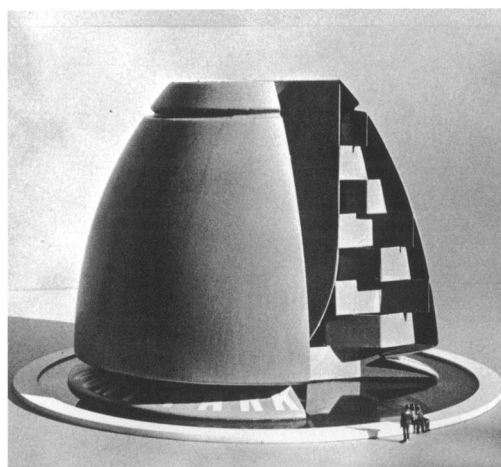
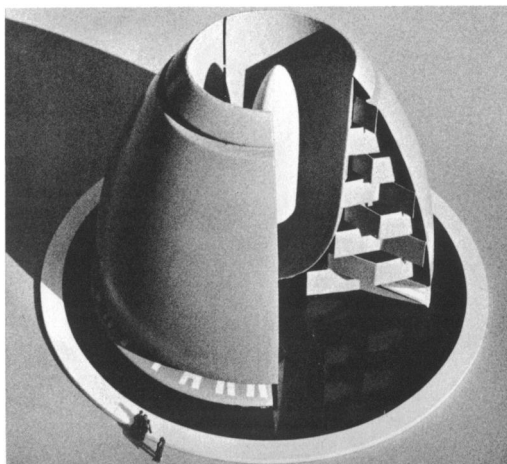


a Lettering : polished aluminum

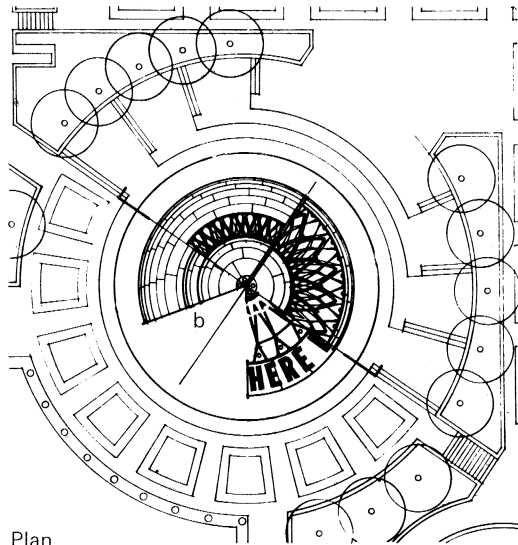
b Water supply line with multiple orifices

c Surface : sandblasted dark gray aluminum

d White granite veneer



2 Fountain Competition, Philadelphia
Fairmount Park Commission
 Venturi and Rauch, Denise Scott Brown, 1964



This fountain was to be located within the open city block that terminates the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in front of City Hall. The block is common to the gridiron plan of the center of the city and is surrounded by streets with plenty of local traffic. Beyond it, except along the through-axis to the Parkway, looms a jumble of high office buildings. The interior of the almost-square block contains an existing round pavilion called the Information Center. The landscaping and paving layout, including the 90-foot diameter basin for the fountain itself, were elements established by the competition program. The Benjamin Franklin Parkway is a boulevard whose axis is about a mile in length and diagonal to and intersecting with the normal gridiron plan of the city. It connects City Hall with the Art Museum and Fairmount Park beyond.

In the other direction it can also be considered an extension of the park into the center of the city because its green trees make a continuity with the park itself, and it is also under legal jurisdiction of the Fairmount Park Commission. The Parkway acts as an important arterial approach to the center of the city and focuses on the dominant form of City Hall—the field against which the fountain is to be viewed. City Hall is light in color, large in size and scale, and ornate in pattern and silhouette. These characteristics of space, form, scale, and circulation, which make up the context of the fountain, largely determine its form.

The form is big and bold so that it will read against its background of big buildings and amorphous space and also from the relatively long distance up the Parkway. Its plastic shape, curving silhouette and plain surface also contrast boldly with the intricate rectangular patterns of the buildings around, although they are analogous to some of the mansard roof shapes on City Hall. This was not to be an intricate Baroque fountain to be read only close up or from a car stalled in traffic.

But the action of the water itself, as well as the context of the surroundings, determines the particularities of the sculpture's form. The scale of the water's action matches that of the sculpture; the central jet is 60 feet high and relates to the scale as well as to the axis of the Parkway. Its constant stream is shielded from the prevailing wind by the concave, inner surface of the sculptural form. It is exposed only toward the Parkway, and it is set off by the dark background of the enclosure. From most parts of the plaza only the reverberations of the great jet within the misty and mossy artificial grotto are evident. The large aluminum shield corresponds to little glass shields that protect the flame from drafts in some kinds of old-fashioned candelabras.

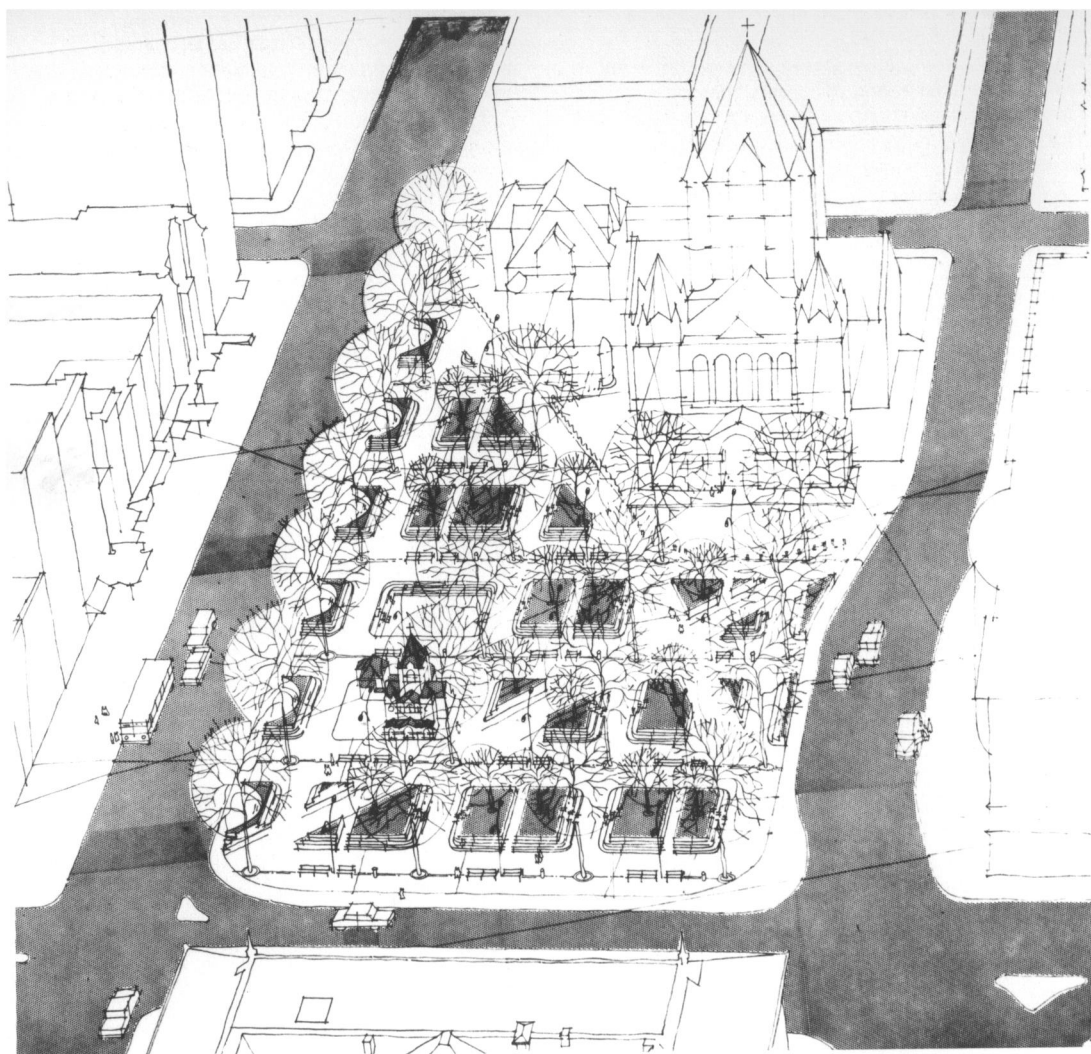
If the inner surface of the sculpture is concave to accommodate to the large-scale water action there, the outer surface is convex to accommodate to the small-scale water action outside. This consists of a constant sheet of water issuing from a weir near the top of the surface and continuously dripping from its lower edge into the pool. The legend **Here Begins Fairmount Park** is glimpsed through a screen of droplets. This waterfall, with the polished, elongated letters on the sloping surface of the base behind, relates to the scale of the individual walking around the immediate plaza and is designed to engage his interest.

Lettering is traditional on monuments. The legend designates the dramatic penetration of the biggest urban park in the world into the heart of the city. When the legend is read from the front elevation it appears to say **Park Here**, not inappropriately for a monument over an underground garage.

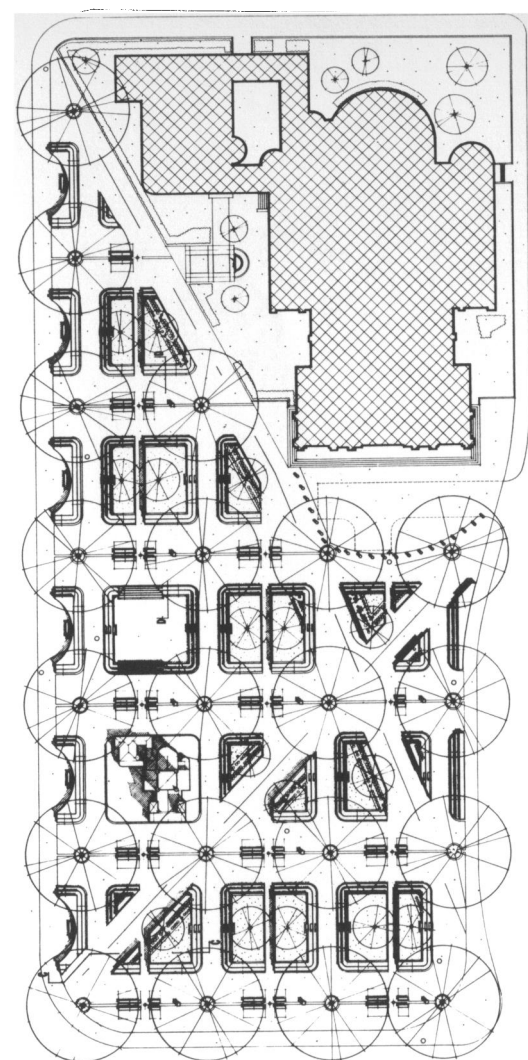
The central jet is spotlighted by quartz lamps recessed in the base. In the winter, when the jet is inactive, incandescent lamps with amber lenses flood the angular maze of the in-between core structure with yellow light. The central space is then dark. The angled base is flood-lighted by amber-lensed incandescent lamps. This continuous band contrasts with the looming dark body above, and at close range it illuminates the legend.

The material is aluminum to lighten the weight on the spans of the garage below. Its surface is sandblasted to promote a dark, mat, warm-gray finish. The sheets are welded, but the joints are not ground smooth. The structure is a skin structure with stacked, bent-plates inside (themselves bent into "Z" sections), which act both as spacers between the contradictory inside and outside silhouettes and as integral bracing, like the inner corrugations of laminated cardboard box sections. The geometry of the inner plates is angular, and it contacts the curvilinear surfaces of the outer plates at welded points. This airy **poche** is exposed at the openings of the enclosure, back and front. A series of vertical manholes for maintenance is located in the lower plates. These contribute a scale that contrasts with the monumental scale of the whole.

This fountain is big **and** little in scale, sculptural **and** architectural in structure, analogous **and** contrasting with its context, directional **and** nondirectional, curvilinear **and** angular in its form: it was designed from the inside out **and** from the outside in.

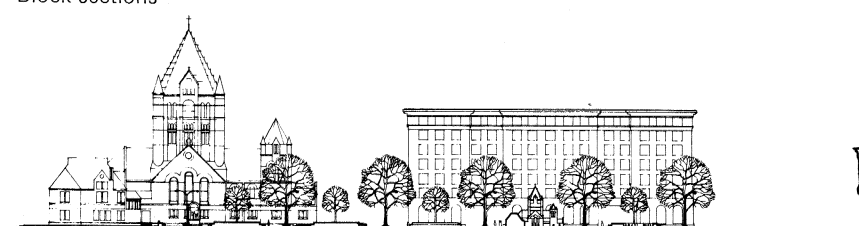


Aerial isometric



Plan

Block sections



3 Copley Square Competition

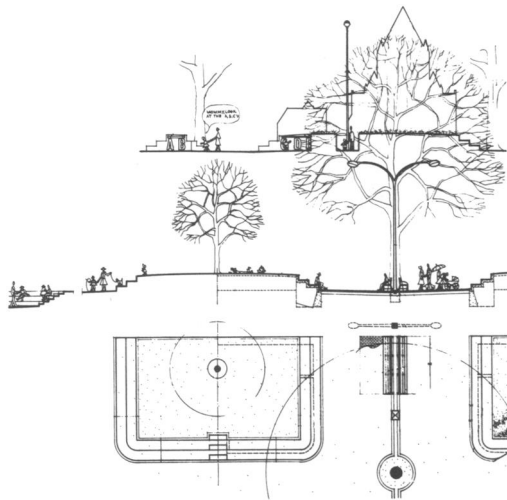
Venturi and Rauch, Arthur Jones and Gerod Clark, 1966

For a large open space in an American City, Copley Square in Boston is quite contained—on the south by the hotel, on the west by the Public Library, at the northwest corner by the new Old South Church and by the row of commercial buildings on the north. But the open corner toward the southwest where the diagonal Huntington Avenue is to be terminated and the leaking corner toward the southeast between Trinity Church and Copley Plaza tend to weaken the sense of enclosure. And toward the east the space is enclosed ambiguously by Trinity Church itself, which tends to sit in the square rather than along it. The varying heights, rhythms and scales of these buildings as well as the streets which separate them from the center of the space further diminish the spatial unity of the existing square.

which make more vivid the banality of the blacktop walkways and the precast concrete of the stepped block sections, gutters and drains. There is grass only on top of the blocks where it will receive a minimum of wear. Rows of flowers border the avenues atop the blocks to extend visually the width of the avenues. Where the blocks are cut through, the cheek walls have very bold inscriptions of nursery rhymes, etc. cast into the concrete to interest children who cannot see over the blocks.

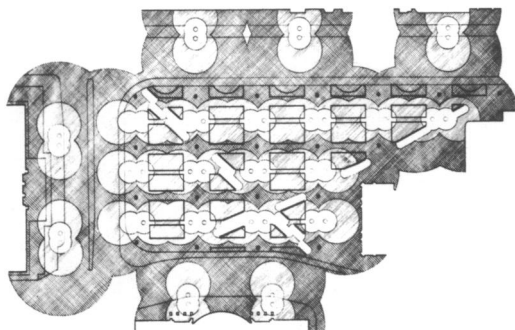
The grid of trees, lampposts and street furniture and that of the hierarchy of streets are out of phase with each other along the north-south axes. These slight irregularities of rhythms contrast with the violent irregularities which come from the juxtapositions of the diagonal avenues upon the gridiron pattern of the streets which are manifest, as I have said, in the residual, fragmentary blocks, triangular and polygonal in shape. Indeed, because of these contrapuntal juxtapositions of diagonals and the truncations at the borders almost no typical or pure blocks remain. And of these two are made exceptional. One block is reversed in section, that is depressed exactly in the manner that the typical ones are elevated in order to make a little piazza to sit in in contrast with the typical walks you sit along; the other is level to contain a miniature replica of Trinity Church. The fragmentary blocks along the north side, gouged out with niches to sit in, are further exceptions.

Sections



Plan

Night lighting diagram



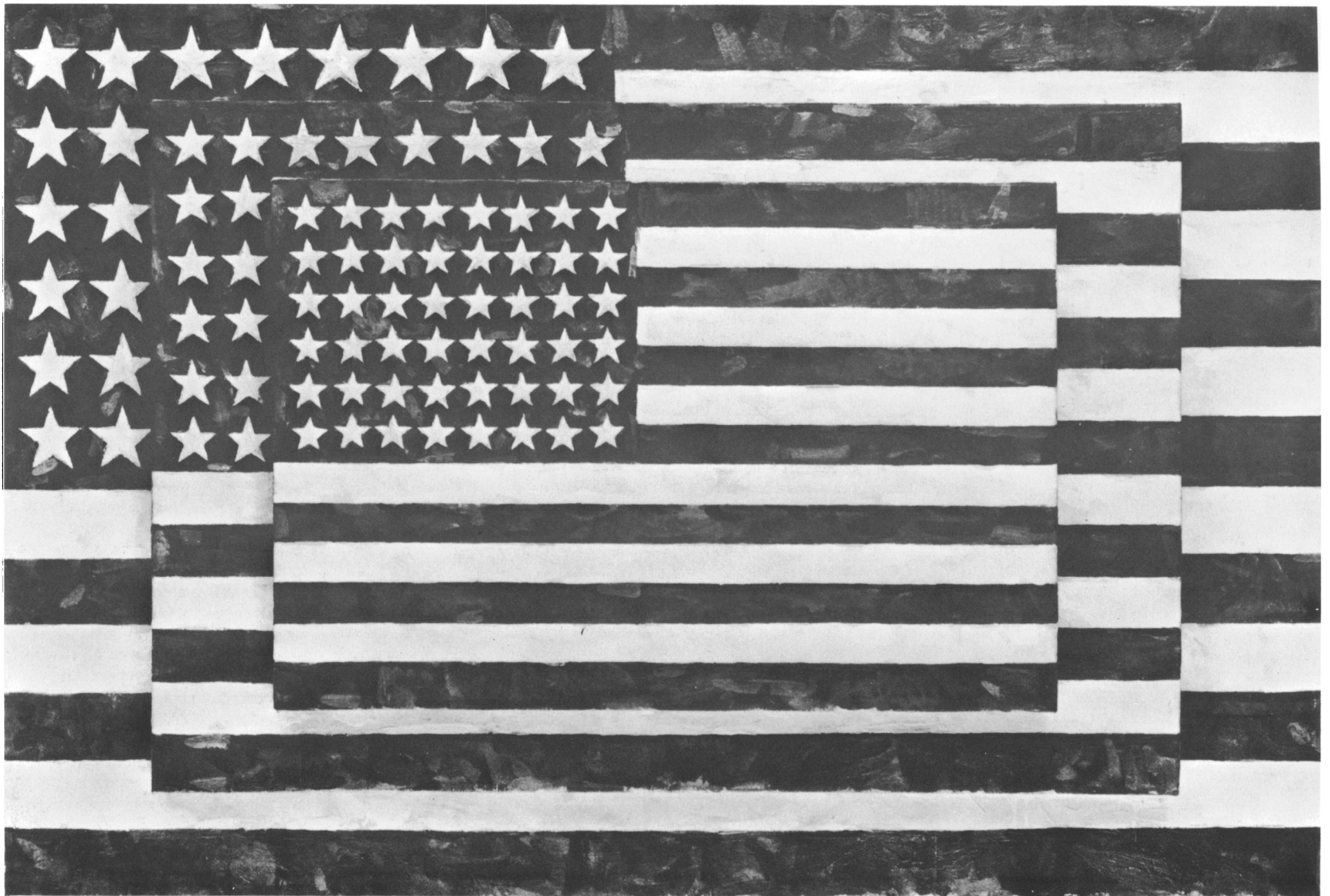
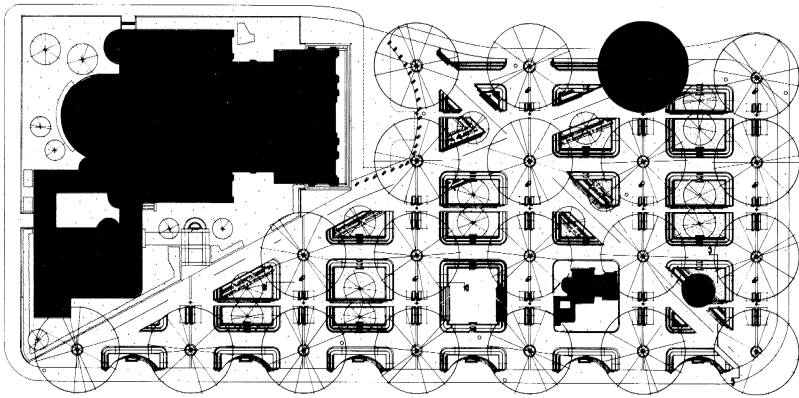
The rules of the competition confined the area to be designed within the block defined by the interior sidewalks of the three streets and the diagonal sidewalk along the northwest side of Trinity Church; of course, we could not change nor anticipate change in any of the disparate buildings around the space.

So we made a non-piazza; we filled up the space to define the space.

We filled it with non-dense matter, a consistent but rich grid of trees. These trees are too far apart to make a traditional bosque, yet too dense to be read as discrete elements. When you walk among them they are far enough apart to filter light with variety and to veil the church tantalizingly (you have to struggle to see the great facade), but from without, along the streets, they are a rigid form which defines the space and identifies the place. Their form as a whole however (unlike our fountain project for Philadelphia in a different kind of context) is not a sculptural form sitting in a space because that would compete with Trinity Church. It is an overall, three-dimensional repetitive pattern without a climax, separated from the surroundings by the border of streets and in contrast with Trinity Church, which at one level of focus, is accent enough in the whole composition. In the context of the "boring," consistent grid inside the square the chaotic buildings to the north become "interesting" and vital elements of the composition.

Besides the mosaic of trees and tall lampposts there is at a lower level a grid-order made up of stepped mounds about four feet high between walkways. This grid reflects in miniature the gridiron pattern of the part of Boston surrounding Copley Square. It imitates the hierarchy of streets, big, little and medium found in the real city. Like the real gridiron city it contains diagonal "avenues" which facilitate circulation and whose juxtaposition creates exceptional, residual blocks.

Within the blocks of the lower grid is another pattern of benches, trash cans, and drains in phase with the grid of trees and lampposts. This furniture, like the lampposts, is composed of conventional elements given new value by their new context. These "vulgar" elements are not specially designed; they are only thoughtfully chosen. (Compare these aluminum lampposts with the tastefully exotic, bronze-like anodized aluminum ones around the Green in New Haven.) Materials are similarly plain except for the precious brick areas under the benches



This play of exceptions to the order, slight or violent, creates tensions within the grid that contradict the boringness of the pattern. But there is a play of scale too which creates within the pattern a kind of monumentality as well as ambiguity and tension. It involves a particular relationship of size and proportion. The juxtapositions of streets of different size on the grid result in blocks of different size but similar proportion and a combination of trees, one big and two little within the grid pattern, makes for a similar relationship of elements of different size but same proportion. (This idea is anathema to orthodox Modern architects who hold that change in size means change in proportion to emphasize a structural basis for form and proportion [see Kepes]; they tend also to equate monumentality with relative bigness rather than with relations of size and proportion: in their view, ambiguities of scale are bad also. On the other hand Jasper Johns in his paintings juxtaposes conventional flags which are big, little and medium in size.) The species of trees was chosen with this in mind: the form of the mature Plane tree, about 60 feet in height, has a similar proportion to that of the mature Scholar tree, about 25 feet high. The element which most vividly exemplifies this idea is the replica in cast concrete of Trinity Church in front of Trinity Church.

There is a reason for this little replica and that of the gridiron "streets" too—a reason other than those reasons already mentioned affecting ambiguity, tension, scale and monumentality: the miniature imitation is a means for explaining to a person the whole which he is in but cannot see all of. To reassure the individual by making the whole comprehensible in this way within a part is to contribute a sense of unity to a complex urban whole. This kind of imitation in miniature involves as well an imitation of one aspect of life. To condense experience and make it more vivid is a characteristic of play: children play house; adults play Monopoly. In this square it is a simulation of urban circulation and space. The little church is play sculpture for children too.

Another characteristic of play which is lacking in Modern architect-designed urban spaces is the opportunity for choice and improvisation: that is for people to use the same spaces in many different ways including ways the spaces are not explicitly designed for. In a Victorian mansion there are probably more ways of using the eventful stairway than there are of walking through and sitting in a typical Modern square. When form follows function explicitly, the opportunities for implicit functions decrease. The grid, whether in the form and scale of the town plan on countryside of the American Midwest or the columned interiors of a mosque in Cairo or Cordoba, allows for improvisation and variety

of use. There are probably more ways to use this square which is "just a grid" than there are to use those interesting, sensitive, and human projects which won. And more important, there are more ways to see it. It is like the intricate pattern of a plaid fabric. From a distance it is an overall repetitive pattern—from a great distance, indeed, it is a plain blur—but close up it is intricate, varied and rich in pattern, texture, scale and color. (In this spatial plaid there is the added dimension I have mentioned, of slight and violent exceptions.) It is a question of focus: as one moves around and through the composition, he can focus on different things and different relationships in different ways and at different times. There are opportunities to see the same thing in different ways, the old thing in new ways. As there is not a single, constant accent—a fountain, reflecting pool or the great church itself, for instance, neither is there a single static focus when you move within and around the square. There is the opportunity for a variety of focuses, or rather, for changing focus. The main paradox of this design is that the boring pattern is interesting.

Violent juxtapositions of blurred and sharp focuses come from levels of relationships which relate more or less to the whole, or in complex compositions, to wholes within wholes. These changing relationships within complex wholes make for complex kinds of unity some of whose immediate interior relationships involve distinct disunity. Not all the relationships are always all right. I think "relating" buildings is an eighth crutch of Modern architecture which Philip Johnson could well add to his seven. Buildings like Trinity Church and the Boston Public Library don't have to be "related" in easy and obvious ways. And they shouldn't be because their relationships cannot be just immediate to the interior setting of the square, but to greater wholes outside themselves and their immediate setting. Our little grid from a distance (like the plaid pattern) is a big blur because of its consistency at this level of focus: it does not always relate close up and in detail therefore to the fine buildings around it. Richardson and McKim, Mead and White don't need that kind of explicit homage.

Another crutch of Modern architecture is the piazza compulsion derived from our justifiable love of Italian towns. But the open piazza is seldom appropriate for an American city today, except as a convenience for pedestrians for diagonal short cuts. The piazza, in fact, is "un-American." Americans feel uncomfortable sitting in a square: They should be working at the office or home with the family looking at television or perhaps at the bowling alley. Chores around the house or the weekend drive replace the *passeggiata*. The traditional piazza is for collective use as well as individual use and public ceremonies involving crowds are even harder to imagine in Copley Square than *passeggiate*. Our square is not an open space therefore to accommodate non-existent crowds (empty piazzas are intriguing only in early di Chiricos), but to accommodate the individual who comfortably walks through the maze and sits along the "streets" rather than in a "piazza." We are in the habit of calling open space precious in the city. It is not. Except in Manhattan perhaps, our cities have too much open space in the ubiquitous parking lots, in the not-so-temporary deserts created by urban renewal and in the amorphous suburbs around them.