Remarks on Continuity and Change
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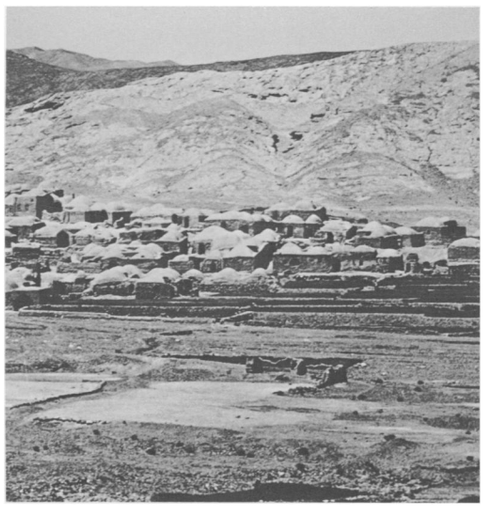
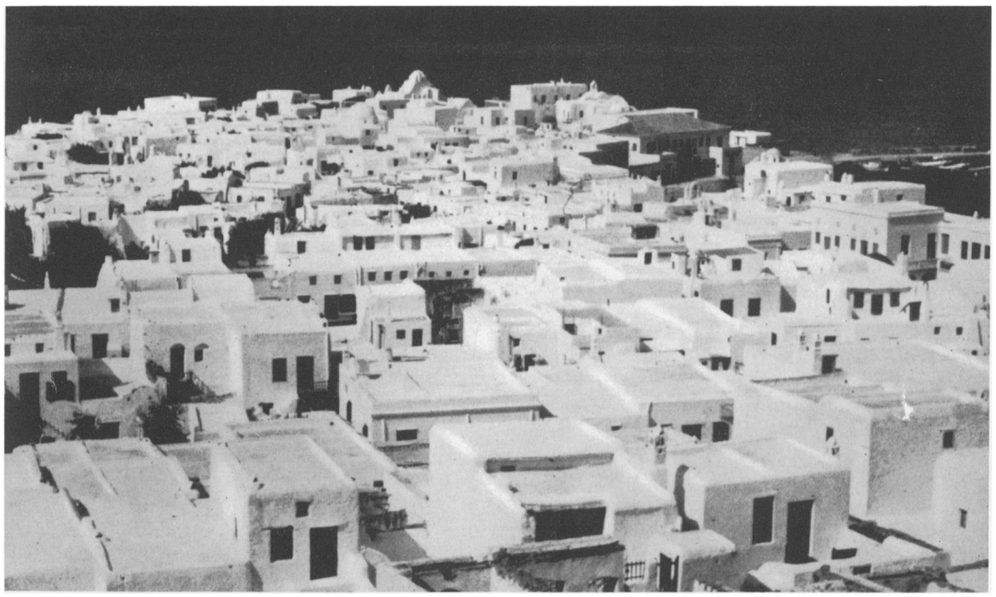


Five years ago I was commissioned to do a consulate in Tabriz, Iran. I was sent there to design the building and I came back by way of Athens and Mykonos. That journey was a turning point for me. And if I had to choose one word to define the architectural dimension that I saw in the Middle East, it would be the word *continuity*.

In order to understand how much the trip meant to me, you must understand my previous architectural state of mind. When I was at school, Corbu was our hero – the Corbu of the Villa Savoye and the Pavilion Suisse. However, Corbu was always one step removed, and we saw the International Style at first hand through Breuer, who had just come to join Gropius at Harvard. He was young and talented and a great admirer of Corbu. Breuer's own house in Lincoln was a revelation of a new world of light and space. You may remember the plan, with a two-story living room, a bedroom on a balcony, and a dining room a few steps down. I had never seen such fresh details and materials. I remember a great deal of white, mirrors beyond Japanese reed screens, a Scotch plaid bedspread, stone, huge sheets of glass, wicker, and chrome, more white walls, somewhere the first Breuer blue wall, an early Calder mobile, and sheer white curtains. I was dazzled by the sureness of this touch – Breuer's ability to combine totally dissimilar elements and materials and yet not crowd the space. And I felt that his architecture was somehow like the Paul Klee paintings in which disparate objects float in space – an arrow, a moon, a flower, a glass – all unrelated yet held together by their exact placement. This quality of tension and contrast seemed to be a true expression of our lives at that time.

The Harvard School continued to combine stone and wood and glass. As the years went by plastic skylights, folded roofs and other structural effects were gradually added to their repetoire in an easy-going unarchitectural way. But the promise of the Breuer living room was never fulfilled.



Instead, architecture became restless and uncertain; often busy and brittle. "Whither Modern Architecture" symposia were held at museums and schools, but the crystall ball remained obstinately cloudy.

Tabriz is neither brittle nor busy. It is true that there are Coca-Cola bottling plants and gas stations on the outskirts of Tehran, the capital, but these Western phenomena are minor in the total Persian scene. Tabriz is a northern outpost and was a major crossroads for caravans in the days of Marco Polo. The economy is essentially agrarian, and around Tabriz for hundreds of miles the little mud brick villages are self-sufficient and primitive. The soil is red-brown, so are the towns, and when the dust blows, so are the people. One is overwhelmed by the sense of time – the slow, unchanging cycle of life and death and work and worship. This same round, these same crumbling brick compounds existed a thousand years ago, and, indeed, one often sees mounds on the plains, vestiges of a buried village decomposing under the drifts of earth. It is as if the village were an organism, like a coral, growing by accretion, each dwelling modeling itself on its neighbor, each street widening and narrowing in a fluid way, as a river responds to currents. The individual does not count; society does. And in village architecture, whether in Persia, Africa, or Mykonos, society is the unit, not the individual. Any single building in the village is conditioned by what is around it and what came before. As society is continuous, so is the architecture.

Surely, there is a place and a need for continuity of this kind in Western culture and architecture. We live in a society that is fragmented, fugitive, and often shallow. We practice architecture in a highly competitive, building-by-building way that is frequently without significance.

In architectural terms continuity means the use of fewer materials; an emphasis on what is alike, not on what is different; the elimination of unnecessary

articulation; the use of land without the wholesale use of the bulldozer. It means designing with respect for adjoining buildings – their scale and color and mood, with respect for the spaces between buildings, realizing that this space may be important in the buildings themselves; finally, it means thinking of each building as part of a process, not as a world unto itself. It is interesting that continuous architecture, which, I suggest, is the architecture of society, has many parallels with Kiesler's "continuum," an architecture which, I believe, he relates to the psychological needs of the individual. You know Kiesler's "endless," house, where the walls and floor and ceiling curve together as one continuous space, and where space is not fractured and parceled out, but is likewise continuous. There is much in common between the curving womblike piazza in the heart of medieval Sienna and the womblike living room in Kiesler's house. Both spaces are organic in form and both relate to basic human needs. Equally strong is the parallel between Kiesler's architecture and that of an African village.

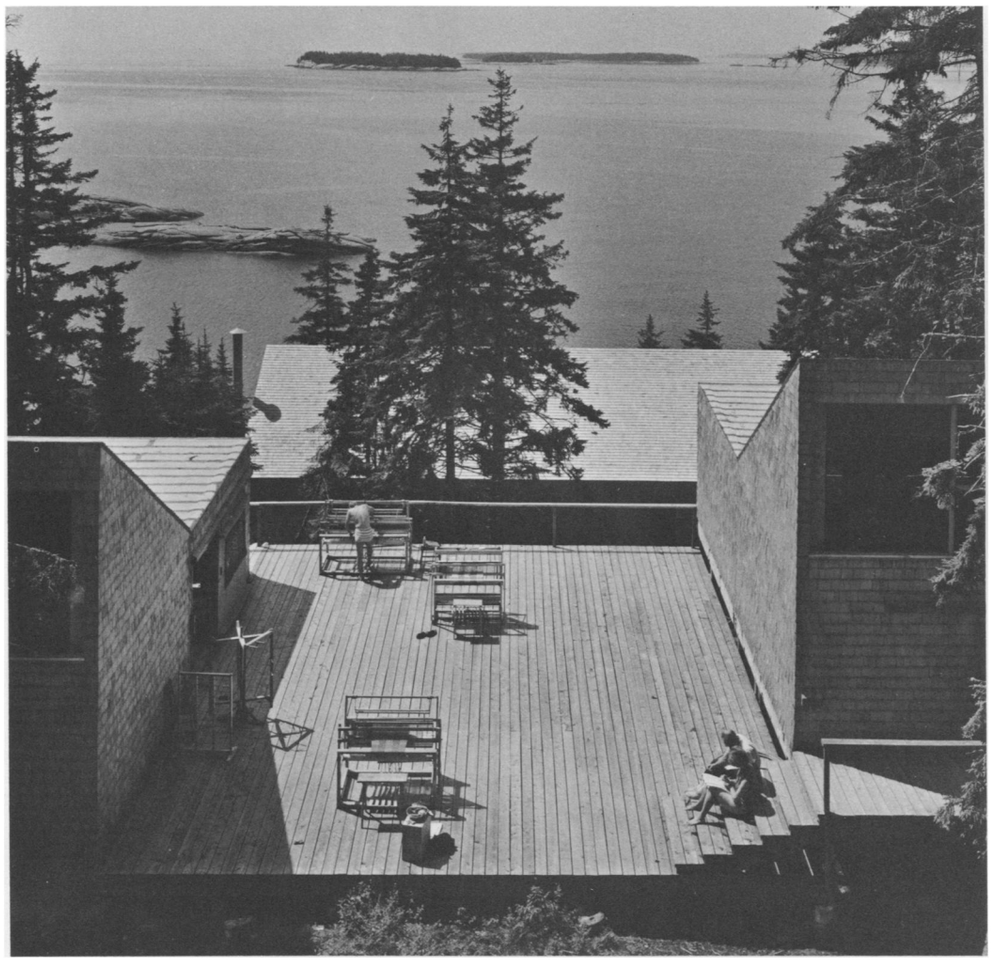
When I emphasize the need for continuity in architecture you may imagine that I am hopefully promoting the idea of a plastic city where walls, floors, ceilings, streets, and landscape all flow together organically. In fact, I am arguing for architecture which is in harmony with its environment, assuming the environment is not a no man's land or a slum. And I am arguing for the unified statement.

To describe briefly a few examples of my work in this direction: Haystack School (1-6) is built on a great shelf of granite pitching south into the ocean. The design grows out of this slope. That is its strength.
The Tabriz consulate (7-10) is designed in one material, brick, with a variety of domes and vaults. The impact of the design lies in the simplicity of the statement.
The St. Paul's School (11-14) dormitories reinforce an old street line and continue the scale of adjacent Victorian buildings. That is the central idea of the scheme.

All three of these designs show continuity. Yet all three, I think, have their own inner force. It seems to me, as I look around, that many architects are showing an interest in continuity. Perhaps this is a symptom of particular need in the 1960s. The day of putting architecture on a pedestal is over. No architect is an island. And let us hope that the days of what Philip Johnson calls "Urban Removal" are over, too. It is time for planners and architects with a sense of continuity to consider the past and use their tremendous powers to make some really beautiful city spaces.

"Speaking of continuity," you will say to me, "what do you think of Corbu's Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard? Do you think it should have been brick and rectangular and parallel to the sidewalk? And do you think it's kind to its neighbors? Does it make a beautiful street? In short, do you think Corbu gives a damn about continuity?"

These are pertinent questions, for the Carpenter Center, like the Guggenheim, defies its surroundings. The Guggenheim, as you know, was designed to cantilever well over the legal building line. Later, in order to get a building permit, Wright had to tighten the coil of his spring and pull it back into the lot. As a result, the building has a bulging, corseted look which is doubly menacing to the vacuous oatmeal-colored apartment buildings around it. Carpenter Center does not have the problem of being too large for



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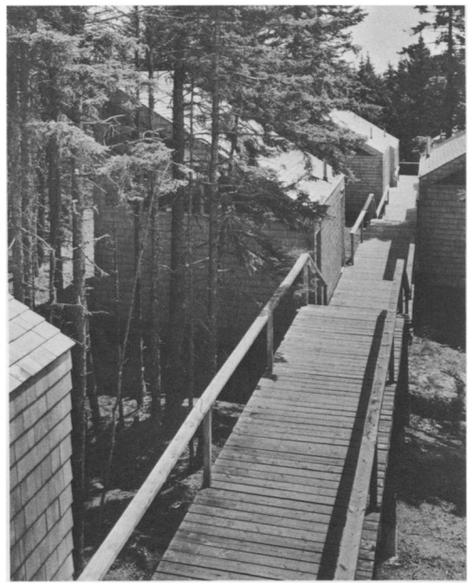

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the lot, but, like the Guggenheim, the forms and materials are in dynamic opposition to the mild Cambridge background – the Fogg, the Faculty Club, and President Pusey's gateway. Suddenly, with a complete disdain for the shade of the elm trees and the warm-textured brick next door, one sees curving concrete surfaces advancing and receding, a sweeping diagonal ramp, a cavernous entrance, and glittering details.

Both of these buildings, the Carpenter Center and the Guggenheim Museum, are in revolt. Both have an inner thrust that dominates the form. And I think it particularly fitting that the grand pioneers, Corbu and Wright, continue to shock the complacent, and create buildings which represent change, not continuity.

Of course, we know that Corbu has shown profound awareness for continuity, particularly in his Catholic work at Ronchamp and La Tourette. And we know that Wright has a deep understanding of the environment, of the continuity between nature and architecture. And yet how much more important in their work is the inner thrust of each building – the architectural idea that gives such power and authority. Make no mistake. Architecture, no matter how "appropriate," no matter how "respectful" of its enviornment, and no matter how continuous it is with the sweep of history, is not great or even good unless it has this vibrant inside force.

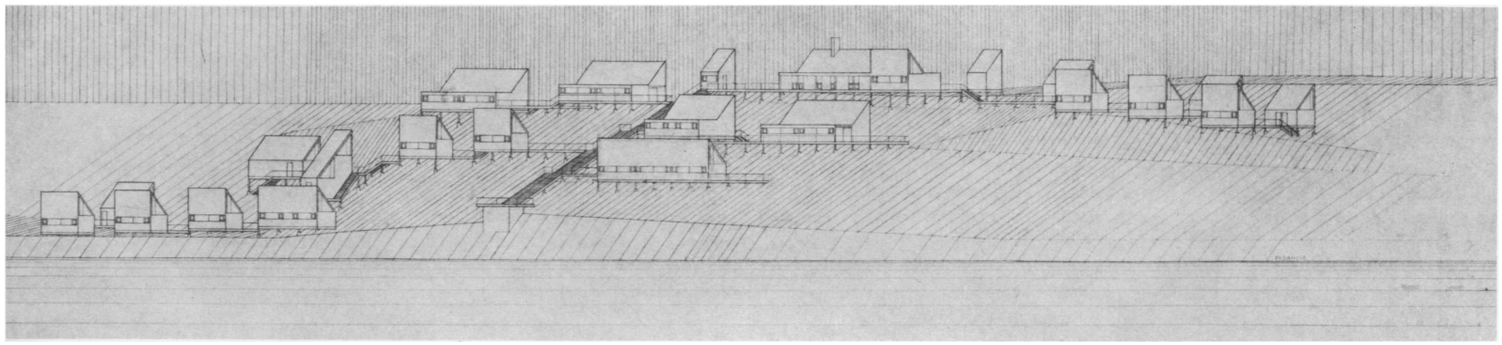
John Molloy, a recent graduate of Yale, who is now in my office, went around the world last year. When he got back I said, "Well, what did you think of Mykonos? Do you see now what I'm talking about – this continuity?" "If that's all there is to architecture," said he, "then we'll all be building piles of marshmallows." Good point. John's comment applies to countless "village" solutions to architectural problems from dormitories to schools, where the device of rambling, small scale units is an excuse for formlessness.

We can learn a great deal from organic villages like Mykonos, but this does not mean that we abandon the discipline and the form of positive ideas. One of the great advances in architectural history was on a day in 3,000 B.C., or around then, when a Sumarian king decided to build a step pyramid rising out of an organic village. Giedion makes the point that here, for the first time, the vertical dimension was employed. This, he says, was a vital new thought that changed the course of architecture.

So I submit that when we discuss the need for continuity, we must not overlook the vital need for change and even revolt.

It happens that I have worked in two cities, New Haven and Boston, where the problems of change and continuity have the direct attention of some of the best architects in the country. Here in New Haven, you are all familiar with the efforts of Kahn, Saarinen, Johnson and Rudolph. You can see that each relates his design in his own way, to the mood or color or scale of the surroundings. You also can judge to what extent each man is building architecture which is true to itself, that accommodates the past and points to the future. I know of no other building program where the combination of environment with a very strong mood and architects with strong consciences has produced so many interesting variations of continuity and change.

In Boston, under the leadership of Ed Logue, director of the Boston Redevelopment Authority,



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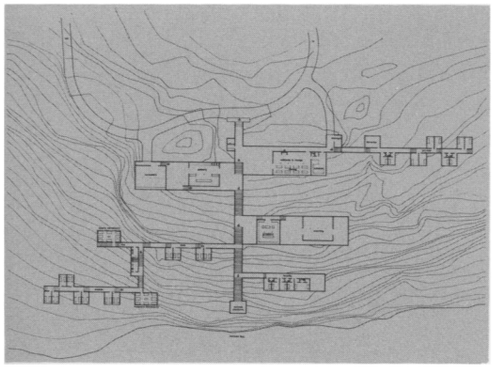

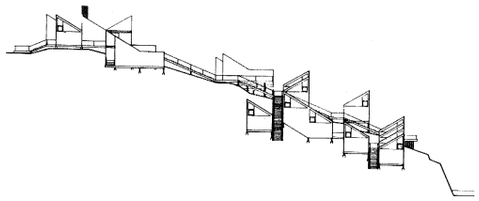

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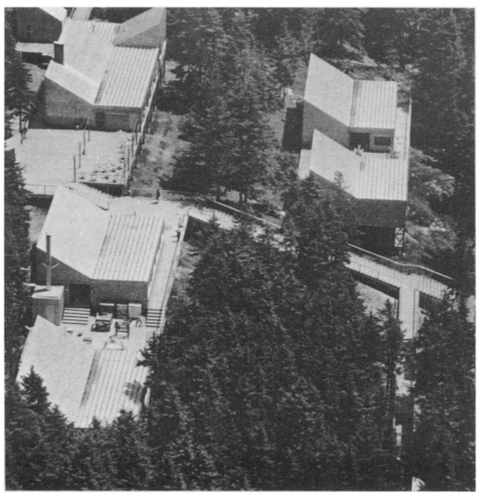

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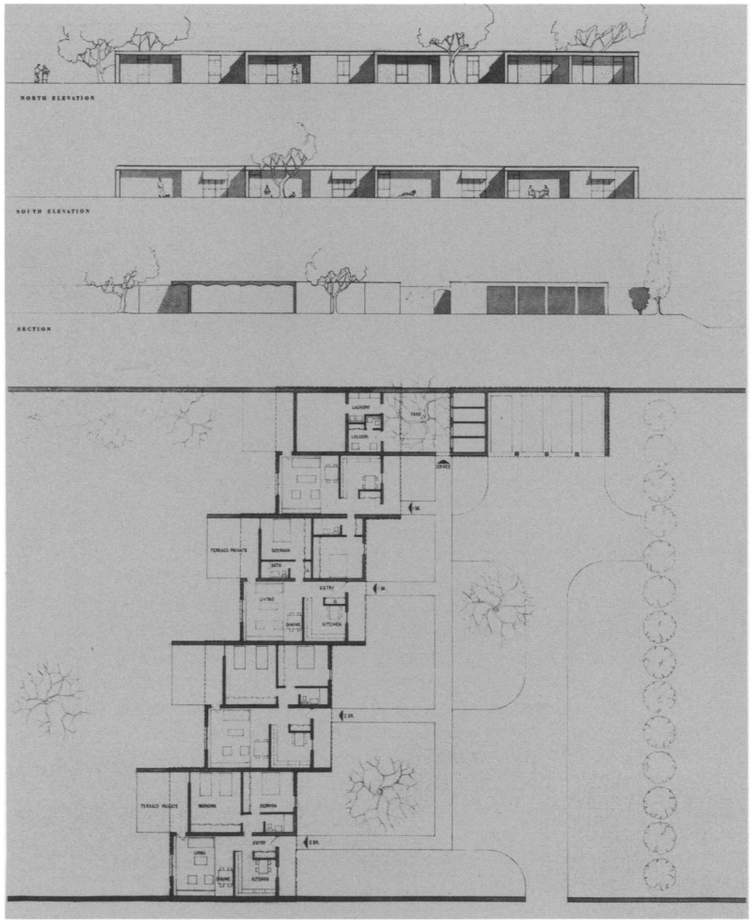

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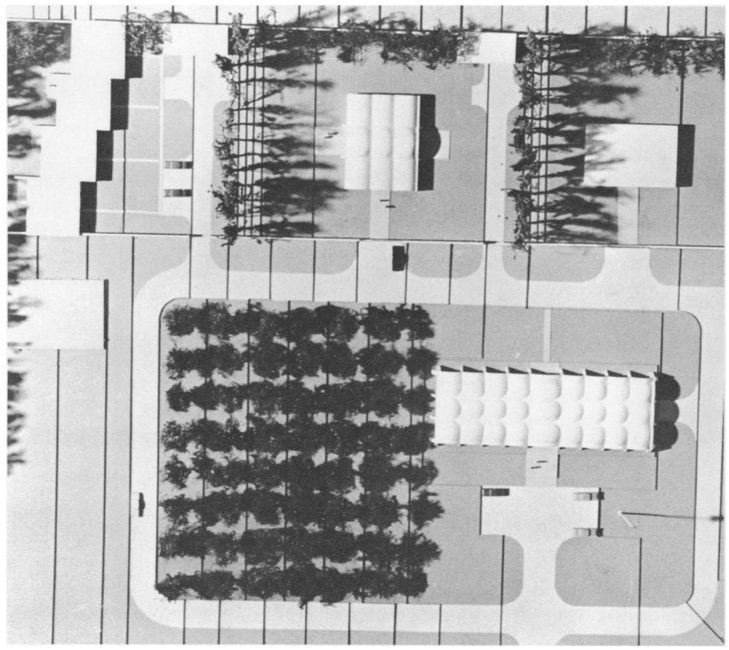
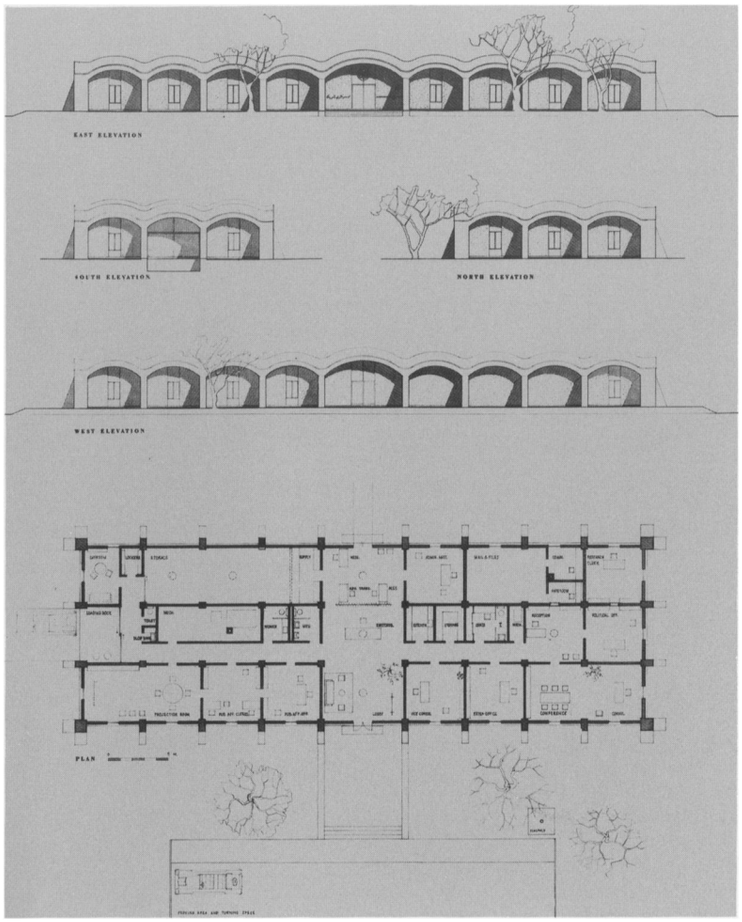


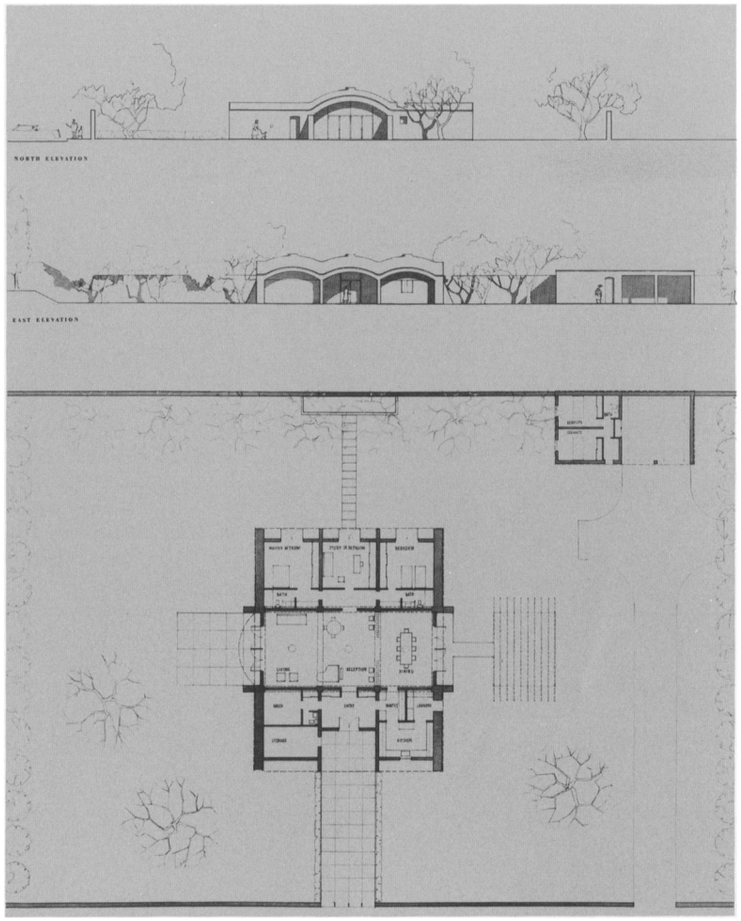
a similar situation exists. Paul Rudolph is doing an office building there whose outer form is all odd angles following the pattern of the winding streets which were once cow paths. The building wraps around a court and then rises to a tower. And yet, despite the anachronisms of the site, the tower was, the last time I saw it, a strong disciplined pinwheel of offices and elevator cores.

Kallman is doing the City Hall, a building whose many entrances rise out of the great sloping brick plaza. The building has a strong central idea, the vast stepped court, and the material is poured concrete in contrast to the brick buildings around. And yet here, too, is a new awareness of the need to relate to the slope of the land and to the scale of the surrounding buildings.

Our office is doing a thirty-five-story office tower, now stalled by problems of land acquisition. Our work is still preliminary and we have done several designs. However, I can tell you a few things that suggest our attitude. The structure is regular, and a typical floor is highly disciplined. At the same time, we are delighted that the building stands on sharply sloping land, which we are not leveling. We are also attempting such things as side colonnades and bridges to other buildings in order to relate to the street and to the spaces around us. The problems of combining the old and new, of looking both forward and back simultaneously, must be solved without contrived picturesqueness on the one hand, or the shock of brutal contrast on the other. New Haven and Boston are good case studies.

Problems of continuity and revolt come into dramatic focus when the city scale is changed. Our thirty-five-story office building faces Kallman's City Hall, an old Richardsonian office building called the Ames Building, as well as Faneuil Hall and the old Statehouse. Kallman's design is





powerful enough to hold its own, and the old Ames Building is as solid as a rock. But the colonial buildings become toys at our feet. One wishes that the square-foot area, which is dictated by the promoters' rents and the city's expectation of taxes based on the appraised value, was much smaller. And yet, I wonder whether the nostalgia for the scale of the past is proper.

Problems of changing scale are occuring in every city in the world. New York sets the most breathless pace. Here, in 125 years, we move from Trinity Church, whose spire once cut the skyline, to the early Wall Street offices overshadowing its churchyard, to the Woolworth Building (so long the symbol of the American skyscraper), to the Empire State Building, and now to the twin shafts of Yamasaki's Trade Center. The fantastic change in scale is always going on. In fact, Yamasaki's towers will do to downtown New York what Wall Street office buildings did to Trinity Church. The pyramiding skyscrapers at the Battery will become foothills.

Should we accept without a murmer this dwarfing of the past? People like Jane Jacobs and Dwight McDonald are outraged. Is it possible to relate to the existing environment in some continuous way, as in so many European cities, and, at the same time, make revolutionary changes in city scale? When architects rhapsodize about St. Mark's Square, whose buildings span eight centuries and as many styles, and yet continuously respect the space between, when we say "Why can't we build St. Mark's Square?" are we speaking of a possibility which is in any way a valid one? Or are we speaking of the exception, the preservation of an historic space, like Independence Square in Philadelphia, or the occasional city college campus, or an amusement center like Disneyland? Of course, we can preserve a few charming exceptions which maintain continuity with the scale of the

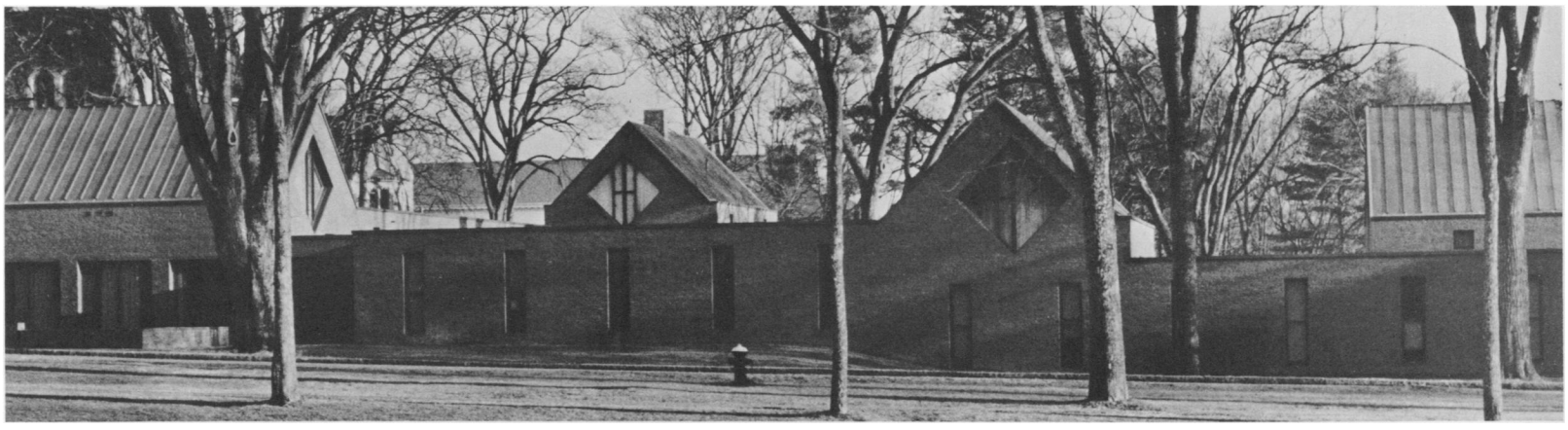
past. But essentially the problem is rooted in the population explosion, which, since World War II, has blasted scale at every urban and rural level throughout the United States and throughout the world. Here, it seems to me, is the challenge for architects. How can we overcome this imminent threat to the human scale of rural and urban landscape?

Let us examine some aspects of a changing city. A great deal has been said about the suburban sprawl and I am sure that everyone is alarmed by the seas of single houses that surround our cities. We all know that the density must increase and that any waste of land is inexcusable. But it is questionable that row-house schemes can ever condense this sprawl sufficiently. To shift from single-house developments to town-house developments is only a minor stopgap. If we are to house the population without spreading horizontally, from ocean to ocean, we need a great deal of high rise building. And how can we make this kind of high density living agreeable, even human? It is not enough to build Miesian apartment boxes. We must think in terms of complete neighborhoods in one building, and express in the architecture the organic life of the community. Perhaps the answer to the problem of human scale is not to think smaller – building rows and rows of charming little town houses with back yards – but to think bigger, in terms of large comprehensive units where the cycle of daily life, the shopping, schooling, working, and worshiping are all expressed in one neighborhood structure.

One aspect of the changing city that seems completely out of hand is the floor – the base on which the buildings are supposed to stand. The base of any building is as crucial as its crown, and this has been known to architects for thousands of years. The Miesian formula is the classical one: – a calm, level podium composed as a part of the buildings. And yet, where is the base under these new huge buildings in a changing city? Very high density buildings like the Pan-Am Building and the World Trade Center span at least four levels of circulation. Subterranean entrances, highways on stilts, parking ramps, plazas raised high above the sidewalk and what Saarinen called "sunken art holes" – all are part of the uncertain new vocabulary. Out of the sky come tremendous columns holding up enormous trays of office space, and these columns disappear into a miasma of uncertain street levels.

It seems to me that continuity with the old street levels is one thing that may have to be sacrificed in a changing city. Perhaps, as in Rome, where the Renaissance city stands on land one story above the level of the Ancient Forum, New York, the city of the future, will relate to a base plane well above the present street level. I do not know what Yamasaki's ground floor plans for the World's Trade Center are, but I'll be interested to see his real base plane. Will it be the old street level, with the charming old warehouses and markets around, or a new upper level related to the level of a new highway along the Hudson? Can the scale of the approach be commensurate with the scale of the building? One cannot contemplate the complication of getting millions of people in and out of such a building without realizing that multilevel entrances and a new visual base plane are implied. And if this is true of one building, it must be true of whole sections of the city. Should not whole sections of the city be raised like plaques joined to major circulation routes which sweep in along the rivers, in such a way that all the buildings involved relate to a common approach system, a common parking system, and, most importantly, a common visual base plane? I suspect that this new city floor is being established right now without a plan. Isolated highways and buildings are defining an upper level circulation system with no over-all concept for interconnection. If this is so, it would seem to me that the function of the city planners is to define the areas where this new level is appropriate and even to design the plaque itself. In this way valuable historical sections of New York would not be destroyed by a complex of approach roads, and at the same time, in other sections, a whole new plane, light and airy like the deck of an aircraft carrier, would be established as a visual base for building. As in the case of suburbia, I do not think that the building by building approach is valid. Whole sections of the city must be taken as units, and the true dimensions of the approach and entrance system must be recognized. Until a firm base is established, it is impossible to build a tower.

I spoke earlier of the time in Babylonia when stepped towers rose out of sprawling villages. It is changes of this dimension that we need in city planning today.



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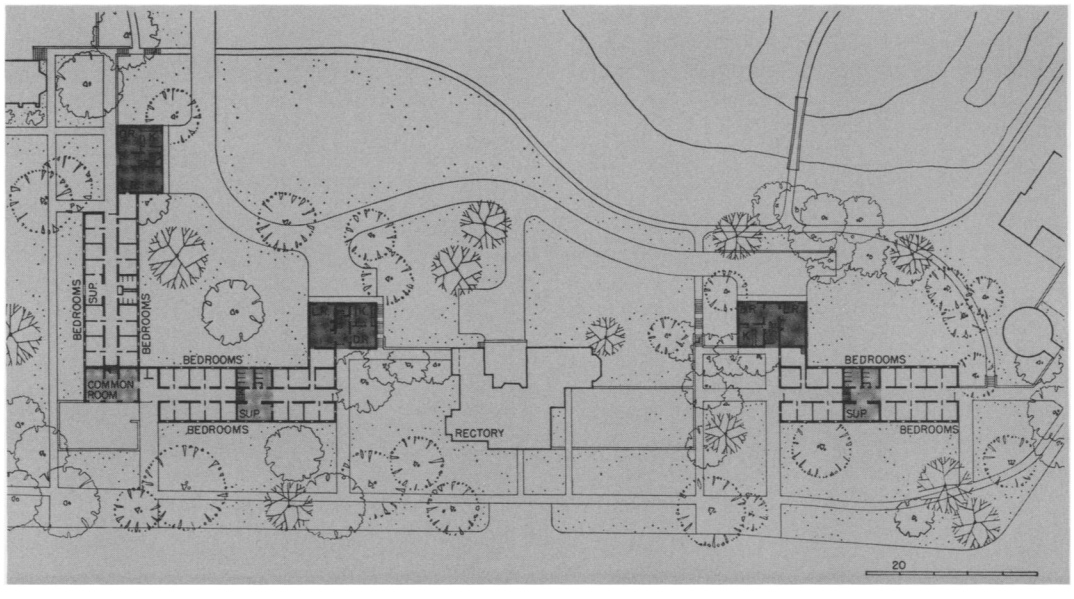

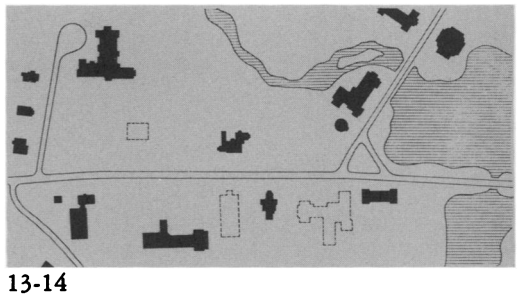

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