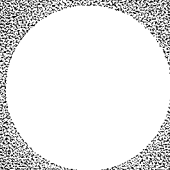
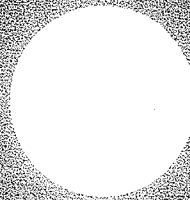
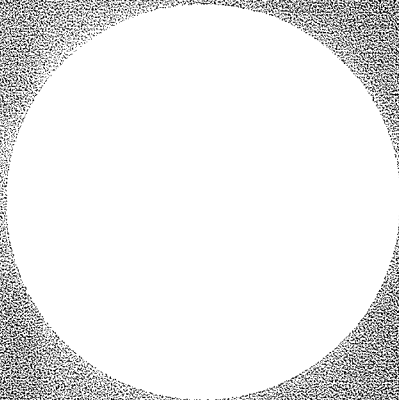
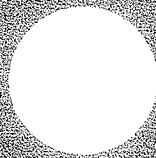


Urban Elements:

A New Perspective on
Public Outdoor Seating



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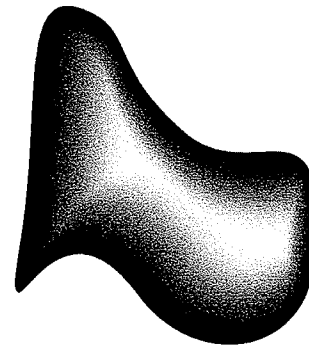
By: Ida Giannini

A Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

Master of Landscape Architecture
Department of Landscape Architecture
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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**Urban Elements:
A New Perspective on Public Outdoor Seating**

BY

Ida Giannini

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of
Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree
Of
MASTER OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE**

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“Veni, Vidi - He came, He saw. Assume that he who came was capable of letting things which were different remain different - that he wasn't compelled to make things different from his part of him. Not a 'let it be' attitude and not a 'let it be mine' attitude. Rather: 'let me see'. And assume he could in fact see, and wherever he looked he saw a bench...Seeing would have conquered conquering, sitting down. And sitting would have granted a new position on possessing. With bottoms down, hands off might have become second nature and culture could have become more natural. Typically utopian.”

- Dirk Reinartz, *Benchmarking in Germany*

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Abstract

Park benches are found in cities all over the world, with little variation in form, function, or materiality. These items tend to be so banal that they often go unnoticed and unused by the people for whom they are “designed”. As such, they offer little value to the urban environment in both visual and physiological terms. This project is a study of the ‘park bench’ in the urban environment. It looks at the social and architectural roles seating has had in various landscapes throughout history and discusses notions of place specificity and the generic in urban environments. It is an exploration of new possibilities for public outdoor seating. Both global and local urban conditions are studied as well as standard design and placement issues such as microclimate, human anatomy, psychology, sociology, durability, and ecological sustainability of materials.

The study began by examining social aspects of pre-historic hominid culture in an attempt to trace the origins of outdoor seating and its social and physical contexts. Many of the earliest, hominid, social gatherings occurred around butchering sites where dismemberment of large animals occurred. These sites were also associated with flint-knapping and tool making. (Gamble 1999:168) These social encounters may have resulted in any number of scenarios including individuals sitting – or kneeling – as they worked or

rested. Presumably many individuals would have used rocks or tree stumps to sit on, making them the earliest forms of public outdoor seating. The study then goes on to outline the evolution of public seating from this point through history to the present day.

An outline of the existing situation in Winnipeg was formed through a localized inventory of public seating options occurring in downtown Winnipeg. As suspected, little variation occurred among the options and designs tended to be drab, uninspired, and unused. Since the intention of the project was to propose new possibilities for outdoor seating in the urban environment, the study then sought to create a theoretical framework through which a design could be derived. The theoretical framework included the role of public furniture in the individualization of globalised cities through identities and branding as well as notions of appropriation, the body, perception, and play in the everyday urban environment.

From there, the theoretical framework formed the backbone of the design concept. Typical and atypical construction materials were analysed and their attributes were assessed thus forming the basis for the final selection. The final form, then, was based on design concept and the attributes of the selected material.

Introduction

Objective

The main objectives of this practicum are to examine closely all aspects of public outdoor seating in the urban environment, and to provide new perspectives and approaches to their design.

More specifically, the project looks at the social and architectural roles seating has had in various landscapes throughout history and discusses notions of place specificity and the generic in urban environments. It also speaks of appropriation, the body, and play and their place in the city fabric. New possibilities for urban seating emerge in response to these ideas. Global and local urban conditions, as well as standard design and placement issues such as microclimate, human anatomy, psychology, sociology, durability, and ecological sustainability of materials are studied.

Relevance of Study

"Spaces designed to keep out undesirables

– pushers, bums, hippies – for example, generally tend to keep out other people too. In contrast, spaces that attract people tend to be relatively free of problems. The sun is important. So are trees, water, food, and most of all, seats." (Whyte 1980:7)

The park bench has often been regarded as an icon of public life - the place for chance meetings among strangers and spontaneous conversations. Ideally, it is the place where anyone can spend the afternoon sitting and watching the surrounding activity. In reality, however, benches are often uncomfortable and poorly sited and maintained, making them undesirable places to sit. They are designed to restrict certain modes of sitting and to discourage people from staying too long. Their forms and materiality are often so banal that they usually go unnoticed and unused by the people for whom they are "designed". As such, they offer little value to the urban environment in visual, physiological, and social terms.

Currently cities are struggling to individualize themselves in the global

market. Chairs, according to Galen Cranz, are said to be cultural symbols, revealing class, sex, and even personality. What do our poorly designed public furnishings say about our cities? What can they say?

Benches are architectural objects that form part of our exterior environment. They can help make a city function and nearly every inhabitant comes into contact with them. But for some reason they have been largely ignored in landscape architectural discourse. A trip to the local library will reveal that little, if any literature exists on the topic at all. Yet, furnishings are integral to the design process in the interior realm of architecture. Hundreds of books have been written on the chair alone, and almost every architect dreams of designing one him/herself. So, why is public furniture ignored? Most likely it is because no one person will own and therefore care for it leaving public furniture susceptible to vandalism. This in turn results in a decreased desire to invest resources into their design, production, and placement. This study, in contrast, argues for the opposite approach. A better design process keeps with the user in mind in the hope of creating pieces that evoke emotion and stimulate the imagination of their users. This may then result in a greater degree of respect and therefore care for the furnishings. It is my belief that good design has the power to create pleasure and pride in people and their surroundings. Why shouldn't we feel good about where we live – and sit?

Methodology

The process and thinking behind this study evolved over the course of the project. Before a design proposal could be reached, several factors required studying and many questions needed answering.

The document is divided into three parts. Part 1, *The Past and Present of Public Outdoor Seating*, is an historical account of public sitting in western culture beginning with our early hominid ancestors of the Paleolithic Era. The first chapter of this section attempts to trace the origins of public outdoor seating. Since there is currently no design literature devoted specifically to the subject, archaeological and sociological literature was reviewed and extrapolations were drawn from various historical artworks.

The second chapter discusses the state of public seating in Winnipeg today. The information and images are based on a small inventory of seating types in downtown Winnipeg. The inventory was conducted in the spring of 2003 on four main streets in downtown Winnipeg. Each seat [how many?] was documented and photographed and its condition recorded. This provided information about the durability of the materials typically used in their construction.

Part 2 of the study forms the theoretical framework from which the design evolves. Various books, essays, and articles on topics important specifically to the study of urban furniture design and generally

to contemporary landscape architecture were consulted. These readings helped the author develop a theoretical stance to frame and inform the proceeding pages.

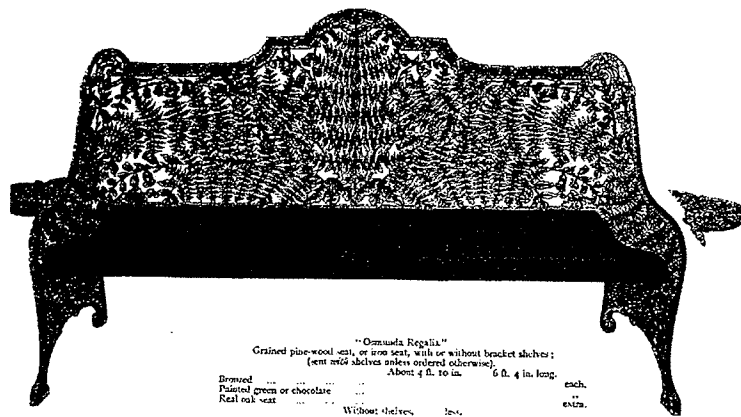
Part 3 of the document is the culmination of the first two sections. It illustrates the design thinking and material selection process. A set of design criteria derived from the theoretical framework outlined in Part 2 led to the material selection and the final design proposal. Attributes and drawbacks of materials (as described in various literatures and through the Internet) were recorded so that ultimately, a wise selection could be made in conjunction with the qualities desired in the final design.



PART ONE

The Past and Present of

1. Public Outdoor Seating Through The Ages



"Osmunda Regalia"
 Grained pine-wood seat, or iron seat, with or without bracket shelves;
 (sent with shelves unless ordered otherwise).
 About 4 ft. to 5 ft. 6 ft. 4 in. long.
 Brossed each.
 Painted green or chocolate
 Real oak seat extra.
 Without shelves, less.

Fig. 1.1 Victorian Bench Dating Back to 1875 (Davis 1914)



Introduction

In order to speculate effectively on the future of the 'park bench', we must first understand its history as well as its present day conditions. This section of the study is an attempt to trace the origins of outdoor seating and its social and physical contexts through the compilation of archaeological, and sociological information as well as through the interpretation of various art works throughout history. Through this study, I hope to understand the social and physical implications of sitting outdoors.

Paleolithic Culture

For over a century, archaeologists have been re-constructing human origins through the recovery of various artifacts and skeletal remains. Our earliest hominid ancestors date back to Paleolithic times (early stone age 750 000 – 15 000 years Before Present) where fossil remains illustrate evolutionary modifications in posture and skeletal structures. (Collins et. al. 1973:4) Discussions surrounding prehistoric culture, however, usually refer to the Neolithic era (new stone age 10 000 – 7000 years B.P.) and the development of polished stone tools, weapons, and settled agriculture. In these discussions, culture,

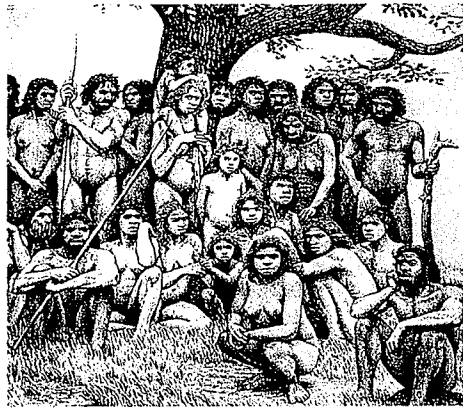


Fig. 1.2 Artist Interpretation of a Paleolithic Family.
(Gamble 1999)

defined as “the system of rules and symbols which provide the extrasomatic means of adaptation that humans have at their disposal”, is set up in opposition to nature - we have culture, animals do not (Gamble 1999:27). Having culture defines humans from the rest of nature. It exists outside us and is part of our social life. More recently, however a continuum approach to the study of human and non-human primate societies has been adopted. Here, culture is defined as “the means by which the social processing of information, vital to survival, is structured. Culture regulates social knowledge. It can change and be transmitted and is subject to selection pressure.” (Gamble 1999: 28) These researchers argue that culture began to manifest itself earlier in the evolutionary chain and that it “springs from the active engagement of people in the business of living and interacting. Therefore it represents a continuum between animals and humans. Culture varies between species and through time

because individuals call selectively on different resources to sustain relationships and promote social projects” (Gamble 1999:30). According to this definition then, technical acts such as flint-knapping and food preparation are actually social productions that evolve as the body engages in the action.

“The history of the origin of humans is a history of walking, of migrations of peoples and cultural and religious exchanges that took place along intercontinental trajectories.” (Celeri 2002:44) Social life 500 – 300 000 years ago involved hominids in the “continuous and different construction of their surrounding environment” (Gamble 1999:132). The processes of social life were executed through several, related, continuous, activities and skills such as hunting and butchering (Gamble 1999: 137). The most common gatherings of this era (in “Europe”) were butchering sites where dismemberment of large animals occurred reflecting the social nature of the activity. These sites were also associated with flint-knapping and tool making. The focus of social life was not an organized social occasion centered on the hearth or hut, but rather it was “the intercepted or encountered opportunity available for subsequent negotiation” (Gamble 1999: 168). These encounters may have resulted in any number of scenarios including individuals sitting as they worked or rested. It is also not unreasonable to assume that some may have even sat on rocks or tree stumps as Figure 1.2 shows. For the purposes of this study, I will argue

that these types of gatherings form the origins of sitting outdoors and in "public".

Several archaeologists have interpreted the Bilzingsleben site, excavated by Dietrich Mania, in what is now eastern Germany. The archeological site dates back 350 000 to 320 000 years. Gamble's (1999: 169) interpretation of the site suggests that it is made up of a series of gatherings rather than a campsite with huts and hearths. Strings of anvils were distributed in circular areas of approximately 4m in radius identifying performance spaces where individuals interacted with each other and the resources of the site. The focus of social life was based on setting up the anvil. This attached the individuals to the gathering, to other people, and to the locale. The gathering began with the carrying of the anvil to the site resulting in spatial and temporal opportunities for social interaction. Then, sitting beneath trees or beside charred tree trunks, the site became a place to transmit skills, break bones on anvils, knap stones, strip flesh, share, and eat. The locale became invested with social meaning by individuals sitting or standing and facing each other in relation to the anvils even if they did not speak to each other. The gathering was transient and lacked a continuing structure beyond the immediate presence of those at the site. (Gamble 1999:170-2) This scenario parallels many situations in today's urban setting. For example, transit stops. People arrive, often carrying brief cases and backpacks filled with the 'tools' they require for the day. Some may sit on the standard bench provided by the city

but most will choose to stand. The fact that there is more than one person at the stop makes it a social situation. One person may ask another if they have the time or if they noticed a certain bus go by. The other person will respond and the conversation may end there or it may continue. Often, however, no conversation occurs amongst the strangers at the stop but in all cases the people are observing each other. The gathering is concluded when the bus arrives and the participants become passengers. The experience is not shared by anyone who was not present at the stop at that particular moment in time. The experience is different every time.

Neanderthal societies occurring 300 000 - 60 000 years ago intensified social life through the construction of several social environments (Collins et. al 1973: 4). Activities became more routine and gatherings became more co-operative than in earlier societies. They had the capacity for language but evidence suggests that it was used only to enhance their emotional resources. This allowed them to create a social reality distinct from earlier hominids. They constantly renewed their lithic technology and when moving from site to site, brought familiar and useful objects from previous environments with them rather than letting the associations of a new environment completely encompass them. (Gamble 1999:362-69) This behavior still occurs today. Most of us take all our belongings with us when we change our place of habitation. Some people, such as R.V. enthusiasts even take their shelters with them.

Technology was integral to social action as it is today. Style and function were determined through the actions of making and using and there were local ways of making things. (Gamble 1999:369) By 28 000 years BP settlements included hearths, burials, and abundant stone and bone tools. Thousands of clay and ivory figurines, such as the ones illustrated in Figure 1.3, along with a series of subterranean huts built on leveled platforms terraced into the slope have also been uncovered. (Gamble 1999:389) Hearths provided a focus for performance and social life. They occurred both within caves and in the open air.

In an ethnoarchaeological study of a Nunamiut hunting stand in Anaktuvak Pass, Alaska, Binford (1978:38) observed that the primary function of the hearth sites was to “engage in pursuits which reduced boredom”. These pursuits include target practice, craft making, and sleeping. While this is not a pre-historic society, these observations can provide insight into the types of interactions that may have occurred in the past.

Social life becomes even more complex with Cro-Magnon (the earliest known examples of *Homo sapiens* dating from 50 000 – 30 000 years BP) societies where we see greater variety in material culture and ornament and display. Locales are now invested with association and meaning. They become places, not simply sites for gatherings (Gamble 1999:415). According to Gamble (1999:412), a locale is transformed into place via involvement and experience through a social occasion

rather than simply a gathering or encounter. Social occasions occur in social landscapes (“the spatial outcome of individuals developing their extended network and the appearance of the global network”), organize action, provide meaning to life by involvement, and often involve architecture and non-portable objects. It can be said that many of our public spaces, while they occur in built environments, are not social landscapes but are rather part of our landscapes of habit which are constructed through the routines of daily life and therefore do not actively engage the people using them. Park benches “... are part of our landscapes of habit where we experience our lives in a largely unthinking fashion.” (Gamble 1999:398) But can they become punctuated events that help to establish patterns of social occurrence?

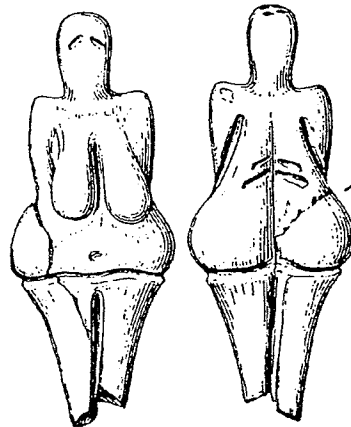


Fig. 1.3 Ancient Clay Figurines (Gamble 1999)

Neolithic Humans and the Beginnings of Civilization

The latest period of the Stone Age, the Neolithic era, spanned from approximately 10 000 to 3000 years before present. The first situated objects in the human landscape, the menhirs, directly relate to roaming and nomadic cultures of the Neolithic. (Careri 2002:48) These large vertically planted stones have been found throughout the British Isles and northern France. As outlined in Careri (2002:52), several interpretations of their functions have been put forward. These include: communicative devices where symbols are placed on the main face of some of the stones; the creation of an architecturally constructed landscape as a sort of geometry to oppose the chaos of nature; and a means of revealing the geography of place through descriptions of physical structure and its productive or religious utilization. They formed a system of "territorial orientation, easily deciphered by those who understood its language – a sort of guide sculpted in the landscape, leading the traveler to his/her destination from one signal to another along intercontinental routes." (Careri 2002: 52) Through its magnitude, the menhir, illustrated in Figure 3, would be able to attract the attention of the traveler and could then be used to communicate useful information regarding the surrounding territory relative to the continuation of the journey. They may also have indicated where ritual celebrations connected to wandering were held. The area around the menhirs, then became "space for the

representation of the voyage or the place of events, stories, and myths." (Careri 2002: 56) Careri (2002:58) continues:

"The menhir - through its artificial vertical position, lack of adjectival impulses, and its pure crystalline form - results in a monomeric, situated, fixed, immobile, inert, almost inexpressive object. But it imposes a certain distance and has a new relationship with its space. It is a character without internal life, but at the same time, takes possession of the space, forcing the observer to participate, to share an experience that goes beyond the visible and that addresses, like architecture, the entire body, and its presence in time and space."

The latter portion of the Neolithic is often referred to as the Bronze Age. It is during this time that humans became agriculturists and from there, civilization began. The advent of agriculture as well as advancements in tool making technology and the use of metallurgy allowed for a more settled way of life. Populations no longer had to travel great distances tracking food. The first major concentrations of people occurred in broad, fertile river valleys such as those along the banks of the Nile, Tigris, or Euphrates Rivers. The reason for this was that the fresh silt deposits of the rivers were the only way to fertilize the soil on which so many people now depended (Jellicoe and Jellicoe 1996:11). The social structure of these civilizations arose from the need to regulate the unpredictable nature of these rivers by means of "irrigation works" that

required more energy than one family unit could provide (Jellicoe and Jellicoe 1996: 22). With the advent of irrigation, between 600 and 500 BC, came the first designed gardens, which dotted the vast landscape between the two rivers. They were rich green oases, geometrically laid out within protective walls, blocking out the surrounding, hostile, desert, conditions. In their purest form, these paradise gardens consisted of an enclosed square, crossed by water channels, symbolic of the four rivers of heaven, and contained, theoretically, all the fruits of the earth (Jellicoe and Jellicoe, 1996:23). They often contained trees beneath which one could recline and contemplate their surroundings.

For much of the twentieth century, Mesopotamia, now modern day Iraq, and Ancient Egypt were thought to be the cradles of civilization with Bronze Age accomplishments emanating from their cities and diffusing outward influencing all other civilizations. Renfrew tells us that, "We can see the growth of a civilization as the gradual creation by man (sic) of a larger and more complex environment, not only in the natural field through increasing exploitation of a wider range of resources of the ecosystem, but also in the social and spiritual fields. And, whereas the savage hunter lives in an environment not so different in many ways from that of other animals, although enlarged already by the use of language and of a whole range of other artifacts of our culture, civilized man (sic) lives in an environment very much of his (sic) own creation. Civilization in this sense is the self-made environment

of man (sic) which he had fashioned to insulate himself (sic) from the primeval environment of nature alone." This concept of the first civilized society suggests a separation between humans and the rest of the natural world.

New evidence suggests that there were other civilizations occurring at the same time as those of Mesopotamia but uninfluenced by them in both the old and new worlds (i.e. China and Mexico) (Lamberg-Karlovsky 2000:22). These cultures were based on Shamanism, believing in a "layered but interlinked world continuum in which privileged humans and animals roamed about from one layer to another" (Chang 2000:13). The Aztec saw their cities and their surrounding environments as integrated cosmological structures within which natural phenomena were regarded as sacred and intimately related to the activities of humans (Chang 2000:7). All of these societies, however, share certain characteristics related to civilization. These include bronze metallurgy, writing, cities, state hierarchies, palatial structures, temples and monumental art, and social stratification.

The Invention of the Chair

Chairs first appeared in the archaeological record in Egypt and Mesopotamia during the Bronze Age when permanent stone houses were part of the way of life (Cranz 1998:31). The Nile River not only irrigated and fertilized the lands

of ancient Egypt, it was also critical for the transportation of indigenous building materials, communication, and trade with other regions (Blakemore 1997: 2). Timber suitable for furniture production was relatively scarce in Egypt. Logs were therefore largely transported from Lebanon. Timbers included cedar, pine, fir, and cypress (Blakemore 1997:2). Archaeological digs of building interiors from 7500 BC show benches and ledges for sitting and sleeping. Eastern European archeologists of former Yugoslavia and Bulgaria have found several ceramic female figures seated on chairs (Cranz 1998:32). By 2850 BC, chair sitting was widespread practice in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. Remains are fragmentary but they indicate that they are more than "naïve efforts of primitive people" (Hollis 1966:19). While paintings, carvings, and hieroglyphs on temples and papyrus show that chairs were used in Mesopotamia no physical examples have yet been found. Survival of the Egyptian furniture is due in large part to the arid conditions present in Egypt in contrast to the more humid Mesopotamian climate (Cranz 1998:31). The Egyptians also had a firm belief in life after death resulting in the taking of worldly goods, symbolic of status, into the tombs for use in the afterlife. This was also the belief in Mesopotamia but their tombs were not protected by massive masonry structures as they were in Egypt. Many of the Egyptian remains were made of wood encased in gold, which also aided in their preservation (Hollis 1966:22). Paintings and carvings show that many people, not just royalty, used chairs regularly. Social

rank determined who sat in the presence of others (Cranz 1998:22). Regarding rank, Cranz (1998:23) writes: "Ancient chairs reflected the relationship of power between rulers and ruled. Today they also elaborate differences between men and women, bosses and employees, teacher and student, young and old."

Ancient Egyptian architecture was influenced by climate, religion, and society. The minimal rainfall, intense sunlight, and small variations in temperature led to architecture that "fostered indoor-outdoor relationships". (Blakemore 1997: 3) Features included flat roofs, porticoes, loggias, high windows, roof ventilators that directed air to the innermost rooms, and interior courtyards. (Blakemore 1997:3) Religion was highly complex and polytheistic. It was the motivation for most architectural monuments. Gods were associated with specific towns or regions and their attributes were often combined when one town deity was perceived as being stronger than another. Gods may have been represented as celestial bodies, human or animal forms, or a combination of the two. They were the focus of specific temples and were represented in reliefs and paintings in all types of architecture and furniture design. (Blakemore 1997:3) Egyptian society was highly stratified with the pharaoh or king at the top. His powers were divine and he represented god on earth. The middle class was comprised of priests, mayors, provincial governors, administrators, and high executive officials. The lower class included craftspeople and peasants. Class

distinctions were reflected in the size and décor of a house, its number of rooms, and the materials used. (Blakemore 1997: 3) All of these factors also influenced the design of their furniture.

According to Hollis (1966:31), one of the earliest types of seating was the stool, used by all levels of society. Evidence for this appears in the carved stelae found in the private tombs of the late First Dynasty (2920-2770 BC) and late Second Dynasty (2770 - 2650 BC) in Egypt. These stelae served as the magical means through which the deceased could enjoy their fine material objects in the afterlife. They often depicted the owner sitting on his/her stool in front of a large pedestal table on which offerings to the gods were presented (Hollis 1966:29). Many stylistic variations have been discovered. One of the most popular types is the lattice stool shown in Figure 1.4. It was rectangular in form with some combination of: square section legs, vertical and diagonal struts joining the stretcher with the seat, flat, single, or double-cove seat surfaces with interwoven

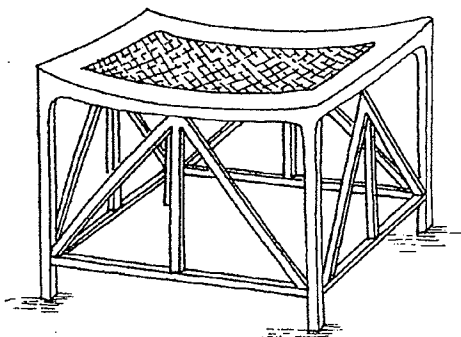


Fig. 1.4 Lattice Stool (Hollis 1966)

rushes, reeds, or wooden slats. (Blakemore 1997:15). Some more basic models were depicted as solid blocks scored with a number of vertical lines. These lines most likely indicated a feature of the construction and have been interpreted as either slats or as a woven construction. (Hollis 1966:29) Others were more complex such as the Duck Head Folding stool and the Stool with Animal Legs depicted in Figures 1.5 and 1.6 (Blakemore 1997:15).

By the time of the Second Dynasty (2770 - 2650 BC) this elementary form had developed into the seat with a high back that we have come to know as the chair. At first it was used only by nobles and high officials representing a high-ranking status in society. It was not until much later, in the Eighteenth Dynasty (1580-1314 BC), that they were utilized by the general public (Hollis 1966:31). One of the earliest examples of the chair is illustrated in the 'niche' stela of the princess Sehefner from Saqqara. It is derived from the low square stool with straight legs. Its slender members and the cross-stretchers with which it is strengthened display a sophisticated design. A seat cushion gives it added comfort.

The oldest preserved chair from this region dates back to the Fourth Dynasty (2575 -2467 BC). It was found in the tomb of Queen Hetepheres, the wife of King Sneferu. Figure 1.7 shows the chair as low with wide deep seat sloping slightly from front to back. With the exception of the back panel and seat, the chair is entirely covered in gold. Its legs, also covered in

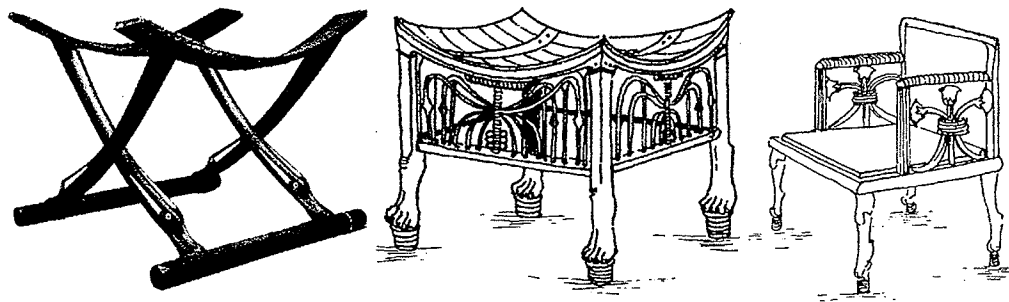


Fig. 1.5 Duck Head Folding Stool (Blakemore 1997), Fig. 1.6 Animal Leg Stool (Blakemore 1997)
 Fig. 1.7 Chair of Queen Hetepherus (Hollis 1966)

gold, terminate with copper disks and are inspired by the fore and hind legs of a lion. Three papyrus flowers bound together are carved into its side panels (Hollis 1966: 41). Fragments of a second armchair were also found in the tomb. It too was covered in gold and had animal legs. Its side panels, however, were carved with an image of the Falcon of Horus perched on a palm column. Both designs incorporated religious symbols with imagery of the natural world (Hollis 1966:42). This, combined with the fact that these civilizations depended heavily on the natural fluctuations of the Nile, would lead one to believe that perhaps these civilizations were not based on the exclusion of the natural world, as was suggested earlier, but rather on the integration of natural phenomena with human activity.

It was mentioned earlier that Egyptian architecture included central open-air courtyards. Since people were already sitting on stools and chairs and since most of life occurred outdoors, it is not a stretch

to assume that they would have used them while in their courtyards. In fact, the carved panel (Figure 1.8) found in the palace at Ninevah (in northern Mesopotamia) at approximately 1350 BC depicting the king feasting in his garden proves just that. From this carving, we can state that people sat on chairs in the outdoors from at least the time of carving - 1350 BC. But gardens and courtyards were private rather than public spaces. So the question now becomes when did people sit on chairs, outdoors, and in public?

Before this can be answered, the word public must first be defined. According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, the word was derived from the Latin *publicus*, which was akin to *populus*, meaning the people. It is now defined as:

1: exposed to general view: open b: well-known, prominent c: perceptible, material

2: of, relating to, or affecting all the people or the whole area of a nation or state

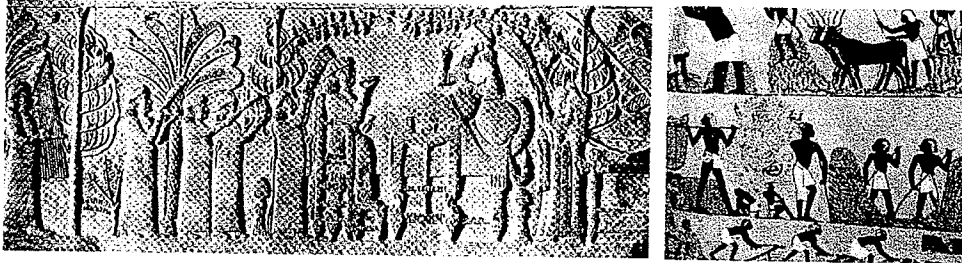


Fig. 1.8 Carving Depicting the King and Queen Seated in Their Garden (Hollis 1966), Fig. 1.9 Tomb Painting Illustrating Daily Agricultural Pursuits (Hodel-Hoernes 2000)

3: *of or relating to people in general: universal b: general, popular*

4: *of or relating to business or community interests as opposed to private affairs: social*

5: *devoted to the general or national welfare: humanitarian*

6: *accessible to or shared by all members of the community*

If we combine these definitions, sitting in public must entail being exposed to general view and must be accessible and relate to all members of the community.



Fig. 1.10 Tomb Painting of Mother and Child on Stool (Hollis 1966)

Much of what we know about ancient Egyptian life is in large part thanks to the discovery of their tombs. Since the poorer classes could not afford such

elaborate burials, the tombs being studied today belonged mainly to the wealthier middle class. They still, however, provided an account of daily life at the time and are thus a great source of information. (Hodel-Hoernes 2000: 88) Paintings from the Tomb of Menna, such as the one in Figure 1.9, date back to the Eighteenth Dynasty (1539 – 1292 BC) show scenes related to agricultural pursuits. The lower portion of this image depicts grain being mowed with a sickle and packed into baskets. Above this, two girls are depicted gleaning the grain that fell to ground from one of the bulging baskets. Labourers, on the far right are spreading the harvested grain on the threshing floor with large pitchforks while their better-dressed supervisor watches and leans on a staff. To the left of the supervisor, two workers sit on stools under the shade of a tree. One seems to be taking a nap while the other plays a song on his flute (Hodel-Hoernes 2000: 91). Figure 1.10 is a painting of a mother and her child seated on a stool under one of the trees in the harvest scene. A vessel, perhaps containing food, is standing in front of the mother (Hodel-Hoernes 2000:

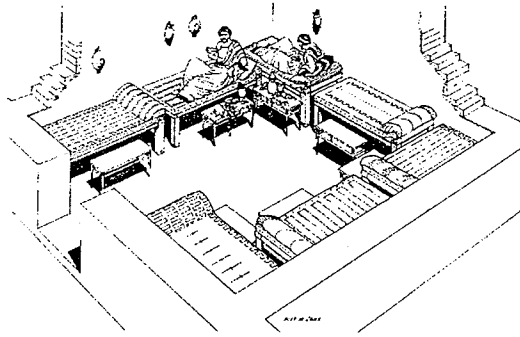


Fig. 1.11 A Dining Room in an Athenian Stoa Apparently Used for Small Boards and Commissions. (Thompson and Wycherly, 1972)



Fig. 1.12 Vase Painting Depicting a Woman Seated on a Typical Greek Klismos. (Richter, 1966)

91). Since large-scale agriculture was community rather than family based, different members of the community are depicted sitting on stools in front of others. And since we already know that stools were accessible to all members of Egyptian society, it can be concluded that public outdoor sitting existed at least as far back as 1539 BC.

1919. Davis, 1914:16

In ancient Athens, "the great plaza of the agora buzzed with life." (Davis 1914:16) It was the centre of community life, the seat of legal and governmental institutions as well as a major religious centre, the main marketplace, and the scene of several other commercial and industrial activities. The agora of Athens developed slowly over the course of the 6th century BC. (Thompson and Wycherly, 1972: 19) All artistic energy was spent on

civic establishments and buildings. The Athenian agora was a square of spacious dimensions planted with bay trees and completely encircled by buildings such as temples and governmental edifices. Much of the local political, religious, and social life occurred in the open air. But exposure to the elements without any nearby shelter was detrimental, so Greek architects used covered promenades, porticoes, or stoaes as a way of mediating between the two. Their purpose was to put a roof over a limited part of the open area. (Thompson and Wycherly, 1972:82) These shelters were treated as structures in their own right. By 500 BC, use of the stoa was widespread throughout Greece.

The stoaes were combinations of rain/sun shelters, shops, picture galleries, and public offices. One of the more outstanding stoaes was the Stoa Poikile or 'painted porch'. Here, almost the entire length of the sheltered walk was painted with the vivid Frescoes of Polygnotus outlining the story of the capture of Troy and the defeat of the



Fig. 1.13. Stone Greek Benches. (Richter 1966)

Amazons (Davis 1914:7).

In the open space of the plaza were various altars and innumerable statues of local worthies such as Harmodius and Aristogeiton, the tyrant slayers. Across the centre, cutting the market place from east to west, ran a line of busts depicting a bearded Hermes (the trader's god) each one mounted on a stone post. The base of each post would have been plastered many times over with all kinds of official and private placards and notices. (Davis, 1914: 18) From this description we see how civic pride was manifest in the design of public spaces. Public art and ornament contained narratives alluding to past and present notions of the particular place.

The square was usually filled with noisy activity and little booths of wicker, from

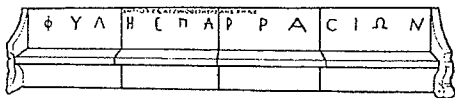


Fig. 1.14 Greek Bench with Back and Volute Arm Rests. (Richter 1966)

which vendors sold their goods. Space was often limited resulting in some vendors not having their own booths. In such cases they sat "on their haunches on the level ground with their few wares spread before them." (Davis 1914:21) Even if a man (since respectable women never frequented the agorae) had no actual business to transact, he would have gone to the agora to get the morning news. (Davis 1914:21)

One of the best-preserved foundations of a classical Athenian stoa is the Stoa Basileios or 'stoa of the king' dating back to 500 BC (Thompson and Wycherley, 1972: 83). Here, as in Figure 1.11, continuous benches were placed against the walls running along the back and across the ends of the stoa. Footings for pieces of furniture were also found at intervals along the front of the colonnade. (Thompson and Wycherley, 1972: 84)

According to Richter (1966:13), the

According to Richter (1966:13), the



Fig. 1.15 Ancient Tomb Frescoe Depicting Games Spectators Seated on a Bench (Richter 1966)

Greeks had five main types of seats. They include thrones (thronos)- with back and arm rests; the light easy chair (klismos - Figure 1.12) with curving back but no arm rests; the backless stool (diphros) with four legs the; folding stool with crossed legs, and the bench (bathron)- on which several people could sit. Each of these types appeared regularly from the eighth to the second centuries BC on various monuments, vase paintings, and reliefs. Among these five types, benches were the least often depicted in the artworks because mythological and everyday scenes tended to be the subjects of choice and benches were not often used in either of these situations. Another reason for their lack of depiction may have been the difficulty of representing several people sitting on one seat. (Richter 1966:48) In Greek literature, however, the benches were described as low seats, with or without backs, and long enough to accommodate more than one person. (Richter 1966:49) They were also described as the seats on which the people sat to listen to the discourse of the Greek philosophers and sophists such as Socrates, Pericles, and Plato. The lecturers occupied thrones or klismos. Being members of the leisured class, or those “exempt from every kind of sordid money-getting hard

work” (Davis, 1914:24), they very often frequented the agorae to engage in their discourses.

Outdoor seating was also associated with political life in Greece. The first great public building, The Council of Five Hundred, instituted at the end of the sixth century BC, was to be the principal instrument of democratic government in Athens. The Athenians recognized the need for appropriate accommodation and therefore constructed a series of “rectilinear tiers of wooden benches rising on the east, north, and west” (Thompson and Wycherley 1972:30). Another series of similar benches were laid out in front of the Temple of Hephaistos in Athens. Researchers have speculated that they were put in place after the Temple of Hephaistos but probably before the Stoa of Zeus and definitely before their view of the agora was blocked by the Temple of Apollo and the Hellenistic Metroon, dating them at mid fifth century BC (Thompson and Wycherley 1972:71). The 4 benches are each 40 metres long, providing enough seating to accommodate approximately 400 people. They were most likely constructed for the convenience of dignitaries watching events in the agora. Occasionally, the law courts may have used them as well. (Thompson and Wycherley 1972:71)

Many stone benches (Figure 1.13) have been found in Greek theatres and sanctuaries, mostly dating from the fourth to the second centuries BC. Examples occur with and without back and arm rests. (Richter 1966:48). When backs do

exist, such as in the example in Figure 1.14, they are generally perpendicular to the seat and undecorated. The arms and legs usually have a voluted (or scroll-like) decoration. Etruscan furniture paralleled that of the Greeks with some small changes here and there. Some examples, however were influenced by the Egyptians and Assyrians, whereas Greek furniture was mainly influenced by the Minoans and Mycenians (Richter 1966:90). Figure 1.15 shows a bench depicted in the fresco of an ancient tomb (Tomba delle Bighe at Tarquina). The painting dates back to the early fifth century BC and illustrates the long seats occupied by spectators of the games (Richter 1966:90).

If we return to the earlier definition of public outdoor seating, i.e. seating that occurs in the exterior environment, exposed to general view and accessible and relating to all members of the community, it becomes evident that the ancient Greek

examples are not quite there. While they are definitely exposed to general view, they are not really accessible to all members of the community. Most of the examples occur within the agora or market place, where women were prohibited. Even if one were to argue that the people who did frequent the agora made up a community in themselves, most of the seating examples discussed were reserved for dignitaries, government officials, and other upper class members of society.

Public Life in Ancient Rome

Roman cities each contained a forum, or public square, at its geographical centre. Much like the agora in Greece, the forum was surrounded by religious and governmental buildings where the people went to worship and to listen to speeches. It was the centre of business and commercial

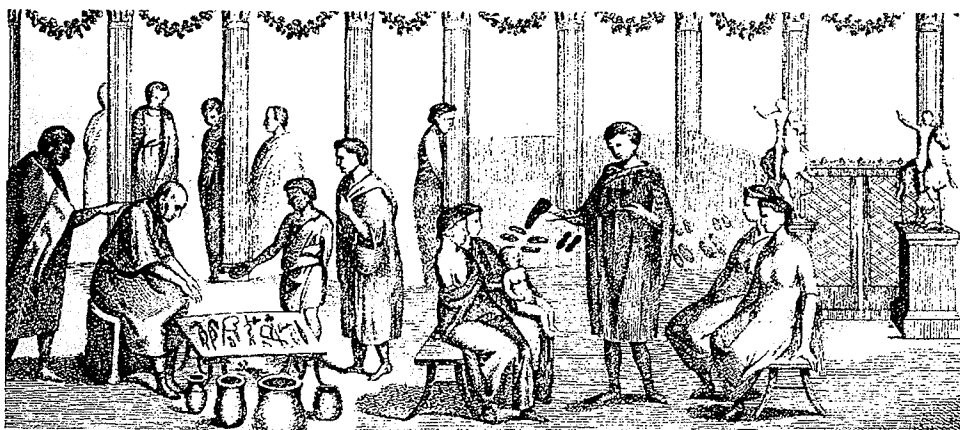


Fig. 1.16 Typical Scene From Under a Colonnade Near the City's Forum. (Jashemski and Jashemski, 1979)



Fig. 1. 17 Stone Roman Bench Found Outside the Porta Majora in Ostia. (Jashemski and Jashemski, 1979)

activity in the city (Grant 1970:15). Also like the agora, the forum was surrounded by colonnades that provided shade and shelter from the elements. The difference, however, is that the forum housed public baths, theatres and amphitheatres. But more importantly, members from all social classes were present – including women (Grimal 1983:7). Figure 1.16 depicts a scene from under one of the colonnades adjacent to the forum. We see a vendor selling shoes while two women and one child are seated on a bench. Two more women are seated on another bench perhaps listening to the conversation and waiting to be attended to.

The public structures were used by all people but class determined the time of day they were used. For example, the most elite men and women would use the



Fig. 1.19 Ancient Roman Bench Made of Bronze Found at Pompeii (Richter 1966)

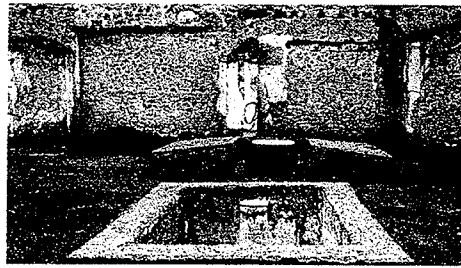


Fig. 1.18. Example of a Triclinium Situated in a Private Garden. (Jashemski and Jashemski, 1979)

baths at the time when water temperature was at its optimal (late afternoon) while the lowest classes worked longer hours and therefore would arrive much later. (Laurence 1994:139) The theatres and amphitheatres were different in that they held comedies, tragedies, and gladiatorial combats that were associated with the worship of the gods. This made them a public necessity. People of all classes and both sexes gathered here at the same time. They were among the most prominent, buildings of the Roman city. Every city in the empire had at least one theatre and the more important ones also had an amphitheatre. (Grimal 1983:57) The orchestra was seated in a semi-circle at the front of the theatre. Seats for the most important people of the city were crowded around the orchestra while the rest of the audience took their places on the tiers of the cavea. (Grimal 1983:58) These seats could therefore truly have been considered public.

Roman Furniture

Unlike the Etruscans, Roman furniture design did not run parallel to that of the

Greeks. Rather, it continued its history. The chair with back, called the cathedra, was similar to the Greek klismos but often heavier and not nearly as commonly used (Richter 1966:97). Benches were used as they were in Greece, but were regarded as seats for the humble, since they were considered less comfortable than other forms of seating. Stone benches often lined walls of buildings and were used, again, by students listening to lectures (Richter 1966:104). It is difficult to determine exact periods of style for benches simply because their design was almost always the same. Legs were either voluted (spiral, scroll shape) or animal inspired, armrests - when present - were also voluted, and backs were usually not present. (Richter 1966:104)

Another type of Roman "seating" most often associated with private peristyle gardens is the triclinium or dining couch (Figure 1.18) on which Romans would recline while eating. Large numbers of these triclinia have been found in lavish and humble homes, attesting to the "popularity of eating outdoors" among most people of the time. (Jashemski and Jashemski 1979:89) The dining couches were simple U-shaped masonry structures (sometimes semi-circular) consisting of two parallel couches, the lectus immus and the lectus summus, that were usually equal in length and joined by a third couch, the lectus medius. (Jashemski and Jashemski 1979:89) Each of the three couches accommodated three people, making nine the ideal number for a dinner party. The diners supported themselves

on their left elbow and a table, placed at the centre of the U was near enough for each guest to help themselves directly from the large serving dishes (individual plates were not used). The hard masonry couches would have been made more comfortable with mattresses and pillows. They were also often shaded with a vine-covered arbor called a velum. Children, slaves, and travellers sat to eat, but on special occasions they were often given the privilege of reclining. (Jashemski and Jashemski 1979:90)

Though usually associated with private gardens, variations of these triclinia have been found in various other environments including the tomb monuments of Pompeii. These tomb monuments were located on roads leading out of the five city gates. The tombs varied greatly in size and form. Some were small temples, others high altars, others still, commemorative arches (Jashemski and Jashemski 1979:150). One tomb in particular was quite unusual. It took the form of a semicircular bench, or schola, in a roofed niche, providing a shady resting place for travellers on this busy street. The form is most likely derived from the garden triclinium (Jashemski and Jashemski 1979:153). These scholae were also found in conjunction with public buildings such as the one at the Doric Temple of Pompeii. Here, the schola is placed such that, when seated, one has a view over the plain to the Lattari Mountains beyond and to the Bay of Naples on the right. These benches were also associated with the central palaestra (outdoor exercise area) of the public baths.

The palaestra was enclosed by a colonnade and the benches were placed within them, overlooking the garden. (Jashemski and Jashemski 1979:158)

Medieval Europe

Rome's collapse was echoed in every aspect of medieval life. Cultural values that were once widespread, lost their meaning or were changed beyond recognition. When the nomads plundered Rome, they found chairs that made no sense to them. Their habit was to squat on the ground, and so it remained. (Giedion 1975:263) The Goths produced no furniture modelled after the shape of the human body. In the fifteenth century, low, three-legged stools continued to be used. According to Giedion (1975: 264), the people of medieval Europe sat in an improvised and informal fashion, squatting more often than they sat. People sat on

the bare floor and on cushions. They sat on stairs and on the steps leading to the high-posted beds. In the courthouse (c. 1450s), people sat close together on plain wooden benches without backrests, and with little room for the legs. The justices sat on the floor with great informality, while dignitaries sat on the steps of the royal throne. (Giedion 1975:265)

Long periods of instability and war throughout Europe forced cities to turn inwards, cutting the "most vulnerable limbs from their bodies" (Grimal 1983: 8). Cities became closed behind fortified walls. Tombs and temples were furnished with little expense. Building materials were taken from the buildings left outside the walls. This was a time of profound insecurity of living conditions. Every class of society was menaced. Fortifications and weapons formed the chief expenditures of town budgets. Even behind walls, life was not secure (Giedion 1975:272). A

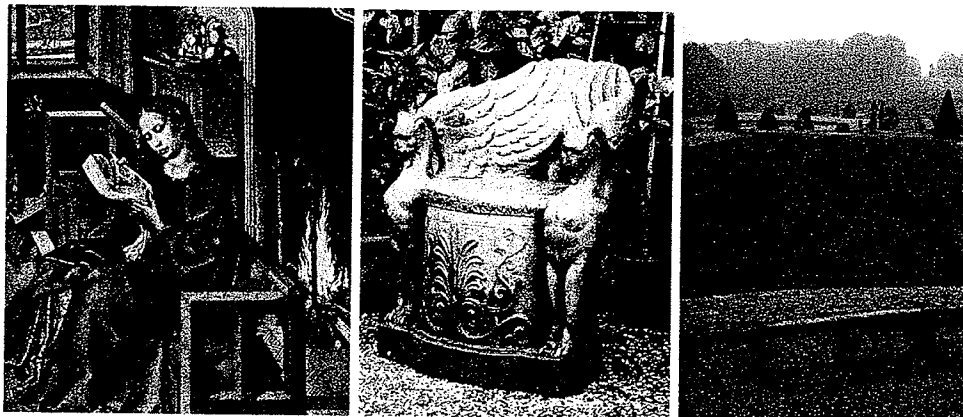


Fig. 1.20 Medieval Swing Bench. (Giedion, 1975), Fig. 1.21 Terra Cotta Seat at Villa Garzoni. (Plumptre 1989), Fig. 1.22. Simple Stone Bench at Vaux le Vicomte (Plumptre 1989)

new type of city was formed in fear and confusion (Grimal 1983:8). Given the need for fortification and this profound insecurity and lack of resources, it is unlikely that much thought or precedence was given to public space in general, or more specifically, to its furnishings and ornament. This fear continued until well into the thirteenth century. Monasteries were the highest agents of civilization, the centres of social activity and education. They offered places of relative safety and stability in times of strife. It was within these walls that medieval furniture took shape. Examples include faldstools of bronze or wood, ecclesiastical thrones, and choir stalls. (Giedion 1975:300) Figure 1.20 is a drawing of a medieval "swing bench". The benches back rest can be swung around so that seating on either side of the bench is possible. (Giedion 1975:300)

Today, much of how we live and design is also based on fear. People move to 'safe' suburbs and gated communities for fear of being robbed or harmed in some way. Design is based on codes that maximize safety and minimize risk for fear of liability.

Renaissance and Baroque Design

According to Giedion (1975:300), the Italian and French Renaissance of the sixteenth century was less prolific in the sphere of furniture than it was in painting

and architecture. Its contribution however, was not insignificant. It elaborated in detail on the designs of the late Gothic and by the mid-sixteenth century the chair, once again, became a popular object of use.

In terms of landscape design, the western ornamental gardens originated in the Renaissance with the Medici gardens near Florence serving as prototypes (Plumptre 1989:13). By the middle of the seventeenth century, the influence of the Italian Renaissance was well established throughout most of western Europe, particularly in France where it is seen in such gardens as Chantilly and Fontainebleau (Plumptre 1989:14).

Seating has been incorporated into garden architecture since the original gardens of the Renaissance. Since then people have disagreed on whether the seats should be used as ornament, and therefore "decorative and striking", or whether they should be as unobtrusive as possible. (Plumptre 1989:151) In both Italian Renaissance and French Baroque gardens, seats were usually only treated in a decorative manner if they occupied a position of axial importance. In such cases they were given highly decorated arms and feet as illustrated in the terracotta seat at Villa Garzoni (Figure 1.21) (Plumptre 1989:151). In contrast, Figure 1.22 depicts a simple stone bench at Vaux-le-Vicomte. Situated in the garden's main parterre beyond the house, the bench blends into the overall design without playing an active role in the grand vista.

Once again, these gardens were all privately owned and therefore not really available to all members of the community. On occasion, the gardens were opened to the public but admittance was generally limited to “people of quality”. (Cleary 2002:73) The seating provided in them, therefore, cannot be classified as public. The examples do, however, provide relevant information on outdoor seat design at the time. They are also the forerunners of the seating we use today.

As for public seating at the time, some literature suggests that seating was incorporated into the pedestrian promenades of seventeenth century France. The promenades were designed for recreational walks and carriage rides and became distinctive features of French cities and towns. They were usually

lined with trees and their linear layout encouraged movement. (Cleary 2002:68)

Public gardens proliferated in number and variety in the mid eighteenth century when they became “essential features of well-appointed cities” (Cleary 2002:73). Like the Tuileries Gardens, these public gardens were symmetrically composed of bosquets and parterres containing a variety of settings for walking and sitting. This would remain the model for public gardens to the end of the eighteenth century.

It was also a time when radical shifts in interior furniture design occurred. Now luxury and flexibility in posture are manifest through curved upholstered backs allowing the chair to adapt itself to the body (Giedion 1977:310). In 1725 a new form of chair, the bergère, was designed

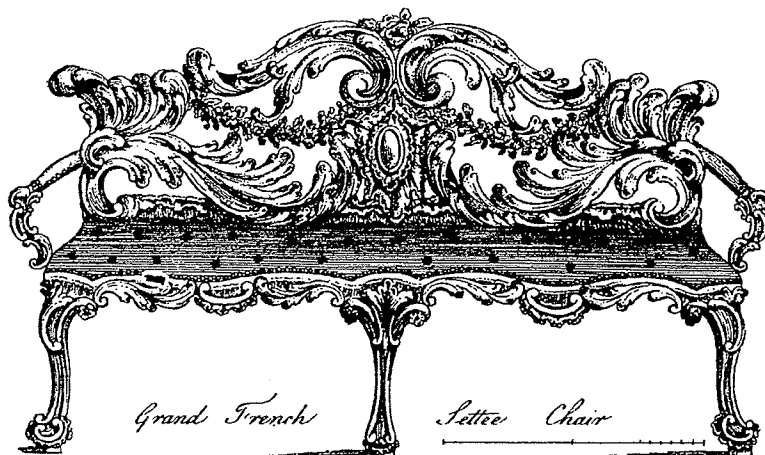


Fig. 1.23 The Grand French Settee.(Giedion 1975) Designed in 1775 for indoor use, it is easy to see how a typical park bench still resembles this form.

with armrests and upholstered seat fused into a continuous curve. The bergère en gondole (named after the gondola) was wavy with a semi-high back on which the user could rest his or her "shoulder against the chair back while leaving the head free to avoid disarranging the hair either of the ladies or the gentlemen". (Giedion 1977: 313)

English Neoclassicism

William Kent decided that a seat situated as a focal point should beckon visitors while at the same time providing a reward once they have arrived at it. At Rousham, he designed a pair of small, pedimented, trellis-work pavilion seats that did just that (Figure 1.24). By the mid eighteenth century these trellis pavilion seats combined with Chinese influence produced some of the most elaborate, geometric designs of wooden outdoor seats. (Plumptre 1989:75) Today these are among the most popularly reproduced furniture designs (Plumptre 1989: 154).

The Victorians enjoyed being inventive and "comfortable". It is important to point out that the term comfort is a relative one and that notions of what is comfortable varies among cultures and through time. In her book, *The Chair*, Galen Cranz (1998) explains how the concept of comfort can be problematic in relation to long-term health and skeletal alignment. This notion will be discussed further in the fourth chapter of this study. Nevertheless, the inventiveness

and desire for comfort of the time can be observed in the variety of different styles of garden furnishings, of the nineteenth century. (Plumptre 1989:155) Wooden seats became especially popular later in the century with the Arts and Crafts movement. One of the more ingenious designs for wooden seating incorporated handles at one end and a wheel at the other allowing for ease of movement from one site to another. This reflected a new development in seating with regards to its positioning in the landscape. Prior to this time, seating was planned as part of the overall design and therefore a permanent fixture. Suddenly, it became completely acceptable for seats to be moved from one part of the garden to another. (Plumptre 1989:155)

The Victorians also worked with cast iron, stone, and wrought iron when designing seats. These models were much heavier

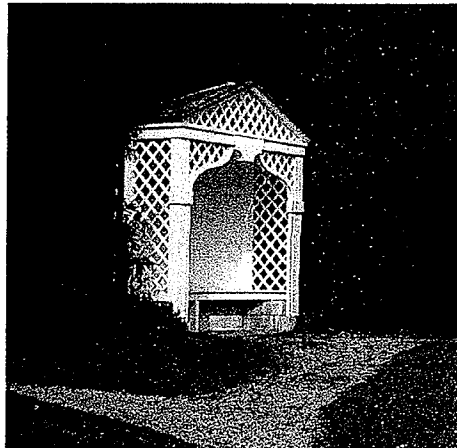


Fig. 1.24 William Kent's Trellis Work Pavillion Seat at Rousham. (Plumptre 1989)

and therefore not easily moved. Designs of this day were often embellished with rich designs such as backs with leaf work or vines, arms ending in animal heads or birds, and legs sometimes clothed in foliage. This is somewhat reminiscent of the ancient designs already discussed.

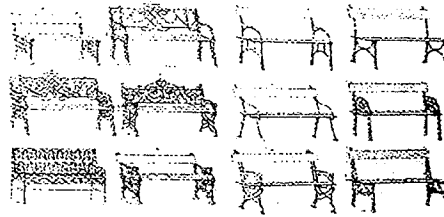


Fig. 1.25 Series of English Benches 1858. (Davis 1914)

Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has traced notions of public outdoor seating back to prehistory and our early hominid ancestors. With the beginning of western civilization we see a more settled way of life and the advent of structures designed solely for the purpose of sitting off the ground. Over time, public outdoor seating has evolved showing remarkably little variation until the nineteenth century. Here we see diversity in the materials used as mechanization opens new doors for invention. Nonetheless, many designs continue to reflect the very early forms of seating belonging to the ancient Egyptians. Today one need only flip through an outdoor furnishings catalog to see that the majority of seating is very much uninspired by innovation and reminiscent of the very first types.

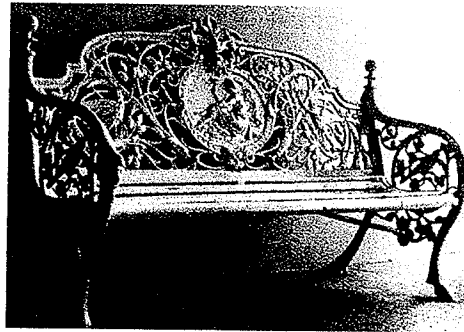


Fig. 1.26 English Wrought Iron Bench 1865 (Davis 1914)



2. Present Day Public Outdoor Seating

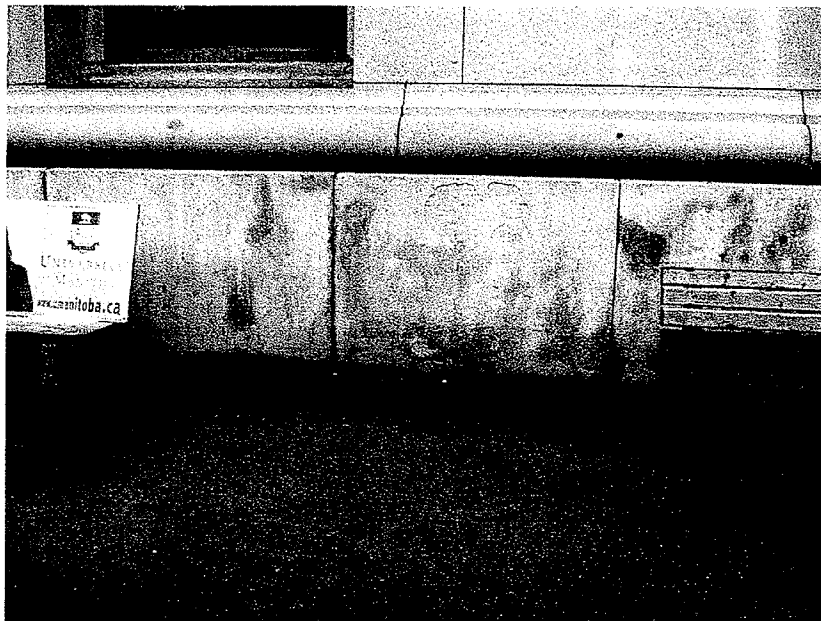


Fig. 2.1. Two Benches on Main St.

“The bench in itself does not exist. It depends on who is sitting on it.”

-Dirk Reinartz Benchmarking in Germany

2

Chapter 2: Introduction

The previous chapter pinpointed the origin of outdoor seating in the western world and outlined its history from the early hominids of the Paleolithic to the nineteenth century Victorians. This chapter discusses the current state of public seating with specific reference to the city of Winnipeg. A quick inventory of seating types on four streets in downtown Winnipeg was used to accomplish this.

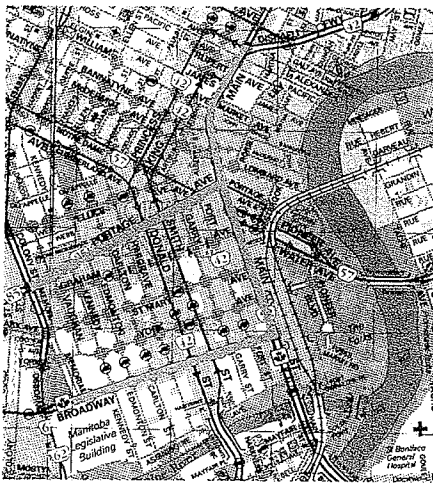


Fig. 2.2 Map of Downtown Winnipeg. Red lines outline area of inventory.

The Inventory

The inventory was taken between April 16th and 18th of 2003 at various times of day. Four streets in downtown Winnipeg were observed. As illustrated in Figure 2.2, they included Broadway, from Memorial Boulevard, east to Main Street; Portage Avenue from Colony Street, east to Main Street; Main Street from Broadway, north to the Disraeli Freeway; and Albert Street, from Notre Dame up to and including Old



Fig. 2.3 Ad Bench Placed Immediately Adjacent to a High Traffic Roadway, Fig. 2.3 Bench with Missing Slat on Seat, Fig. 2.4 Polished Granite Seating Wall - a Favourite Perch for People Working in Nearby Buildings.

Market Square. Each street was negotiated on foot so that all available seating options could be recorded and photographed. The overall condition of each bench was also noted.

The intention of the inventory was simply to illustrate some of the seating designs that are currently in use in Winnipeg. The results are not meant to represent all existing seating types in the city. In scientific terms it would be closer to a reconnaissance exercise rather than a controlled sampling. No statistical analyses were performed and provisions were not made to ensure equal representation of all seating types throughout the city.

Results/Critique

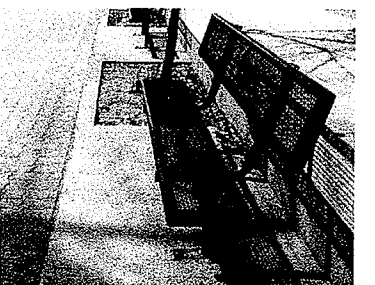
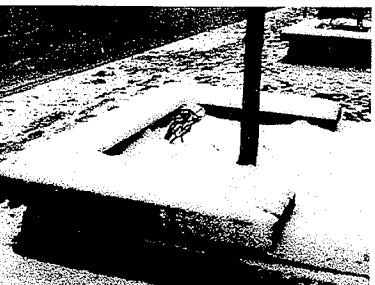
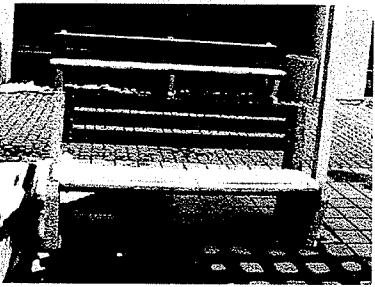
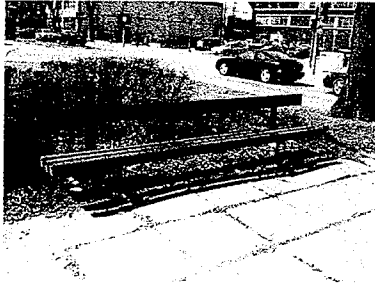
Over the course of the inventory, two kinds of seating were encountered. The first were those whose primary function was seating such as chairs and benches. Twelve different designs of this kind were observed. The second were those that had other primary functions such as retaining

walls, raised planters, and stairs, but that also could be appropriated and used as seating. While the different styles and materialities of this type were not counted, it was noted that these types tended to be favoured over actual benches.

Primary Seating Style

Figures 27 to 40 on the following pages, illustrate some of the seating types encountered in the inventory. Variations occur mainly in materiality rather than in form. For example, several combinations of wood, metal, stone, and concrete are observed. However, all observed styles are "benches" – some with backs and some without. They are all meant to accommodate more than one sitter. When these benches are occupied, however, it is usually by only one person at a time. Their long linear forms make conversation difficult when more than two people occupy one bench.

In all designs, seats are fixed in place through bolts, concrete footings, or simply by being too heavy to lift. Users are therefore unable to reposition the seats in



Figs. 2.5 - 2.15 Photographs of Various Seating Types Encountered in Inventory

What is wrong with these seats?
No one is using them



Fig. 2.16 Classically Styled Bench Placed in Downtown Winnipeg Street.

order to optimize their sun/wind exposures and social arrangements. The benches tend to be positioned on sidewalk edges – either immediately adjacent to the road or up against the adjoining property. Those placed near roadways generally tend to double as advertising and seem to be least desirable for sitting. (Figure 27) Design and placement of these “Ad Benches” seems intentional, to deter people from sitting on them thereby maximising their advertising potential. On Broadway, these benches were placed on boulevards near traffic intersections.

Many of these options were not designed with the city’s climate in mind. As a result, most of them are covered in snow during winter, making them virtually unusable to the average inhabitant for a large portion of the year. Those whose seats and / or backs are made of metal are often too cold to sit on in winter and too hot in summer. Concrete benches also tend to be too cold in winter. Often these benches are placed in wide, open areas making users uncomfortable and susceptible to the harsh winter winds.

These benches are ethnocentric in that they restrict postures other than the right-angled seated one. People of many cultures do not assume this posture when at rest and some researchers, such as Galen Cranz (1998), even believe this to be an unhealthy way to sit. Variations in the dimensions of the human body tend not to be considered. All of the noted examples have fixed dimensions even though people come in all shapes and sizes. The designs are based on assumptions about average human proportions. They also restrict alternate

uses. These benches are designed solely for the purpose of sitting short lengths of time. Any recreational or other uses are unwanted.

Many are in poor condition, with pieces missing or uneven bases making them difficult and uncomfortable places to sit (Figure 28). As such, they do not add to or enhance the urban environment aesthetically, physiologically, or socially.

Secondary Seating Style

While exact numbers of the secondary seating types – the retaining walls, planters, etc., were not recorded, several observations were noted. In most cases, these options were used more often than the actual benches. Here, people were observed sitting, leaning, and perching on them. This is probably due to several reasons. These elements usually extend from buildings to the sidewalk. They are designed as part of the building architecture and therefore create boundary zones between public and private ground (Figure 29). It seemed that most of the people using them worked in nearby buildings. They were popular smoke and coffee break spots probably because of their proximity to workplaces.

Not all sitters, however, worked in the immediately adjacent buildings. So what attracted them? Because the elements are largely privately owned, they tend to be well maintained and clean. Most are constructed of finer materials such as smooth granite making them more inviting to sit on than most benches. Placement is often such that those who choose to stop and rest can do so without feeling exposed

or unsafe. Sitters can face the action and have their backs protected by the building. This proximity to the building also proves desirable in various climatic conditions. When it is cold, as it was at the time of study, the buildings create warmer pockets and a defence against wind. On hot days, they provide shade from the sun. As previously mentioned, these elements also allowed for a variety of postures making them attractive to a wider range of people.

William Whyte's *Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*

These preferences do not seem to be specific to Winnipeg. William Whyte's study, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (1980), conducted in various outdoor plazas in New York City, reaches similar conclusions. He believed that seating is perhaps the most important component of a successful public space. "Benches are artifacts, the purpose of which is to punctuate architectural photographs. They're not so good for sitting. There are usually too few of them, they are too small, and they are often isolated from other benches or from whatever action there is on the plaza." (1980:33) Their worst feature is that they are "frozen in concrete permanence". He found that ledges and sitting walls wide enough for two people to sit back to back are more successful. He also found steps to be successful for similar reasons. "The range of space provides an infinity of possible groupings and excellent site lines

make all these seats great for watching the theatre of the street." (Whyte 1980:32)

Whyte (1980:28) believed that seating should be physically comfortable. Designs should be well contoured and include backrests. He also believed, however, that it is more important for it to be socially comfortable. This means choice. Choice can be provided by arranging seats in a variety of sizes and configurations. Moveable chairs allow users the freedom of choice to move into or out of the sun, to make room for groups, or to move away from them. "The possibility of choice is as important as the exercise of it. If you know you can move a chair if you want to, you feel more comfortable staying put...Moving the chair is a declaration of autonomy to oneself and rather satisfying." (Whyte:1980:34) Social distance is a subtle measure that varies among people and their relation to one another. The distances of fixed seats do not change which is why they are rarely quite right for anybody. They tend to have so much space around them that they feel somewhat awkward. (Whyte 1980:35)

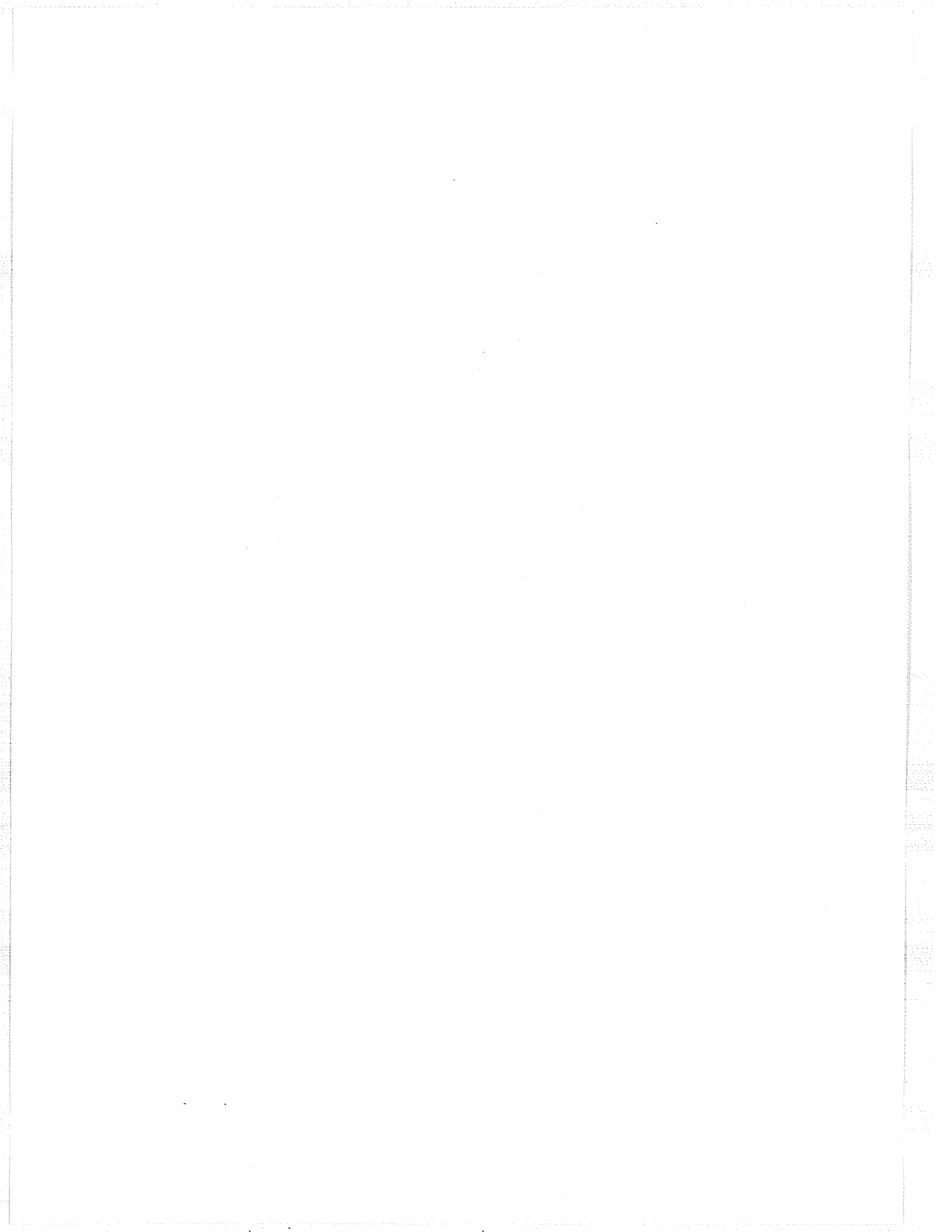
With moveable seats in the public realm however, comes the issue of security. What is to stop people from stealing and vandalizing them? There are several sites where this has not proved to be too much of a problem. For example, William Whyte (1980:37) described how the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York put out approximately two hundred chairs along its steps leaving them out unattended twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. They found that it was less expensive to trust people and to periodically

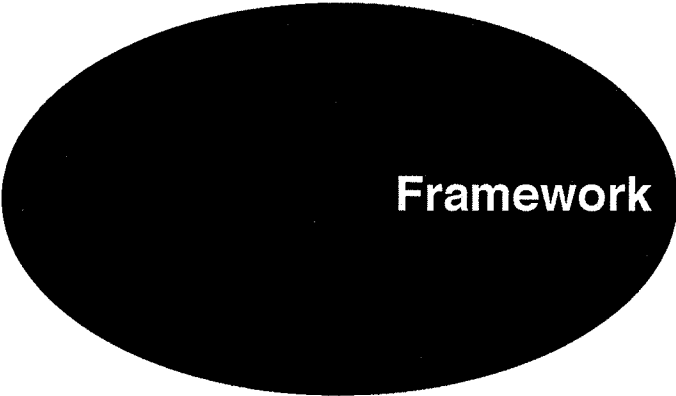
Conclusion

In summary, most people prefer seating that allows for several options in posture and placement. Benches typical to the public plazas and streets of today's cities are uncomfortable from both physical and social perspectives and, perhaps as a consequence, are subject to greater vandalism than better designed, moveable seats. They are used less than other elements of the urban fabric such as ledges, retaining walls, steps, and planters. Any new proposal must take these factors into consideration.

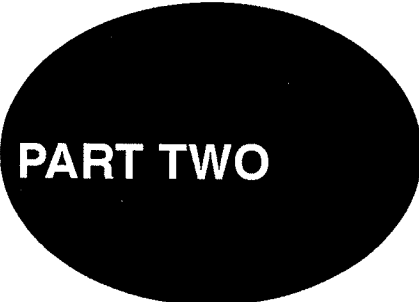


Fig. 2.17 Portage Avenue Planter / Seating

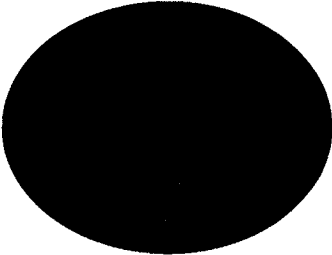


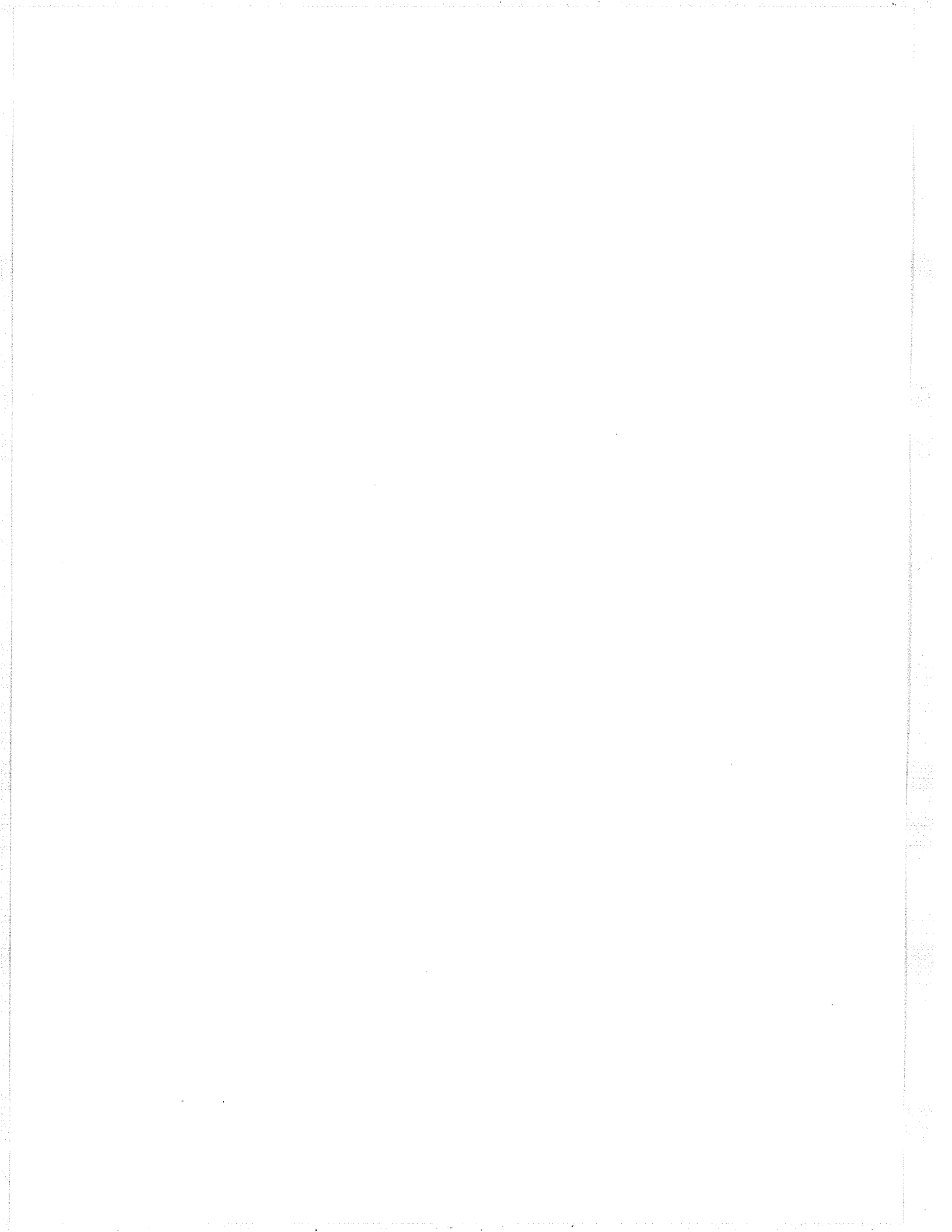


Framework



PART TWO





3. Place, Identity, and Branding in the City



Fig. 3.1 Downtown Winnipeg

“Marginality is today no longer limited to minority groups, but is rather massive and pervasive; this cultural activity of the non-producers of culture, an activity that is unsigned, unreadable, and unsymbolized, remains the only one possible for all those who nevertheless buy and pay for the showy products through which a productivist economy articulates itself.

A marginal group has now become a silent majority.”

- Michel DeCerteau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

3

Introduction

One of the initial intentions of this project was to design a form of public seating that related to place and the urban identity of Winnipeg. In order to do this, the past and present discourses surrounding place and identity first had to be outlined. However, through the course of this study, it became clear that top-down approaches to urban design, such as constructing city identities, can be inappropriate and even detrimental for several reasons.

As a result of globalization, our understanding of geography and place has been transformed irrevocably. According to Joel Kotkin (2000:4), the world at one time seemed to be made up of unique locations – Texas cattle ranches, New England towns, relaxed beachside cities. He argues that while these locations still do exist, many of the distinctions between town and city have become as “obsolete as the horse-drawn mail coach”. Notions of place and identity have been central to the practice of landscape architecture for decades. Over the years, the discourse has evolved and today, academics and designers question the relevance of these notions with regard to urban design. Some, such as Rem Koolhaas, argue for

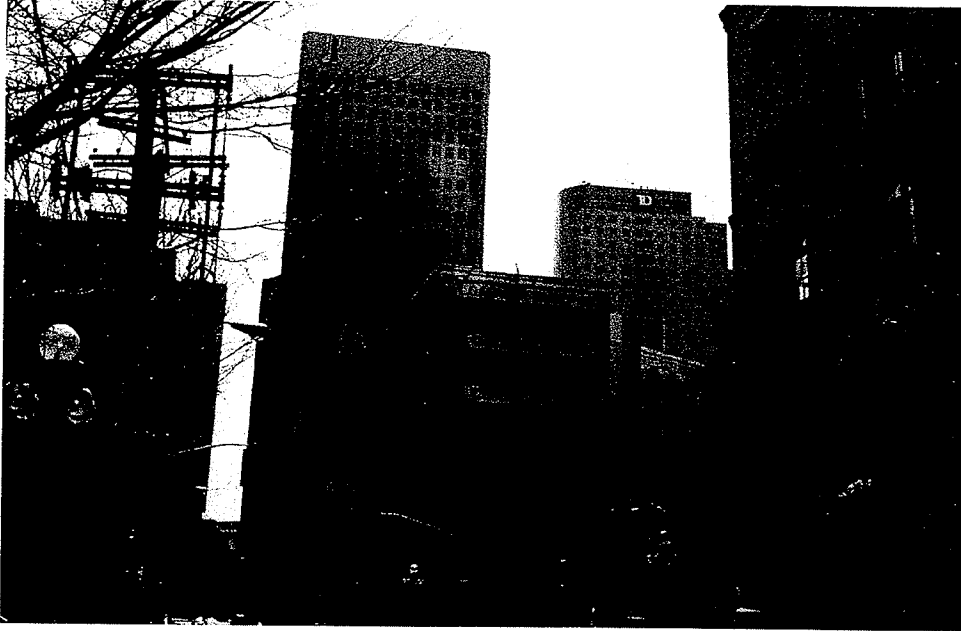


Fig. 3.2 Photograph Taken in Downtown Winnipeg Illustrating its 'Environmental Character'

the generic city as a form of identity itself. He sees globalization and its systematic stripping of the city identity as cause for celebration marking the emergence of a global liberation movement. Others believe that precisely this stripping of identity is what makes these notions even more important now than ever before. Still others believe that individuality is achieved through marketing and branding strategies, similar to those used in the sale of manufactured goods.

Place and Identity Defined

Place

The word place is derived from the ancient Greek word *platus* meaning broad. This later gave rise to the word *plateia*, an open square or courtyard, or a shared commons surrounded by private houses. When Rome expanded, its urban forms were spread throughout Europe becoming symbols of civilization. Among these components were the bath, aqueduct, forum, and *plattia*. People in various regions developed other pronunciations such as *piazza*, *platz*, and *plaza*. These terms are the forerunners to the Anglo-Norman word, *place*, meaning an open space ringed by houses. (Howarth 2001:57)

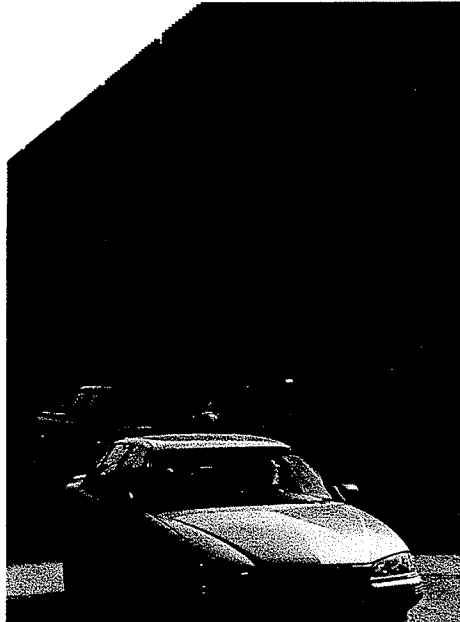


Fig. 3.3 Photograph Taken in Downtown Winnipeg Illustrating its 'Environmental Character'

Place is different from the geometrical idea of space. Where space is a set of points or dimensions that measure distance, area, and volume, place refers to a broader range of human activity. It "sustains fundamental concepts of time and space, the earth and maps, forms of writing, the sacred, the profane, gardens and buildings, region and nation." (Howarth 2001:57) The shape, feel, and texture of a place provide a glimpse into the processes, structures, spaces, and histories that went into its making (Adams et al. 2001:xii).

Sense of place and the related idea of toponophilia are associated with humanistic geography of the 1970s. They were defined

in opposition to the "alienation produced by placeless modern environments". (Duncan and Duncan 2001: 41) Topophilia is defined as the "affective bond between people and place where an increase in the homogeneity of the landscape decreases attachment to place". (Duncan and Duncan 2001: 42) According to Yi Fu Tuan, the man responsible for coining the term, this attachment can be based on, among other things, memories or pride of ownership. The aesthetic becomes a principle mode of relating to an environment. (Duncan and Duncan 2001:41) A more recent line of research suggests that there can be negative consequences to topophilia, namely social exclusion. For example, the affluent bedroom community of Bedford just outside New York City prides itself on being the most beautiful outer suburb of the New York metropolitan area. Consequently, it is also the most expensive. Here, landscape taste becomes an example of "cultural capital" that is highly valued by the local population. This in turn, serves as a subtle basis for social distinctions. Zoning of the community, meant to maintain its aesthetic quality, is such that lower income families could in no way afford to live there. "Social identities become spatialized through topophilia. Landscapes become symbolic of social relations and the relative social standing of individuals." (Duncan and Duncan 2001:45)

In the past, humanistic geographers were concerned with making explicit the relationship between knowledge and human interests. All social constructions

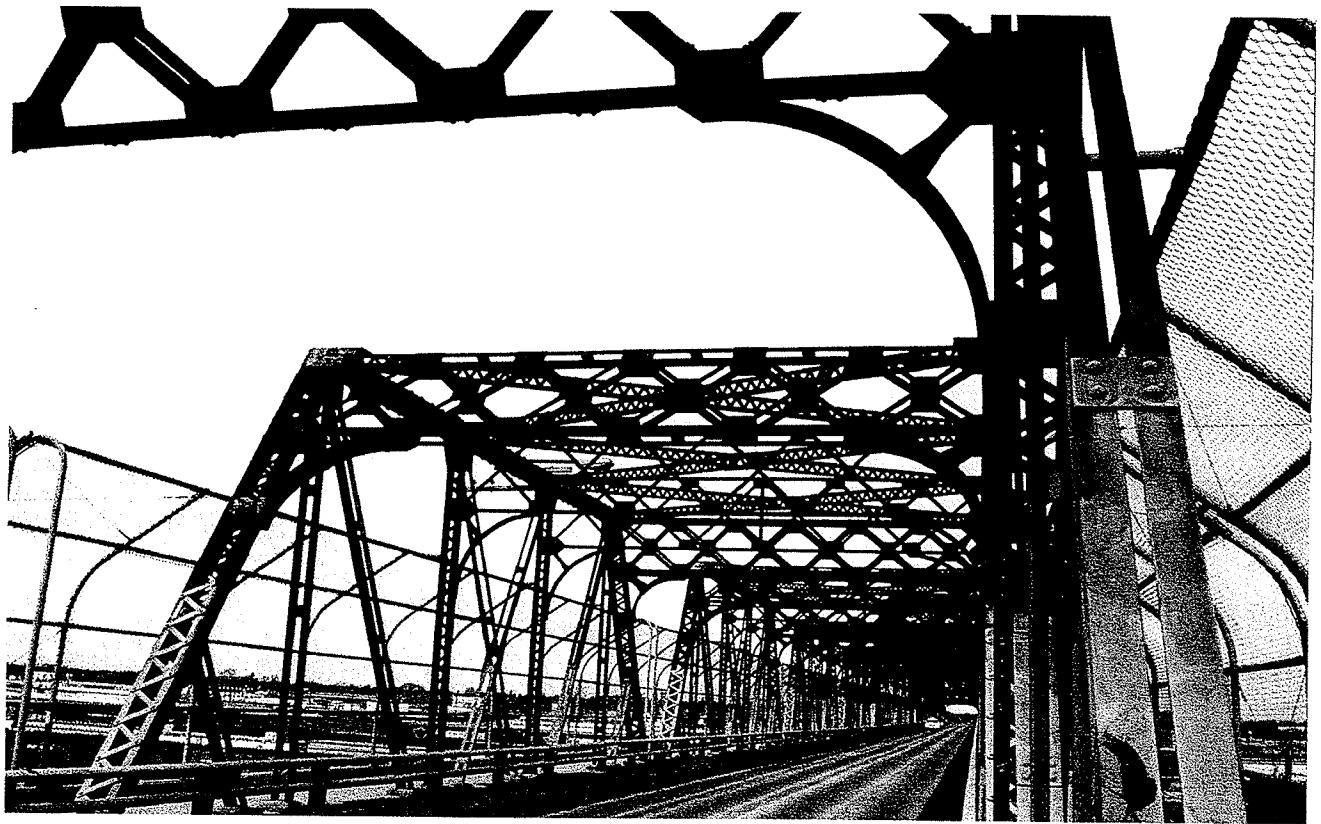


Fig. 3.4 The Arlington Bridge in Winnipeg

Fig. 3.5 A Winnipeg Rail Yard





Fig. 3.6 Downtown Winnipeg
Fig. 3.7 Railyard in Winnipeg

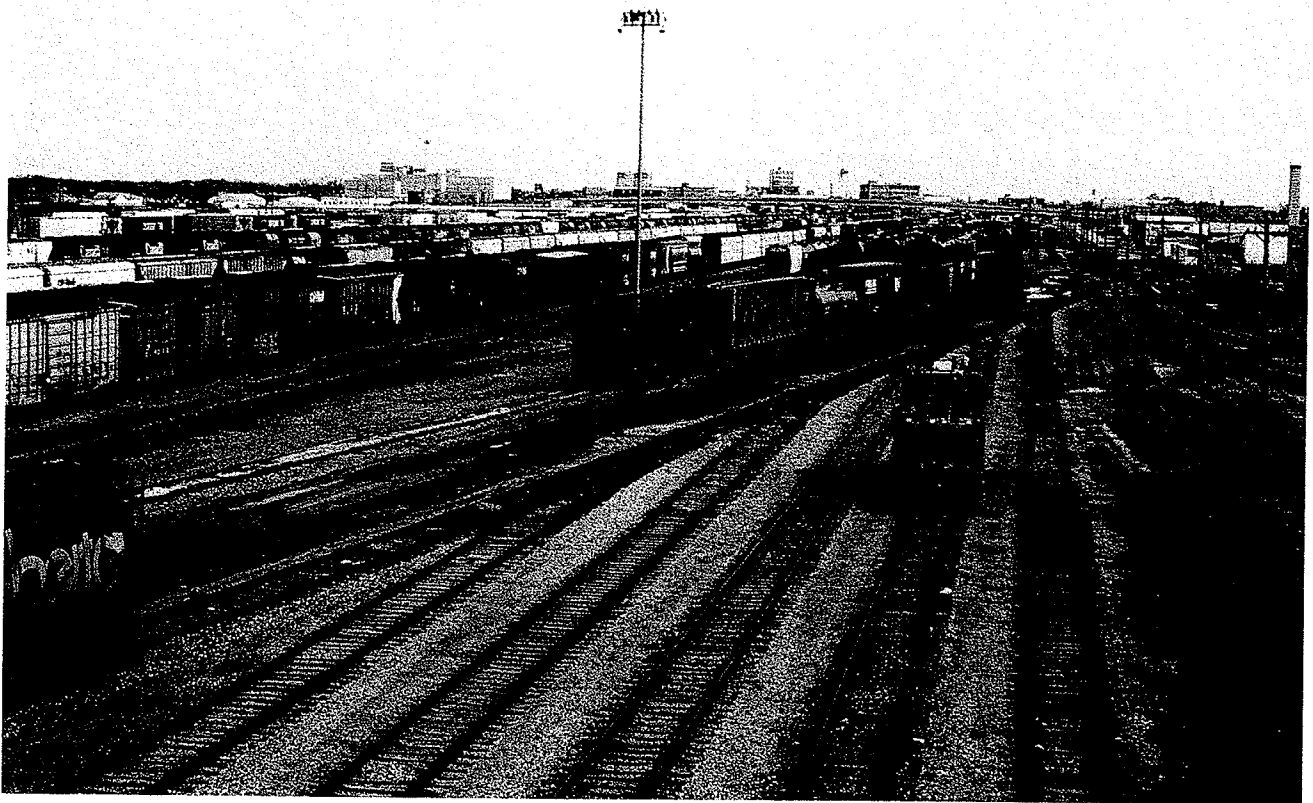




Fig. 3.8 Bur Oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) - A Common Tree Native to Winnipeg
Fig. 3.9 First Snow in Winnipeg



were thought to reflect the values of a society and an epoch. Humanistic philosophies rejected any claims of objectivity and pure theory in the study of humans (Adams et al. 2001:xv). Many humanistic geographers turned to phenomenology, the philosophical science -often combined with existentialism- concerned with "universal and absolute laws that govern the spiritual and psychological workings of humans as the philosophical basis for their investigations of being-in-the-world." (Adams et al. 2001: xv) Such is the stance Christian Norburg-Schultz took in his seminal work, *Genius Loci* where he defined place as "the concrete manifestation of man dwelling... It is a totality made up of concrete things, having material substance such as shape, colour, and texture. Together these things determine an 'environmental character' which is the essence of place... Place is a qualitative total phenomenon which we cannot reduce to any of its qualities without losing its concrete nature." (1979: 5) Norburg-Schultz (1979:18) reminds us that genius loci is a Roman concept. According to ancient Roman belief, every independent being has its own guardian spirit - or genius. This spirit gives life to people and places, accompanying them from birth to death, and determines their character or essence. Other ancient settlements recognized the importance of an intimate understanding of the genius of their home locale. Survival in both physical and psychic senses depended on it. One example was discussed in the previous chapter - where each ancient Egyptian settlement was associated with

a particular deity whose attributes were manifest in the place. "Human identity is... a function of places and things. It is therefore not only important that our environment has a spatial structure which facilitates orientation, but that it consists of concrete objects of identification". (Norburg-Schultz 1979:20)

Other humanistic academics emphasized the politics of place and place making. Edward Relph (in Adams et al. 2001:xv) believed that "one of the first aims of the phenomenology of geography should be to retrieve these everyday experiences from the academic netherworld and to return them to everyone by re-awakening a sense of wonder about the earth and its places".

For much of the 1980s and 90s, questions of place had been devalued, but given the current global conditions these questions have resurfaced and are once again worthy of academic consideration. According to Adams et al. (2001:xix), "Focus on place is not a current academic fad: place is central to how the world seems to work." Many scholars, however, no longer trust the search for universal definitions and the term humanistic geography has not frequently been used since the 1980s. Today, various contexts are examined and rather than attempting to capture the "essence of place", most scholars interpret its multiplicity. Rather than focusing on human existence they speculate on the ways place influences individual and collective identities surrounding race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality (Adams et al. 2001:xix). From this view,



Fig. 3.10 Identity can be Expressed Simply by Where One Chooses to Sit

“places are not so much bounded areas as they are open porous networks of social relations” (Adams et al. 2001:xix). Place identities are therefore multiple and can change over time. If we accept that places are porous networks, then we can see how they might allow themselves to be influenced by certain global phenomena while still maintaining a certain amount of individuality. The question then becomes - can a city reach equilibrium between having enough global culture to function as part of the current globally oriented world and still maintain its own individuality and character?

Identity

Both the word and the idea of identity are modern in origin. According to Wilbur Zelinsky (2001:129), the earliest citation in the Oxford English Dictionary of the term in anything resembling its current meaning is dated at 1638. Here it was defined as:

‘The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition

or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality; personality’.

An upsurge in the usage of the word began approximately fifty years ago suggesting an increase in the number of people and places pondering just who or what they are. (Zelinsky 2001:129) A series of social and technological developments, such as automotive and air transport, electronic media beginning with the telegraph, cable, and telephone, and then television, email, and the internet resulted in changes in social, demographic, economic, and psychological conditions. Until World War I, the western notion of the nation state was a promising utopia. People believed in their leaders and identified themselves with the countries in which they lived. After World War II the nation state came to be seen as dystopic. “Whatever rigidities the modern nation-state may have intended and imposed on its citizens, the issue of choice of individual life projects and of personal identity had begun to emerge.” (Zelinsky 2001:133) Later, in the 1950s, ‘identity’ began its “meteoric rise from relative obscurity”. (Zelinsky 2001:134)

It is also at this time that we observe individual and collective notions of escape through science fiction and imagining of time travel. Originally, science fiction celebrated the wonders of science and technology. But by the 1950s, it began to construct alternative worlds, histories, and life forms, expressing a discontent with the actual situation of the time (Zelinsky 2001:135). More recently, we see a boom

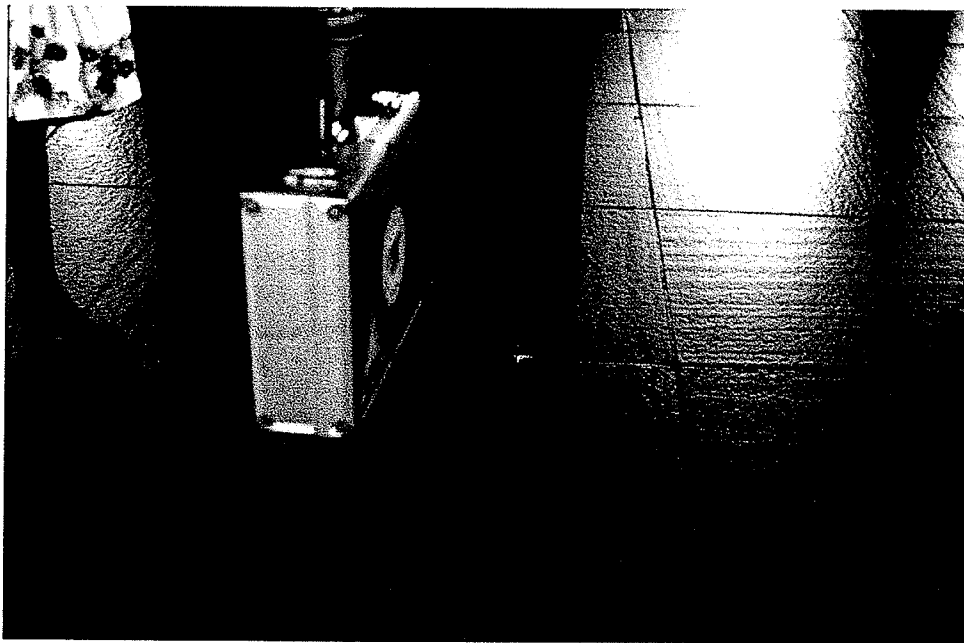


Fig. 3.11 People Often Wear Clothing that Expresses their Identities.

in historic preservation and nostalgia-filled architecture and urban planning strategies such as New Urbanism. Douglas Kellner (in Zelinsky 2001:133) says:

"In modernity identity becomes more mobile, multiple, personal, self-reflective and subject to change and revision. Yet identity in modernity is also social and Other-related...The forms of identity...are also relatively substantial and fixed; identity still comes from a circumscribed set of roles and norms: one is a mother, a son, a Texan, a Scot, a professor, a socialist, a Catholic, a lesbian – or rather a combination of these social roles and possibilities. Identities are thus still relatively circumscribed, fixed and limited, though the boundaries of possible identities, of new identities, and are continually expanding."

By the 1960s, modernism gave rise to the post-modern era. While it is still too near to us to fully understand its implications, one idea implicit in the discourse is the dilemma of identity (Zelinsky 2001: 135). Zygmunt Bauman (in Zelinsky 2001:136) says:

"Postmodernism is the point at which modern untying of tied identities reaches its completion: it is now all too easy to choose identity, but no longer possible to hold it. At the moment of its ultimate triumph, the liberation succeeds in annihilating its object...Freedom...has given the postmodern seekers of identity all the powers of a Sisyphus." [Sisyphus being a Corinthian king eternally condemned to

rolling a heavy rock up a hill in Hades only to have it roll down again as it nears the top. (Merriam-Webster online 2003)]

On one hand, postmodernism has provided freedoms never before attained. One can escape from identities that are no longer suitable or tolerable through migration or in situ. Identities are no longer 'circumscribed or fixed'. You can be whoever and whatever you want. Gilles Deleuze (in Borden 2001: 11) defines difference based on originality, individualism, and particularity. But, if everyone is different then there is no group of others from which to be different. In other words, by being unique, you are actually being like everyone else. Henri Lefebvre (in Borden et. al. 2001:11), on the other hand, formulates difference as "that which emerges from struggle, the conceptual, and the lived. It occurs through social constructions such as class, ethnicity, gender, age, family relations, and sexuality". In terms of landscape, the continued globalization of all realms of human affairs has led to worries of being reduced to universal sameness and anonymity, resulting in the urge to differentiate oneself from the rest – to find one's authentic self. This can be seen in all localities that have reacted to the downside of placelessness and have worked to come up with some form of distinctiveness. Lefebvre (in Borden 2001:11) argues for a revolutionary project – a "differential space" that restores difference ensuring that the "right to the city is not the right to buildings or even public space but rather the right to be different, the right not to be classified forcibly into categories

determined by homogenizing powers.”

Globalization and the Generic City

A common theme in all areas of current academia relates to the notion of globalization and its impact on place. While it is often discussed as a recent development, its origins can be seen in ancient Roman city planning. Upon conquest, Roman cities were laid out in a square crossed by two perpendicular roads that met at the centre of the square. Each city contained a forum, theatres and amphitheatres, baths, temples, a basilica or courthouse, and aqueducts and fountains regardless of where they occurred. Nonetheless with recent surges in technology and mobility, the effects of globalization are perhaps heightened today. According to Michael Speaks (2002:50), globalization has erased local and regional differences to such an extent that we now live in a global monoculture. Cities are forced to compete with each other for market share while using the same architectural, planning, and commercial “chess pieces” provided by this monoculture. Architectural “exotica”, such as the Guggenheim at Bilbao are examples of the extreme measures cities will take in order to differentiate themselves. Its remarkable success, however, has resulted in its quick absorption into the monoculture and therefore is now being deployed in Los Angeles, Buenos Aires, Tokyo, and any other city in need of an economic boost.

“Soon there will be a ‘Bilbao’ in every city.” (Speaks 2002:50) According to Berci Florian (2002:24) “Urban developments will increasingly have to take shape from a global awareness. The simple importation of concepts and formulas from other parts of the world is no longer sufficient.”

This view is slightly deceiving. It suggests that it is too late - that all cities around the world are exactly the same. This is simply not true. While it is true that one can find at least one McDonald’s restaurant in almost any city in the world, we cannot say that Berlin is the same as Winnipeg is the same as Tokyo. Each city has its own culture, geography, history, architecture, climate, language, density, and assemblage of people resulting in the differences we perceive in each city. And as far as the construction of a ‘Bilbao’ in every city – how is this different than the ubiquitous presence of churches, roads, or places of commerce that have always been part of every city?

In his publication, *Generic City*, Rem Koolhaas (1995:14) argues that stripping the city of its unique identity is not cause for lament, but rather for celebration. “It marks the emergence of a global liberation movement, attempting to free itself from the imprisoning strictures of identity.” Koolhaas (1995:15-16) continues;

“Identity is fixed and over-determined. It can only change at the cost of destabilizing itself. For instance, Paris can only become more Parisian. It is already on its way to becoming hyper-Paris resulting in a

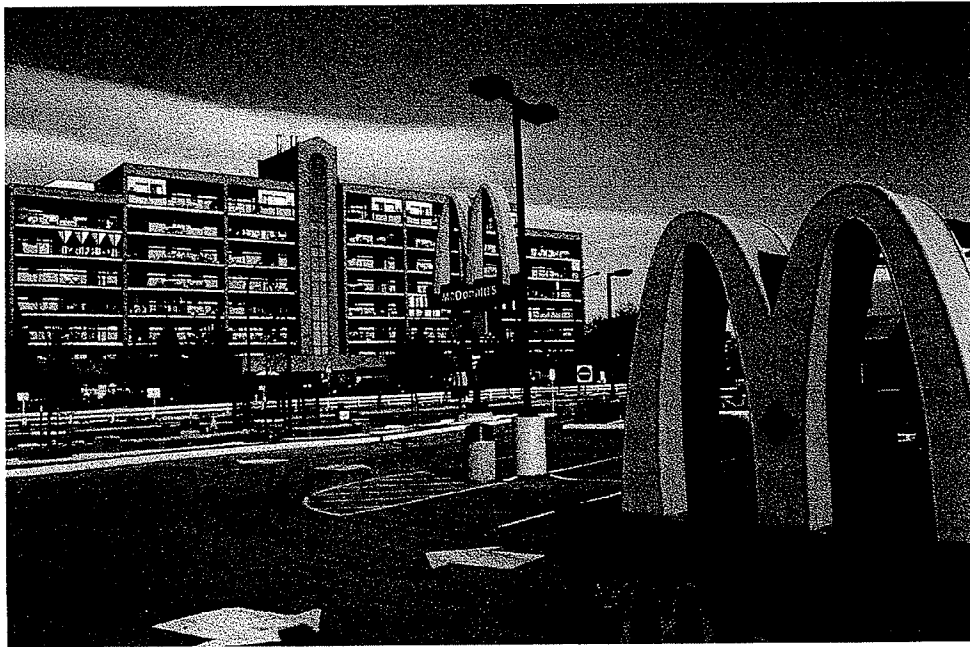


Fig. 3.12 A Typical McDonald's Parking Lot

polished caricature of itself. The generic city is on planning autopilot – it is self-organizing. It makes meaningless any form of intervention that seeks to give it stability, substance, layers, or identity... It is not a total absence of identity, but is city identity at degree zero."

This is in direct contrast to Berci Florian's top-down approach to urban identity through city branding.

Branding and the City

"...[T]he young city dweller proclaims all of life to be a holiday, and while the rest of the world is scanned for unique cultural phenomena, he/she now also has great expectations of his/her home address. This residence is no longer a lifelong constant, but is very much subject to changing personal circumstances. As well as changing family and job situations, self-image is of decisive importance in the choice of a place to live. Navigating on a widely subdivided network of interests and lifestyles, one's own image is constantly being set against the background of the residential environment." (Vermeulen 2002:12)

Individuals choose to live in certain places based on desired qualities, personal interests, and most recently, self-image. Differences between cities, however, are becoming smaller when the consumer actually needs a wider range of choice. Since some cities tend to be more

attractive to tourists and migrants than others, "successful formats are eagerly snapped up" and replication becomes the ambition and eventually, the icon of the city. Rotterdam calls itself 'Manhattan on the Maas', while Eindhoven calls itself 'Rotterdam on the Dommel' (Vermeulen 2002:10). According to Marco Vermeulen (2002:12), cities, rather than developing empty icons, should develop existing qualities into a sustainable image such that the present 'building images' evolves into 'image building'. He believes that the intention behind many current construction projects is to enhance the image of the city without knowing exactly what that image is. Image is primarily derived from well-worn prejudices, desires, and memories and only partially from physical reality. These emotions, according to Vermeulen, take shape in the collective memory where little space is left for factual data. This instinctual feeling then, is the key to urban self-awareness which, in turn, can become the basis for the development of the actual city.

Berci Florian (2002:20) sees the lack of differentiation among cities as resulting in impersonal, anonymous, and, in the end, uninhabitable places. Florian argues for the exploration of a new train of thought that arrives at cities with depth, originality, and character in turn, gripping people's emotions and binding them to that place. Local forms of citizenship tend to flourish when there is some form of connection to the place (Mommaas 2002:36). "Cities", Florian states, "need a soul." (2002:20) Fundamentally, this is not a new way

of thinking. In fact it is quite similar to Yi Fu Tuan's 1970s notion of tophilia mentioned earlier. The difference being, that rather than simply relying on the aesthetic of the city in question, Florian suggests a concept called city branding whereby the city is marketed in the same manner as a product.

Advertising has recently begun to highlight the role a product can play in the consumer's self image over the actual intrinsic value of the product. So too, according to Florian, can the image be detached from the physical city in order to express its potential to the fullest. A city might invest in advertising related products and strategic interventions that can have

a considerable influence on the image of a city with relatively few resources (Vermeulen 2002:13). For example, the Rotterdam water taxi may have a greater influence on the city's image than perhaps many large-scale building projects. The problem with reliance on a constructed brand, however, is that as many of us know, when we purchase a product based on its brand, it does not necessarily mean we are receiving a product that is actually different from its competitors. We are simply buying an association with a particular lifestyle. For example, when we choose Coke over Pepsi, it is often because we would rather be associated with the fun-loving, harmonious, and nostalgic Coke bottle than with Britney Spears via

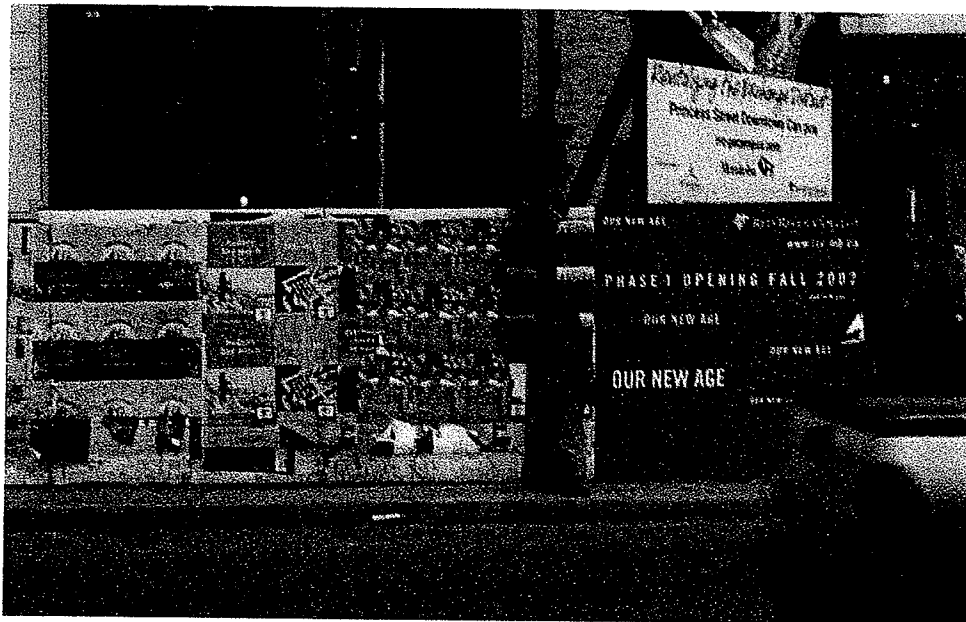
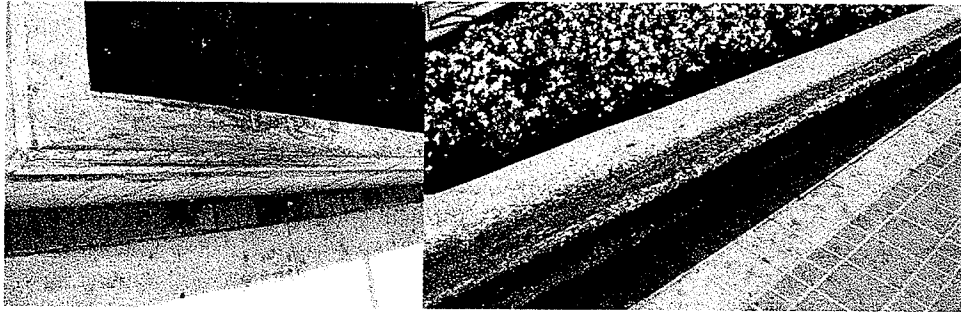


Fig. 3.13 Construction Site Wall Covered in Advertising



Figs. 3.14 & 3.15 Waxed Concrete Suggests a Use Other Than Simply Planting

a can of Pepsi. Not necessarily because we prefer one product to the other. If we rely solely on branding to differentiate cities we may end up with a series of superficial identities rather than actual unique places.

Florian (2002:24) argues that city identities must not be invented, but rather rooted in local and regional culture. He suggests that they be shaped on their origins, without the “paralyzing desire” to preserve the past. They should be derived within the “terms of the city’s cultural singularity and the unique chemistry between the people that is characteristic of it”, thus ensuring the uniqueness of each city brand. He further argues for transforming the city’s aspirations into an expression of local identity in an inspiring way.

Upon first glance this seems like a potentially interesting approach. But, just as with topophilia, city branding has the potential for some serious consequences – namely social exclusion. Hans Mommaas of the University of Tilburg (2002:34) reminds us that city branding is associated with an economically inspired desire to

increase a city’s status or prestige as either a tourist destination or as a residential / business destination. Brands give products (and cities) an added symbolic value which makes them worth more than they are in a simply material or functional sense. They are expressions of ideals or lifestyles thereby adding to the economic value of the product (Klein 2000:6). It is this creation of added value, and among many other things, the preying on peoples’ need for a sense of belonging that has in recent years made brands symbolic of economic exploitation and cultural manipulation.

This desire to attract people and business is extremely important in today’s information-based economy where mobility and freedom of location are inherent. Unlike the industrial economies of the past, today’s economy no longer requires businesses to be located near ports and resources. “The more technology frees us from the tyranny of place and past affiliation, the greater the need for individual places to make themselves more attractive.” (Kotkin 2000:7) A recent study showed that high technology firms

preferred to locate in places that were attractive to skilled workers in terms of 'quality of life' rather than the more traditional factors such as taxes, regulation, or land costs (Kotkin 2000:7). According to Body-Gendrot (2003:133):

"New technologies allow people to move and act from a distance liberating elites from territorial constraints. The less privileged, however, lacking choice or energy are caught in the trap of motionlessness in a world which values mobility."

In terms of city branding, then, there is the danger that brands are created based on the desired 'quality of life' factors of a targeted demographic in the hopes of attracting a particular corporation to the city. This would then result, not only in economic gain for a select group of individuals, but the alienation of all other citizens who do not subscribe to that particular brand or lifestyle. And while some people may have the means to move from city to city in search of places that best exemplify their ephemeral self-images and desired lifestyles, not everyone is afforded this luxury. This, in the end will only lead to further inequalities and fragmentation rather than the desired feelings of solidarity and communality. Mommaas (2002:42) warns, "Brands which reflect only the cleaned up urbanity of the rising middle class will not mesh with actual living conditions of the larger parts of the population."

According to Michael Speaks (2002:52),

the most significant problem with city branding is that it is a conventionally top-down approach to viewing the city as a "field of themeable attractors baited with the honey of consumer choice and its users, ant-like drones, whose movements are scripted and controlled from above by the city brander." The city and its users are thus passive participants in someone else's "game".

It is incorrect to assume that globalization has systematically transformed all difference into sameness. It is not simply an extension of internationalization. Globalization operates by a different and more complex set of "rules" (Speaks 2002:54). Hardt and Negri (in Speaks 2002:54) point out that the struggle between "universal sameness and national, regional, and local sameness has been displaced by a multitude of differential networks, each competing for dominance in the inter-connected global marketplace." These networks are free to roam the planet in search of competitively advantageous affiliations. In the United States, geodemographers have identified 62 distinct lifestyle types or clusters – each with its own set of values and culture. Similar lifestyle groups may be of different races, classes, genders, and may live in geographically distant regions of the city, state, or country. According to Speaks (2002:58), these clusters are new forms of individualization without being dependent on even temporarily fixed identity. They are identity-in-transit and our cities become the places where they overlap without necessarily rubbing against each other.

While similar lifestyle groups occur all over the globe, public seating in the urban environment, then, can potentially become the actual physical points of overlap of these clusters. They can be places from which to observe members of other clusters as well as one's own, or they can be engaged and appropriated by members of the clusters in everyday activity.

"If place is subjected to the homogenizing techniques of mass production and marketing, a critical humanist perspective reminds us that the 'product' may be appropriated in distinct ways by different individuals and their particular modes of habitation. " (Adams et al. 2001:xx) In their essay, *Fragments for a Queer City*, David Bell et al. (2001:88) discuss the notion of erogenous or 'sex zones' in the urban fabric. They point out that these 'sex zones' are much more diverse, complex, and part of the urban fabric than other researchers have suggested. It is "...quite difficult to think of any part of the urban fabric that isn't at least potentially an erogenous zone – from ATM foyers, to libraries, to office blocks, from night buses, to scout huts, to restaurants, and from construction sites, to Tupperware parties to football terraces – each having its own distinct erotics". He marks the street as potentially the most erotic of erogenous zones where everyone is free to look at everyone. These nooks and streets come together in the cityscape to produce a "finely calibrated sexual map of the city. The map is constantly evolving as hostile attention at one site leads to its abandon and new sites are populated. These zones

do not necessarily need to be recognizable or informally designated and often occur without most of the general public even knowing of its existence. Chauncy (in Bell et al. 2001:90) discusses how gay men in 1920s and 30s New York, devised a variety of tactics that allowed them to move freely about the city, appropriating spaces not marked as gay, and constructing for themselves, a gay city in the midst of, and invisible to, the dominant city. I would suspect that this type of mapping occurs for most subcultures. Skateboarders know of all the optimal "skate spots" while graffiti artists could name every clean white, spray paint-able surface in the city. In each case, sites are ranked based on appropriateness for the activity. In Winnipeg, Sunday night drag racing on Portage Avenue has become well-known. In a conversation with one of these car enthusiasts, I learned that he had mapped out all the roads in the city containing large, potentially hazardous potholes so as to avoid damaging his automobile.

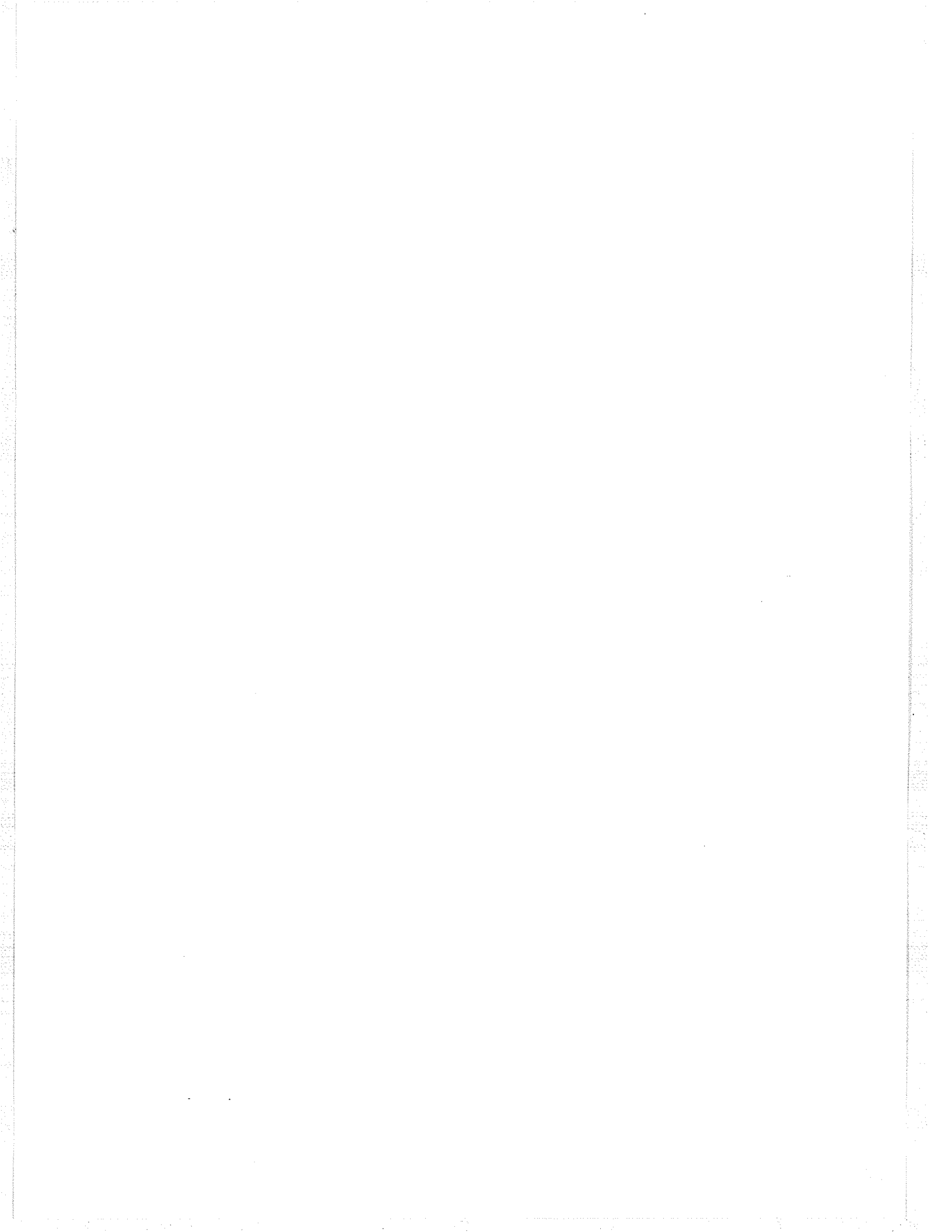
Conclusion

Regardless of where one stands on the issue of branding, the fact remains - the city as generic type is outdated. "Once again, we need to give a strategic, reflexive shape to the lost local urban individuality." (Mommaas 2002: 36) The questions now become, how do we individualize our cities without exclusion, fragmentation, and the construction of clichés? And, how does design aid in this individualization?

Community occurs in networks, not groups. In networked societies boundaries are permeable, interactions are with diverse others, and connections switch between multiple networks (Wellman 2001:227). Cities are where these networks overlap but not always where they meet. These networks, however, are not bounded within one city or place, but rather can span the globe. A friend once told me that he always travels with his skateboard because it automatically connects him to the local network of people with similar interests to his. Although it is a highly localized activity, skateboarding is part of a global network of "approximately like-minded individuals". (Borden 2001) An individual's social network then, can include people from all over the world. At the same time, members of different social networks can live in close proximity without ever coming into contact with one another. I may feel more connected to someone whose lifestyle is similar to mine but who lives in Tokyo than to someone who lives in my neighbourhood with a completely different lifestyle. However, the fact that we live in the same city inevitably creates a common bond between us. We both endure the same harsh winters and mosquito filled summers. We both occupy the same landscape – even if we appropriate it in different ways. Perhaps these natural, inescapable factors are once again the answer to creating an individualized city.

According to sociologist Barry Wellman (2001:227), a computer network can facilitate a social network just as easily as

a physical meeting place. While this may well be true, we still require physical means of contact with other people. The park bench can be seen as more than just a place to sit. It is a "social institution, a meeting place for people who do not need to have anything more in common than that they have time to spare" (Mollerup 1986:43). Can we design a "park bench" that reflects all of the social networks occurring within a specific city and that allows for all modes of socializing between and among these networks? If we are to have viable public spaces again, we must re-think the way they allow for social encounters. They must allow for communication among networks all over the world as well as between the various networks within a specific place or city perhaps through both electronic and physical means. Their physical design must also depend on local factors such as climate, customs, availability of materials, etc. thus emphasizing the individuality of place. A series of benches strategically placed throughout downtown Winnipeg, designed by local artists and designers, can help to reflect the multiplicity and diversity of this place.



4. Appropriation, the Body, Perception, and Play in the Everyday Urban Environment

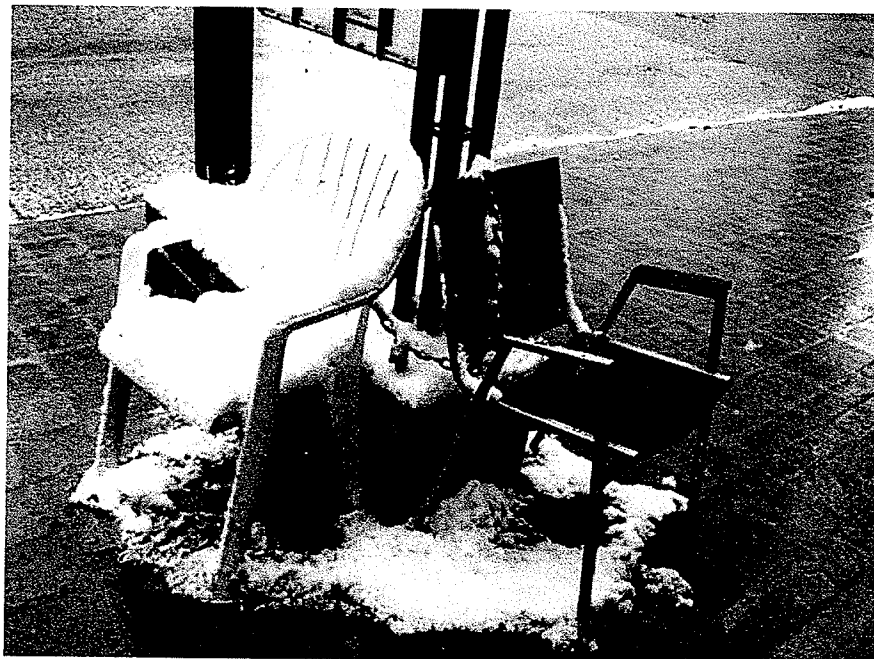
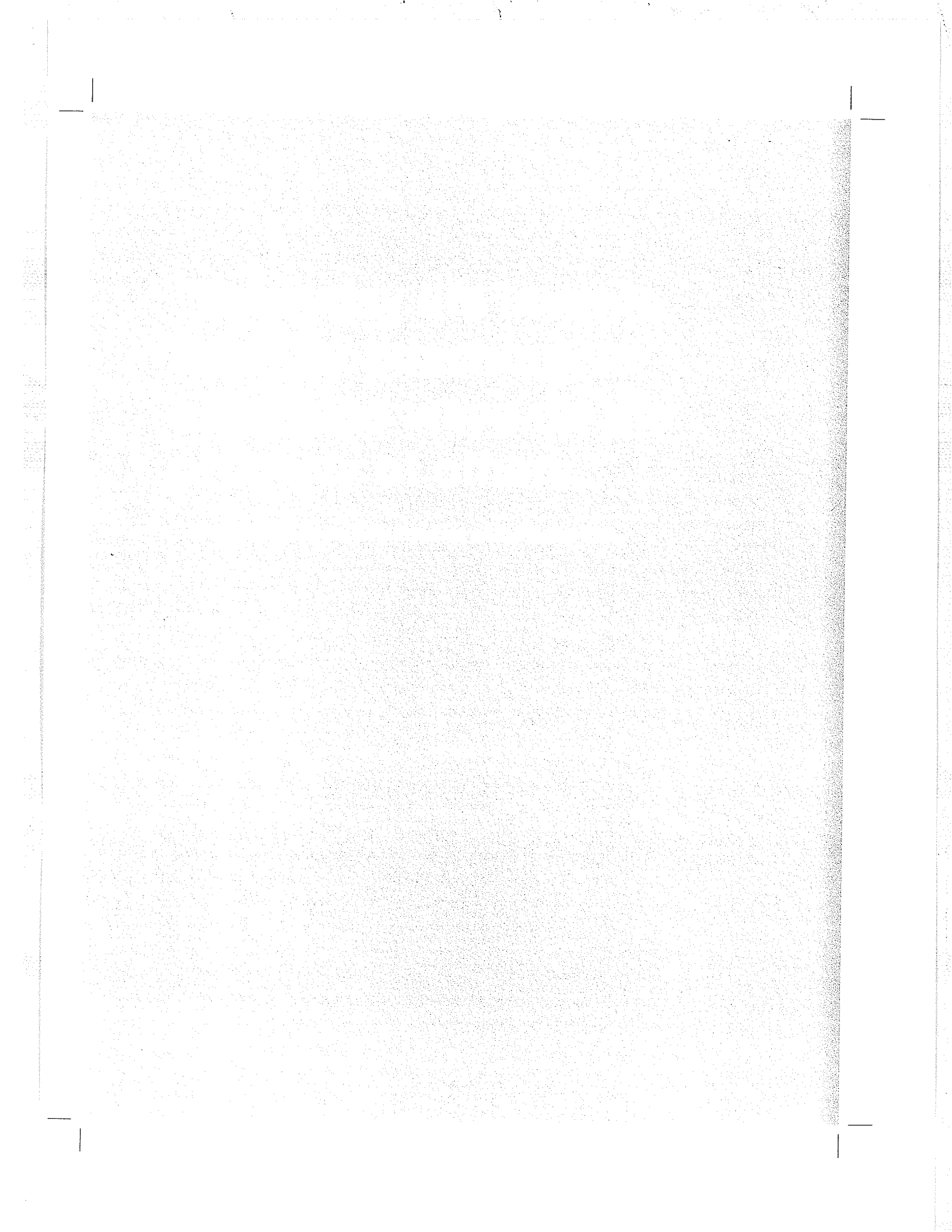


Fig. 4.1 Two Chairs Chained to a Public Information Board - Downtown Winnipeg



4

Introduction

"There are no boring places; every square foot of today's metropolitan world says something, in awkward and muffled ways, or in clear and obvious fashion. Good landscape architecture, gardens, and interiors thus require, in mind, the eye, a frank, playful and discerning, there to be. It is a pleasure, and a pleasure is upon always, important of disciplines. Goodness makes for most of experience." — Charles Eastman, Landscape Architecture

But benches can be found in most of the world with little concern for their function, or materiality. They tend to be so hard that they often go unneeded and misused by the people for whom they are "designed." They are passive objects that furnish our everyday landscape. As such, they follow Frelow's (1993) definition of the everyday: "dividual, found, but invisible, everywhere, and nowhere." On the other hand, they are often appreciated (if only temporarily) by certain groups of people, such as skateboarders, or the

homeless, for purposes other than simply sitting.

The park bench is also seen as a social institution – “a meeting place for people who have nothing more in common than that they have time to spare.” (Mollerup 1999:28) More recently, on-line communities, chat rooms, and message boards have begun to play a similar role to that of the public square or park bench as meeting places begging the question; is public space even relevant any more? The anonymity provided by on-line chat rooms can allow interactions among people who may never otherwise interact face to face. On the other hand on-line chatters choose which rooms they enter based on personal interests thereby limiting their exposure to people with a common interest or lifestyle such as musical taste or sexual orientation. In the public square (ideally) contact with people from varying social networks is much more likely. And since access to virtual communities is currently only attainable to those who can afford a personal computer and its associated internet access costs, public spaces in the urban environment can still be important physical points of overlap for these networks. Urban furnishings – like benches - can be more than simply places from which to observe people, they can become elements that are engaged with and appropriated by any member of any cluster in everyday activity. This chapter also addresses questions such as the following: Can elements in the urban environment not only provide places to sit but also places to play? Can these elements be designed

to allow temporary appropriation and use in ever-changing ways and configurations depending on the whimsy of the player? The spontaneous play could then result in unique interpretations of place leaving nothing behind but the experience within the player and perhaps the temporary configuration of elements. Perception of place is altered with each play session and is therefore always relevant.

Public Space and the Everyday

“Architectural theoreticians confuse Hannah Arendt’s idea of public space with the Greek notion of the agora, the place of public gathering. They forget that the real action took place in the stoa where deals were made and the state was run in sheltering shadows. Public space is a place where many activities overlap: rich confusion, commerce, seduction, and filth. Public space works not as a designed element, but is instead carved out by wheeling and dealing, crossroads, and the chance at freedom, where a person emerges from the shadows into light that grows into the ever-extending space of public gathering and demonstration, and seeps into every open pore of the city.” (Aaron Betsky 1998:458)

We are currently seeing a shift in many North American cities where the distinction between city, suburb, and countryside is no longer clear. Our city centres, once home to overlapping activities and the “rich



Fig. 4.2 Major Public Transit Stop in Downtown Winnipeg

confusion” mentioned above have now become mono-functional zones – office zones, gentrified neighborhoods, ghettos, and commercial and tourist districts. Suburbs like Orange County in California, on the other hand, are no longer simply residential neighborhoods and shopping malls. They now have service sectors containing ethnic restaurants, universities and theatres. According to Steven Jacobs (2002:19) the periphery and the city centre have blended to form an amorphous and fractured landscape. This is what he terms post-urban space. So where in this post-urban space, with its increasing tendencies toward privatization, surveillance, and cleaning up of “filth”, is there room for public life? Many believe that it is in the unplanned voids of our everyday landscape. Streets, parking lots, and

leftover spaces not originally intended for these purposes.

We live in a world of meaning. We exist in and are surrounded by places rather than “abstract frameworks of geometric and spatial relationships” (Adams et. al 2001: xxi). True public space has meaning. This meaning does not exist in the designed – yet empty – plazas of our cities, but rather “meaning emerges in urban form, social life, and the narrative richness of the everyday.” (Betsky 1998:458) Artists and designers convert this meaning into form. Through shared associations, dreams and fears, functional forms – such as skyscrapers, bus stops, blue jeans, or park benches - can lead to a coherent collective experience. (Betsky 1998:458) From this view, everyday architecture and landscape

architecture can play an important role in creating a collective experience.

“Rethinking the city necessarily involves the temporal. Thus it is important to consider that architecture is not just the space-time of the permanent, of the great canonic works that stand seemingly immutable over the centuries while all around them decays and is destroyed. It is also the everyday architecture of the city- that which is embedded in all the routines, activities, patterns, and emotions of quotidian life; that which ranges, spatially, from the body to the globe and, temporally, from the ephemeral and the briefest moment to the longer time of the generation, cycles of life and death, and beyond. Architecture is part of the flow of space and time, part of the interproduction of space, time, and social being.” (Borden et. al. 2001:12)

A recent trend among planners, designers, and artists has been to focus on this

ubiquitous everyday and its associated architecture - generic elements such as the strip mall, the supermarket, the fast-food outlet, or in the case of this project, the park bench. They no longer search for unique elements such as historical monuments and geographical peculiarities to establish place identities. Although these generic elements are exchangeable and can be placed anywhere, they still determine the outdoor character and functioning of a city in many respects. (Jacobs 2002:26) And while they are often regarded as contradictions of urban planning they also become places for a variety of unintended activities. It is this transformation of function of the everyday that is currently of interest to designers and planners. Margaret Crawford (in Jacobs 2002:25) argues for everyday spaces that avoid being overly planned – where experience is not completely dictated by planners and designers. “Lived experience should be more important than physical form in defining the city. Everyday space should stand in contrast to the carefully



Fig. 4.3 An Everyday Drive Thru ATM and Bank Parking Lot, Fig. 4.4 Outdoor Plaza at The Forks in Winnipeg Complete with designated “Bus Stop”

planned, officially designated, and often underused spaces of public life that can be found in most American cities.” If it is true that dictating the way places are experienced leads to boredom and therefore eventual desertion, then how can we facilitate multiple, meaningful, and unique experiences if not through form? Currently, many of our everyday spaces are carefully planned. Parking lots and fast food outlets are designed and sited with very specific intentions in mind – to be efficient, inexpensive, and to discourage loitering/interaction (Figure 57). As such they are uninviting and tend to go unused. Spaces that are designed for meeting, such as The Forks (Figure 58) in Winnipeg, are often overly sanitized and accessible to only certain members of the public. This, however, does not mean that physical form is less important than lived experience. On the contrary, it only proves that physical form is directly related to lived experience and that we must try to find new forms that allow for new experiences based on the imaginations of the users. And as Borden et. al. (2001:3) suggest, physical form and lived experience should be united in architecture (and landscape architecture)

“Architecture is no object. At an interdisciplinary nexus, as an intrinsic element of everyday life, architecture is not composed of isolated and monumental objects. Architecture is ambient and atmospheric, and architecture allows us to tell stories – it is both backdrop to and inspiration for theoretical and poetic musings of all kinds... Ultimately, then, architecture is less the constitution

of space than a way of watching and comprehending the spatiality of the city.”

Henri Lefebvre (in Borden et. al. 2001:6) claims space to be “a historical production, at once the medium and outcome of social being. It is not a theatre or setting but a social production, a concrete abstraction – simultaneously mental and material, work and product – such that social relations have no real existence except in and through space.” In essence, people make places and places make people. Lefebvre sees social constructions such as class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, family relations, and age as central to the production of space. Anthropologists such as Shirley Ardener, Liz Bondi, and Doreen Massey (in Borden et.al. 2001:6) explain how the relation between gender and space is defined through power. That is, the social status of women defines the spaces they occupy. Conversely, space has the ability to maintain, symbolize, and reinforce gender relations.

If space is a social production, as Lefebvre and Borden et. al. (2001:9) postulate, then each era produces its own understanding of space and experiences it accordingly. Lefebvre (in Borden et.al.10) outlines four eras and the spaces associated with each. The pre-historic era is associated with natural space. This then gives way to the space of slavery or absolute space where the fragments of natural space are rendered sacred. This then gives rise to historical space, the early towns of the West, or the space of feudalism, and finally abstract space, which tends toward homogenization

and the erasure of difference. Here space becomes commodity and is at once concrete and abstract, homogenized and fragmented. It is the space of capitalism. Lefebvre (in Borden et. al. 2001:11) also proposes a new space yet to come – a differential space – one that respects difference rather than burying it under homogeneity. The right to the city is “a right that legitimates the refusal to allow oneself to be removed from urban reality by a discriminatory and segregative organization.” (Lefebvre in Borden et.al 2001:12) In other words, it is not simply the right to buildings or even public space but rather the right to be different, the right not to be classified forcibly into categories determined by homogenizing powers. This “differential space”, then, speaks to the human body, the social body, and its knowledge, desires, and needs. It is the spatial equivalent of “the total revolution, the path toward the restoration of the total human; it is not a singular universal entity but the socialist ‘space of differences’.” (Borden et.al. 2001:6)

Body Consciousness

“Bodies are an interface between politics and nature and between mind and matter. They are ‘real’ but at the same time they are socially constructed. Acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and

other discursive means. Gender is thus something we do, and ‘do’ recurrently.” (Bell et.al. 2001:78)

The social status of women defines the spaces they occupy. It also defines the way they comport themselves in space, that is the way they allow their bodies to move through the spaces they occupy. In her study of feminine body comportment, Isabel Young (2003:170) noted that, in general, females tend not to open their bodies in everyday movement. They often sit, stand, and walk with their limbs close to or closed around them. She also noticed that women tend not to reach, stretch, bend, lean or stride to the full limits of their physical capacities, even when doing so would better accomplish a task or motion. The space that is physically available to the feminine body is frequently greater than the spaces that she uses and inhabits. Young (2003:170) also found that this comportment occurs in females as young as four years old, postulating that it is a learned response. It derives from the female’s experience of her body as a thing at the same time that she experiences it as a capacity. She also suggests that it is due to instilled fears of getting hurt, of seeming too strong, of having too high an opinion of herself, of being not feminine enough. In other words, of being different from what is expected of a woman. While these findings are specific to women, they nonetheless provide a great deal of insight into the study of spatiality. This is just one example of the differences that occur among people and the way they occupy space. There is a high likelihood that similar

studies comparing body comportment and spatiality of people of different ethnicities, age groups, and classes would more than likely reveal a great deal more insight.

"There is an immediate relationship between the body and its space, between the body's deployment in space and its occupation in space... This is a truly remarkable relationship: the living body, with the energies at its disposal, creates or produces its own space; conversely, the laws of space, which is to say the laws of discrimination in space, also govern the living body and the deployment of its energies." (Lefebvre 1991:63)

To go into enough detail to do the topic justice is beyond the scope of this project. However, the rest of the project will operate under the assumption that people use and move through space differently based on a multitude of social factors. It is for this reason that public elements, such as seating in the urban environment – especially in multicultural North America – should accommodate every user in an infinite range of possibilities. Arakawa and Gins propose an approach discussed in the following section that forces people to focus so intently on the movements of their bodies that they forget who they are supposed to be thereby “reversing” their destinies.

Body as Site

“The body is the original subject which

constitutes space. There would be no space without the body.” (Young 2003:167)

According to Lefebvre (1991:98), the human body is the site of “cultural endeavor and of self-appropriation and adaptation.” The body is at once subject and object. It is practical and fleshy. Utilizing the whole body and all the senses in the study of space rather than only the eyes and intellect, allows for “greater awareness of conflicts and therefore of a space that is Other”. (Borden et. al. 2001:11) The city, then, becomes more than merely an object of the gaze, and new ways of experiencing the city are presented.

“Architecture produces living bodies, each with its own distinctive traits. The animating principle of such a body, its presence is neither visible nor legible as such, nor is it the object of any discourse, for it reproduces itself within those who use the space in question, within their lived experience. Of that experience, the passive spectator can grasp but a pale shadow.” (Lefebvre 1991:239)

It is through the body that a person is able to perceive the world. “Having a body includes having a world. Through its senses and movements, the body configures the world, or more precisely, each body generates a person who originates, read co-originate, the world.” (Arakawa and Gins 1994:8) People experience their surroundings as the sum of all that is perceptually available at that moment and a “socio-historical matrix of the familiar, derived from all prior

meetings with surroundings". (Arakawa and Gins 1994:8) Therefore a person is made up of a physical body and the sum of all his/her perceptions and experiences of surroundings over time. "Man does not end with the limits of his body or the area comprising his immediate activity. Rather the range of the person is constituted by the sum of effects emanating from him temporally and spatially." (Simmel in Borden 2002:97) The body and the person share events but not extent. The person is greater reaching than the body and is therefore ubiquitous. (Arakawa and Gins 1994:18)

A new surrounding becomes familiar

the moment it is experienced. Therefore, "Every person is constantly turning the unfamiliar into the familiar by bringing their surroundings into a socio-historical context or matrix of the familiar." (Arakawa and Gins 1994:8) According to Arakawa and Gins (1994:8), there are two ways to overcome this habitual and deadening process. The first is to cause an overload of the familiar such that surroundings are so concentrated they become unfamiliar. The second is to throw the body off balance so greatly and so persistently that all one's efforts are directed at re-stabilizing themselves leaving no energy for assembling the socio-historical matrix of the familiar- or



Fig. 4.5 Multi-Faceted Terrain That Throws The Bodies of its Users Off-Centre Forcing Them to Constantly Reorient Themselves. (Arakawa and Gins 1994)

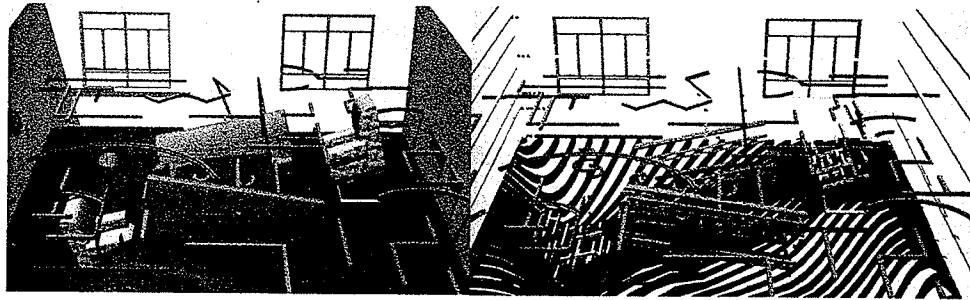


Fig. 4.6 and 4.7 "Unlike Floors, These Terrains are Full of the Unexpected. They Force the Body to Continually Take its Own Measure." (Arakawa and Gins 1994)

for that matter, for the 'being of a person'. (Arakawa and Gins 1994:18) This is what they term "reversible destiny". A lawyer is now – if temporarily – a dancer of sorts based on the movements her body is forced to make. But this is only true of forms that are constantly changing. If a form or space is fixed, then it will always be experienced the same way, thus becoming once again familiar.

However, this is an interesting approach to the city where people, in general, tend to move from home to work to gym etc. as if on autopilot. The landscapes that contain them are so familiar they almost cease to exist. A series of elements could be implemented throughout the city throwing people and their bodies completely off balance forcing them to focus on their movements and to capture glimpses of their surroundings from entirely different viewpoints resulting in new perceptions of everyday spaces and of the people that inhabit them.

Another argument for Arakawa and Gins' approach comes from Richard Sennett

in his book *Flesh and Stone* (1994). He discusses how comfort has become linked to individualism. "Comfortable ways to travel, like comfortable furniture and places to rest, began as aids for recovery from bodily abuses marked by the sensations of fatigue." (Sennett 1994:14) More recently, some researchers, such as Galen Cranz (1998) believe that "comfortable" seating can actually be a form of bodily abuse in itself. Nevertheless, according to Sennett (1994:22), the development of comfortable chairs, carriages, and trains in the nineteenth century also "effectively erased the everyday sociability of public space. Tables placed outside cafés deprive political groups of their cover so rather than conspiring with one another for political reform, they become customers watching the passing scene. In essence, they become passive voyeurs or flâneurs. "On the terrace, the denizens of the café sat silently watching the crowd go by. They sat as individuals, each lost in his or her own thoughts... the people on the street now appearing as scenery, as spectacle." (Sennett 1994:30)

According to Sennett, comfort provides a kind of social detachment, thereby inhibiting the formation of real connections with others. It is an easy unthinking state that implies a lack of necessity to worry about the world or one's position in it, resulting in social and personal atrophy. Conversely, he says "discomfort or displacement dislodges social norms... Human displacements ought to jolt people into caring about one another and where they are." (Sennett 1994:31) Of course this is only true if the displacement occurs to every member of society. Currently, it is usually the disadvantaged that experience this displacement resulting in feelings of anger, and frustration. This leads to further fragmentation rather than the production of a social collective.

Posture and Comfort

Like most species on the planet, humans require rest. Most of us tend to do so by sitting, squatting, or lying down. Many people sit in chairs and just as many do not. Why? According to anthropologist Gordon Hewes (in Cranz 1998:26), posture is a cultural phenomenon rather than an anatomical one. Contrary to what many Westerners may think, apparently only one half to one third of the world's population actually assumes the right angled chair seated posture when at rest or while performing tasks. As Galen Cranz (1998:30) has observed, our current method of sitting (in chairs) is a response to "...social – not genetic, anatomical, or

even physiological forces." In India for example, many of the activities North Americans perform in chairs are performed while seated on the floor.

Many studies that compare chair sitting versus non-chair sitting cultures suggest that the right-angled posture is anatomically stressful. In her study, Galen Cranz (1998: 97) came across evidence from many countries suggesting that chair sitting can be associated with back pain, fatigue, varicose veins, stress, and complications of the diaphragm, circulation, digestion, and general body development. "Sitting strains the spinal column, back muscles, lower back nerves, and diaphragm and increases pressure on the spinal discs by thirty percent over standing." (Cranz 1998: 97) Unfortunately, chair sitters have grown accustomed to sitting in this manner. Over time, the muscles required for squatting or standing for long periods atrophy, leading to discomfort when not seated in chairs. So much so that it is difficult for many people to imagine that squatting or perching may actually be healthier than sitting. (Cranz 1998:97)

Can indoor or outdoor seating be designed to convince people that their current modes of sitting are detrimental to their overall health? "...Until the social elite adopts new ideas about posture and comfort, chair design for the general market will not emphasize physical or practical needs... Body conscious design has to be aesthetic, fashionable, or very, very, familiar." (Cranz 1998: 48-49) In the outdoor realm, people are generally not performing tasks

while seated. Nor do they remain seated in the same place for hours on end. In fact, as has already been noted, few people even use the seating provided by the city. This coupled with the given health risks associated with sitting suggests that the park bench, as we know it is outdated.

This study proposes an alternative to the typical outdoor seating of cities where postures other than right-angled chair sitting can be assumed. Eventually the new elements will become familiar and perhaps even inspire new postures in the home and workplace. They could encourage the use, and therefore, strengthening of muscles that usually go unused in chairs. It is already in public plazas and on street corners that we observe people perched or leaning against objects while eating lunch or waiting for the bus. Observing other people comport themselves in new

ways will help to normalize what may, at first, seem inappropriate. The strange will become commonplace. Further, if the proposed element has little or no visual connection to what we currently know as the park bench or the chair, and its primary function does not seem to be that of seating, people may become more open to assuming new rest positions.

Public Appropriation of the Everyday

Appropriation - to take exclusive possession of - Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary

Cities contain nomadic spaces (voids) and sedentary spaces (solids) that exist adjacent to one another in a symbiotic relationship. "The nomadic city lives inside the stationary city, feeding on its scraps and offering in exchange, its own presence as a new nature that can be crossed only by inhabiting it." (Careri 2002:24) The homeless are a group of people who are often quite skilled at finding these voids, appropriating them, even if temporarily, to suit their needs. In their book *Transitory Gardens, Uprooted Lives*, Balmori and Morton (1993) discuss ways in which several groups of homeless people in New York City have created small, familiar, and livable spaces within empty city lots. One example is the 8th Street Garden (Figure 4.8) set up in an abandoned lot by a group of people who were cleared out from their previous camp



Fig. 4.8 A Personalized Space in the 8th Street Garden (Balmori and Morton 1993)



Fig. 4.10 "James' Garden" Uses Various Chairs to Make the Space Inviting and "Comfortable" (Balmori and Morton 1993)



Fig. 4.11 "Nathaniel's Garden" Consists of a Large Tent Surrounding a Park bench in Tompkin's Square Park (Balmori and Morton 1993)

in Tompkins Square Park. Each member of the group set up a garden for him or herself with whatever belongings they could find. According to the authors it was a social place where community potluck suppers often took place. (Balmori and Morton 1993:15) On October 15, 1991, a fire was set on the lot and police and bulldozers were called in to clear the site. All of the garden's inhabitants were forced out and their dwellings destroyed. The following spring, the city put up signs declaring that it had been officially converted to a community garden for nearby residents. "Park benches were brought in and its chain link fence was covered with morning glories." (Balmori and Morton 1993:29) Here the park bench, normally the icon of public life, is associated with the "cleaning up" of the garden. Only people who can afford shelter are given the luxury of a garden and an actual park bench to sit on – not very public at all. Had it not been for that group of homeless people who started using the site, it is quite likely that the lot would still be empty.

In homeless gardens, dwellings are small and used mainly for sleeping. Eating, sitting, working on construction, etc. all occur in exterior spaces. The seating element is especially important. Furniture adds a sense of importance to the space (Figure 4.9). People have used milk crates, board benches, wheelchairs, and rusty old lawn furniture in their gardens to fulfill this purpose. (Balmori and Morton 1993:51) One man (Nathaniel) even built his tent around a park bench in Tompkins Square Park (Figure 4.10)

Throughout history chairs have been used to represent social status. "Ancient chairs reflected the relationship of power between rulers and ruled. Today they also elaborate differences between men and women, bosses and employees, teacher and student, young and old." (Cranz 1998: 23) Here we see that even a public bench can determine who sits where and when. They too can symbolize social rank simply by their presence or absence. Their design generally dictates who will use them, in what manner, and for how long. For example, many urban benches have no backs or are partitioned with armrests to discourage lying down or sleeping. They are often designed to be uncomfortable so that any given user does not stay too long. Moreover, they are generally fixed and rigid, based on the assumption that the right-angled seated posture is a universal norm, which, we now know is not true. Since Canada is a multicultural society, should not its public seating accommodate the range of postures assumed by its inhabitants that immigrate from all over the world?

In her essay *From Politics of Homelessness to the Politics of the Homeless*, Susan Ruddick (1996:167) points to the danger of normalizing the condition of homelessness through design. Many avant-garde designers and artists have proposed variations of "designer cardboard boxes" that do just that. For example, artist Krystof Wodzycko proposed a portable shelter attached to a shopping cart complete with lockable storage compartments and a coffin-like structure in which to sleep.

The whole thing could be wheeled around and “parked” anywhere. While the project attempts to alleviate some of the homeless individual’s problems, it seems to make light of the person’s actual situation. The project almost suggests that given one of these modified shopping carts, the problems of its user would no longer exist. This is simply not true. Conversely, “work which addresses the homeless as active, creative, and thinking political agents is work which attempts to erase this division, to build a new vision of the homeless not as a people we must organize for, but as a people we might organize with.” (Ruddick 1996:170)

On a visit to Berkley, California I witnessed an example of this type of interaction between a group of university students and some local homeless individuals. In a small lot named People’s Park, not far from the University of California Berkley campus, these individuals were completely engaged in a game of basketball. The site has recently been converted to a playground with the typical swings, sandbox, and basketball court. It is an everyday space constantly being traversed by students on their way to and from class and a known “hangout” for many of the local homeless. Design was obviously not a major consideration in the site. So what caused this spontaneous interaction? The site’s controversial history (see Appendix 1) and its appropriation by the city’s inhabitants are definitely major contributing factors, but I believe it was also, quite simply, the pursuit of play that brought this usually unlikely group of people together.

Play Everyday

Ludic adj. playful in a way that is spontaneous and without any particular purpose

Play v. to take part in enjoyable activity for the sake of amusement

Technology has not delivered its promise to provide us with more time for leisure. The speed with which certain tasks can now be performed simply means that we must accomplish more tasks in a given day. People constantly seek forms of recreation to distance themselves temporarily from their high stress environments. Park benches have often been referred to as “rest stops” in the urban environments. This suggests that a task is being temporarily suspended in favour of something more leisurely. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975:102), a similar suspension of work and the self is essential to play.

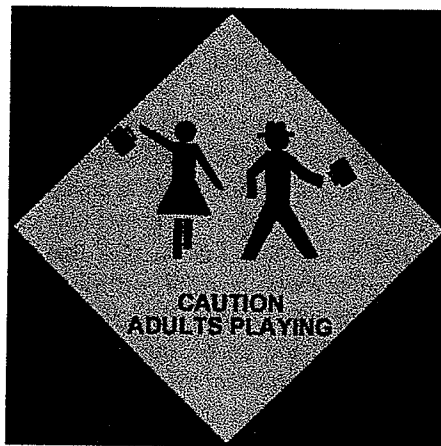


Fig. 4.12 Adults Playing



Fig. 4.13 Woman Completely Engaged in Building a Snowman in Front of Her Workplace on Albert St. After the First Snow

By examining the way the word 'play' is used in its metaphorical sense – play of colours, play of light, play of waves, etc. play is defined as “to and fro movement that is not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end but rather remains itself in constant repetition.” (1975:102) The movement is so central to the definition of play that it does not matter who or what performs the movement. In other words, “this linguistic observation is not to be understood as something a person does, for the subject of play is play itself – not the individual who plays.” (Gadamer 1975:104) Gadamer also

states that the movement is characterized not only by the absence of a goal, but also by the absence of strain. “The structure of play absorbs the player into itself and thus frees him (sic) from the burden of taking initiative, which constitutes that actual strain of existence.” Play is not serious but seriousness is what gives play its purpose. In order to be completely absorbed in play (i.e. to be truly playing), one must take the play, or game seriously. Gadamer (1975: 112) explains that play is a transformation such that the identity of the players and the world in which they live as their own no

longer exist. All that remains is what they are playing.

Accepting this loss of identity, then, we can see how incorporating play into the public realm can create positive interactions among people who would not normally interact as in the case discussed earlier between the vagrants and the students. In terms of design, the outdated park bench as social institution can now be replaced with a new element that stimulates play among any and all members of the public. Once the play is terminated, players return to their daily activities refreshed and with their perceptions of the everyday world slightly altered.

Since "play is always presentation..." even those that choose simply to observe the players belong to play. As Gadamer (1975: 124) explains, being a spectator requires self-forgetfulness. In other words, watching something means focusing your attention on what you are watching rather than on yourself. This self-forgetfulness allows one to become completely engrossed in what they are watching such that the play speaks to the spectator through its presentation. Therefore, watching something is also a mode of participating. Gadamer (1975: 110) follows,

"Play is always presentation therefore human play is able to make representation the task of the game - playing cars... All presentation is potentially a representation, which is the characteristic feature of art as play. Through transformation into structure, play achieves ideality... it

becomes art. Now it is detached from the representing activity of the players and consists of the pure appearance of what they are playing."

COBRA, the Situationists, and New Babylon

"The elsewhere is everywhere. All you need to do is get lost and explore your own city." (Francesco Careri 2002:100)

In 1948, COBRA, the avant-garde group of artists and architects founded by Asger Jorn of Copenhagen, Christian Dotremont of Brussels, and Constant Nieuwenhuys of Amsterdam, used childhood play and creativity as the model for political revolution. Their intention was to revive "the unconscious, creative instincts present in everyone but relentlessly suppressed by the official image of creativity – the art world." (Wigley 2001:34) Children's scribbling and graffiti inspired their work. They wanted to be childish rather than child-like thus producing an actual graffiti not simply an artistic rendering of it. (Wigley 2001:34) Their spontaneous drawings reflected unconscious desires. Similar to sex, "Drawing unleashes desire which unleashes a classless society." Unlike the surrealists, COBRA never refined these drawings to create well-composed images. Rather they saw this refinement as the restoration of the formality of the art world from which they rebelled. (Wigley 2001:45)

In 1957, members of COBRA, along with other artists such as Guy Debord, joined forces and began the Situationist International. They saw getting lost in the city as a “concrete expressive possibility of anti-art” and adopted it as “an aesthetic-political means by which to undermine the post-war capitalist system.” (Careri 2002: 88) The situationists made maps depicting the various perceptions achieved while walking through the city. They included “the impulses caused by the city in the affective sentiments of the pedestrian.” They coined the term *dérive*, meaning literally, to drift. The *dérive* aimed to uncover the unconscious zones of the city while attempting to investigate the psychic effects the city had on the individual. It was an alternative way of inhabiting the city – outside and against the rules of bourgeois society.

The situationists replaced the surrealist unconscious city with a playful, spontaneous city. In their opinion, play was a means of deliberately breaking the rules while inventing one’s own. It freed creative activity from socio-cultural restrictions and allowed one to “design aesthetic and revolutionary actions that undermine or elude social control.” (Careri 2002:106) Their works were based on the premise that work time would be reduced through advances in automation thereby leaving labourers with more free time. According to the Situationists, it was important to protect this free time from having it sucked into the system of capitalist consumption through the creation of “induced needs” (Careri 2002:106). They were right. Today

we see how shopping malls – under the guise of “public” space - force workers to consume their incomes inside the system. The *dérive* is a playful means of reclaiming the city in one’s free time. Careri (2002: 198) writes,

“The city is a toy to be utilized at one’s pleasure, a space for collective behaviors, a place in which to waste useful time so as to transform it into a playful constructive time.”

While working with the Situationist International, Constant Nieuwenhuys created a utopian city whose inhabitants – Homo ludens – were free from the slavery of labour. New Babylon was a playful city. It first appeared as a set of large models, each representing a different “sector” of the city. Hidden beneath the city, automated machines would take care of all work so that its inhabitants could spend their lives drifting through vast interior spaces suspended high above the ground. Spaces were linked through labyrinth-like networks that spread across the entire surface of the earth. It was meant to be a seemingly infinite playground where inhabitants could continually create their sensory environments according to their latest desires. It was a society of endless leisure. (Wigley 2001:27) Careri (2002: 117) describes it this way:

“New Babylon doesn’t end anywhere, it knows no boundaries or collective life. Each place is accessible to one and all. The entire earth is home to its inhabitants. Life is an infinite voyage through a world

that is changing so rapidly that it always seems like another.” (Careri 2002:117)

Abandoning his spontaneous drawing, Constant later presented New Babylon as a series of architectural drawings. At this time he was working closely with the Dutch architect Aldo Van Eyck who believed that the child had to be both cared for and learned from. “The child knows no other law than the spontaneous feeling of being alive and knows no other imperative than to act it out...it is this property too, which makes these cultures [of play] so attractive to the people of today, who are forced to live in a morbid atmosphere of inauthenticity, lies, and infertility.” (Constant in Lefaivre 2002:36) Van Eyck produced and inspired more than

seven hundred playgrounds in Amsterdam between 1947 and 1978 and Constant designed play furniture for several of them. With his drafted drawings of New Babylon, Constant no longer merely reproduced the patterns of play. Rather, he learned from the playgrounds and began making spaces for play. Like Van Eyck, Constant used a highly controlled, abstract geometry to facilitate uncontrolled play. (Wigley 2001:45)

COBRA, the situationists, Lefebvre, and Van Eyck were all rebelling against the regimenting, normative, top-down framework of modern urban planning occurring at the time. (Lefaivre 2002: 25) Rather than adopting the master plan approach to urban design, Van Eyck and



Fig. 4.14 Van Eyck's Ground-Up Approach to the City of Amsterdam. Interstitial Playgrounds Make up a Polycentric Net. (Van Eyck, 1957)

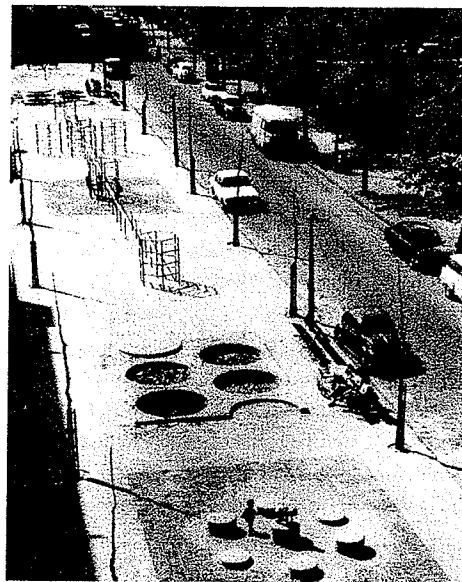


Fig. 4.15 One of Van Eyck's Interstitial Playgrounds in Amsterdam. (Van Eyck, 1965)

the others took a bottom-up approach (Figure 4.14) through a “strategy of the interstitial and the polycentric”. (Lefavre 2002:27) Van Eyck’s contextual approach, adapted designs to specific sites rather than vice versa. This was in keeping with the general anti-establishment, situational spirit of the time. (Lefavre 2002:27) “What is unique about the Amsterdam playgrounds compared to the playgrounds of all other cities is that they are interstitial, inserted within the living fabric of the city. As a result each one has its own unique configuration where nothing comes into play except the constraints of the site.” (Lefavre 2002:28) (See Figure 4.15) According to Lefavre (2002:46), the most significant aspect of the playgrounds is the net or web-like quality they assume when taken as a whole. “They are conceived as a constellation, a scheme made up of situationally arising units – the playgrounds – bound to time, accident, and circumstance.” (Lefavre 2002:46)

Today we no longer produce space under the banner of modernism - the object of the situationists challenge – but that of anti-modernism. Historical preservation, contextualism, and mixed-use zoning have been the guiding principles of architecture and planning since the 1980s. While this sounds remarkably similar to the revolutionary ideas of the situationists, the shift from modernism to anti-modernism conceals an underlying continuity (Deutsche 2002:75). “The segregating, isolating, and fragmenting effects of modernism are also promoted with anti-modernism through urban

renewal and slum clearance projects in their attempts to preserve the city center for the elite.” (Deutsche 2002:75) This suggests a continuing need for play in the urban realm. According to Van Eyck and play has a civilizing function. Van Eyck’s first playgrounds were placed in the voids that were left behind by the Jews upon their deportation. “Filling them with life, in the face of these facts, was a redeeming, therapeutic act, a way of weaving together once again the fabric of a devastated city. The intention was to thwart...the agonial by overcoming it through play.” (Lefavre 2002:45) While Winnipeg has not recently undergone such dramatic or painful events as war, it is nonetheless a fragmented city. I believe that play – not just for children – can be one method of bringing these fragments together.

Learning from Skateboarders

“The urban practice of skateboarding implicitly yet continuously critiques contemporary cities. ... Through an everyday practice – neither consciously theorized nor programmed – skateboarding suggests that pleasure rather than work, use values rather than exchange values, activity rather than passivity, performing rather than recording are potential components of the future, as yet unknown city.” (Iain Borden 2001:173)

According to most skaters, skateboarding is not simply riding a piece of wood on wheels. It is a way of life. While they

are often considered a nuisance by many city dwellers, there is, in my opinion, a great deal we can learn from them. Skateboarding encompasses all that has been previously discussed in this chapter. Through playful appropriation of everyday elements in the urban setting, and the movements of their bodies in space and time, they create an architecture that is not simply a mono-functional object, but rather an engaging element whose function is transformed. Forty (in Borden 2001:8) writes, "Architecture, like all other cultural objects is not made just once, but is made and remade over and over again each time it is represented through another medium, each time its surroundings change, each time different people experience it." Skateboarding shows us that spaces can be used in more ways than originally intended, and that architecture can produce things and activities that are not explicitly commodified. Likewise Borden (2001:233) writes that, "The labor of skateboarding is not the production of commodities, but the effort of play, the ludic."

Since its conception by a group of California surfers in the late 1960s (to occupy their time when not surfing), skateboarding, as we know it has undergone many transformations. Appropriation of space, however, has always been central to the activity. It first began in the modernist spaces of suburbia, such as roads, private pools and yards hidden from public view. These spaces were found, adapted, and reconceived as new kinds of space - as spaces for play (Borden 2001:33). Now skate sites include university campuses,

urban plazas, public institutions, national theatres, commercial office squares as well as more everyday spaces such as back streets, main roads, sidewalks, malls, and parking lots. Skateboarders tend to occupy these spaces when others do not resulting in the "counterinhabitation of habitually uninhabited but nonetheless critical, public spaces". (Borden 2001:186)

"Where the architectural space of modernity tends to homogeneity, fusing geometry and the visual localization, the body (such as that of the skateboarder) can project its symmetries and actions onto that architecture, refusing to accept it as a pre-existent world and instead (re)producing architecture on its own terms." (Borden 2001:105)

The skateboarder produces space through the intersection of body, board, and terrain. Borden (2001:96) explains, "Using a series of front-back, left-right, up-down reversals and rotations in combination with precise relations of board, hand/body, and terrain, the skater generates an extraordinary movement and produces body-centric space." The entire body experiences the space through sight, sound, touch, smell and time. Small details become significant (Borden 2001:200). Curb angles and surface paint determine slide quality and therefore the moves made against it. Over time, skateboarders accumulate very detailed knowledge of various local places, micro-architectures, and accessible times. (Borden 2001:200). Emphasis on the body results in a "lexicon of skate moves". While it is still very much a male

dominated activity, ethnicity and class are no longer relevant. "The community is knitted through the continual exchange and re-experiencing of the skate moves. The image becomes not only a locally lived, but simultaneously a globally reproduced and exchanged phenomenon." (Borden 2001: 126) This exchange occurs through various media such as videos, magazines, internet, and even simply the act of skateboarding.

Skateboarding is often viewed as senseless vandalism and is therefore discouraged. But if we view the architecture of the city as a "writing on the ground, inscribing the legitimacy of owners and managers over others... then urban phenomena such as litter, scuff-marks, smells, noise, pollution, and skateboard marks are all "versions of a counter inscription." (Borden 2001:210) Or as ex-professional skateboarder Ben Powell (in Borden 2001:257) puts it:

"Skateboard – made of wood, metal, and plastic, costs about £100, runs on leg power; causes chips and scratches on bits of stone and metal. Car – costs a fortune, runs on poisonous shit, pollutes the air and water, fills the city with smog; causes the death of hundreds of thousands of people every year...and despite all this cars are ok but skateboards are evil, objects of vandalism, dangerous menaces that must be stopped."

Skateboarding among these other things should be viewed as part of the regular wear and tear on the urban environment. Rather than discouraging new uses of our urban elements we should design them

such that they can withstand the pressures of daily urban life.

Skateboarders, much like the homeless, create uses other than those originally intended for spaces within cities through the appropriation and exploitation of physical terrain (Borden 2001:29). Also like the homeless, skaters occupy urban space without engaging in economic activity to the annoyance of building owners and managers. Where the homeless are removed from commercial areas through such measures as "curved benches, window ledge spikes, and doorway sprinkler systems, so skaters encounter rough-textured surfaces, and spikes and bumps added to handrails." (Borden 2001:254) Their labor produces no "products" beyond the successfully executed trick. It is exchangeable only by means of performance and therefore appears as a waste of time and effort. But this view reduces life to mere survival. Skateboarding is a "release of energy, espousing play, art, and festival".

Conclusion

"Filters and tactics refer to the ways in which we negotiate the distance between city and self." (Borden et. al. 2001:13) Through a series of filters, we are able to understand the city and its contexts and our relation to the external world. Filters are based on perception and representations of aspects of the city. They are "a means of thinking and enacting the relation of the

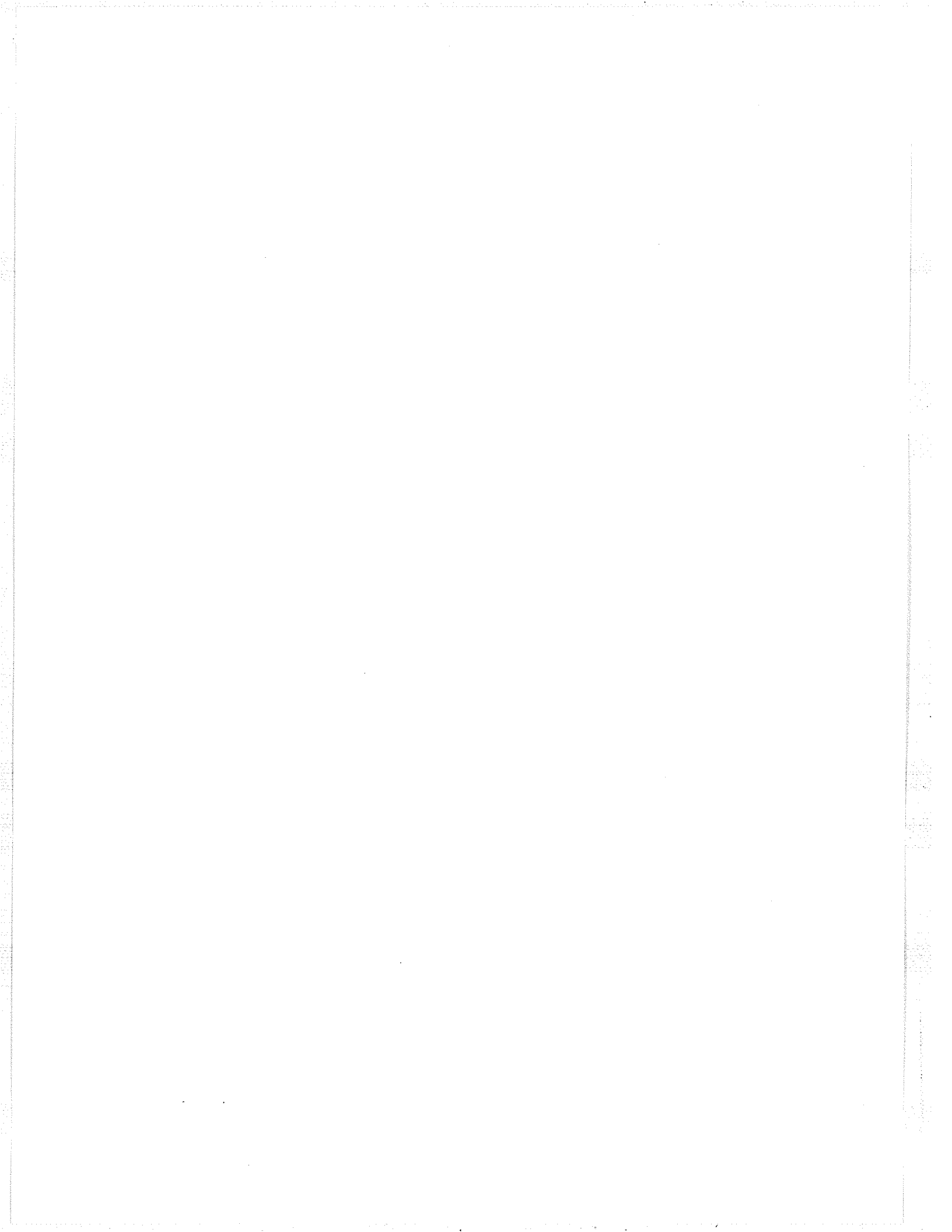
self to the external world". (Borden et. al. 2001:13) Filters can be real or imagined and are influenced by experience or through images, writing, and various other forms of media. As such, a filter can take the place of a city that is physically distant from us. (Borden et. al. 2001:13)

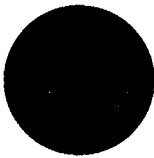
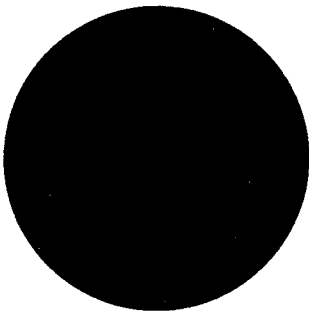
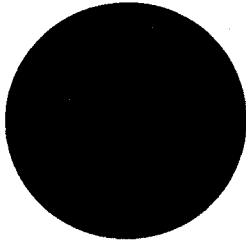
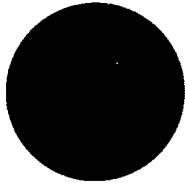
"Tactics are a more proactive response to the city. They are practices or what Michel Foucault refers to as discourses that produce objects." (Borden et. al. 2001:13) they may be words, images, or things. They may be attempts to solve urban problems or they may try to reconceptualize the relation between the city and self. In short, they differ from filters in that tactics aim to make a difference. "Both filters and tactics are necessary parts of urban living, working dialectically as ways of knowing, thinking, and acting. Tactics tend to the concrete and filters to the abstract." (Borden et. al. 2001:13)

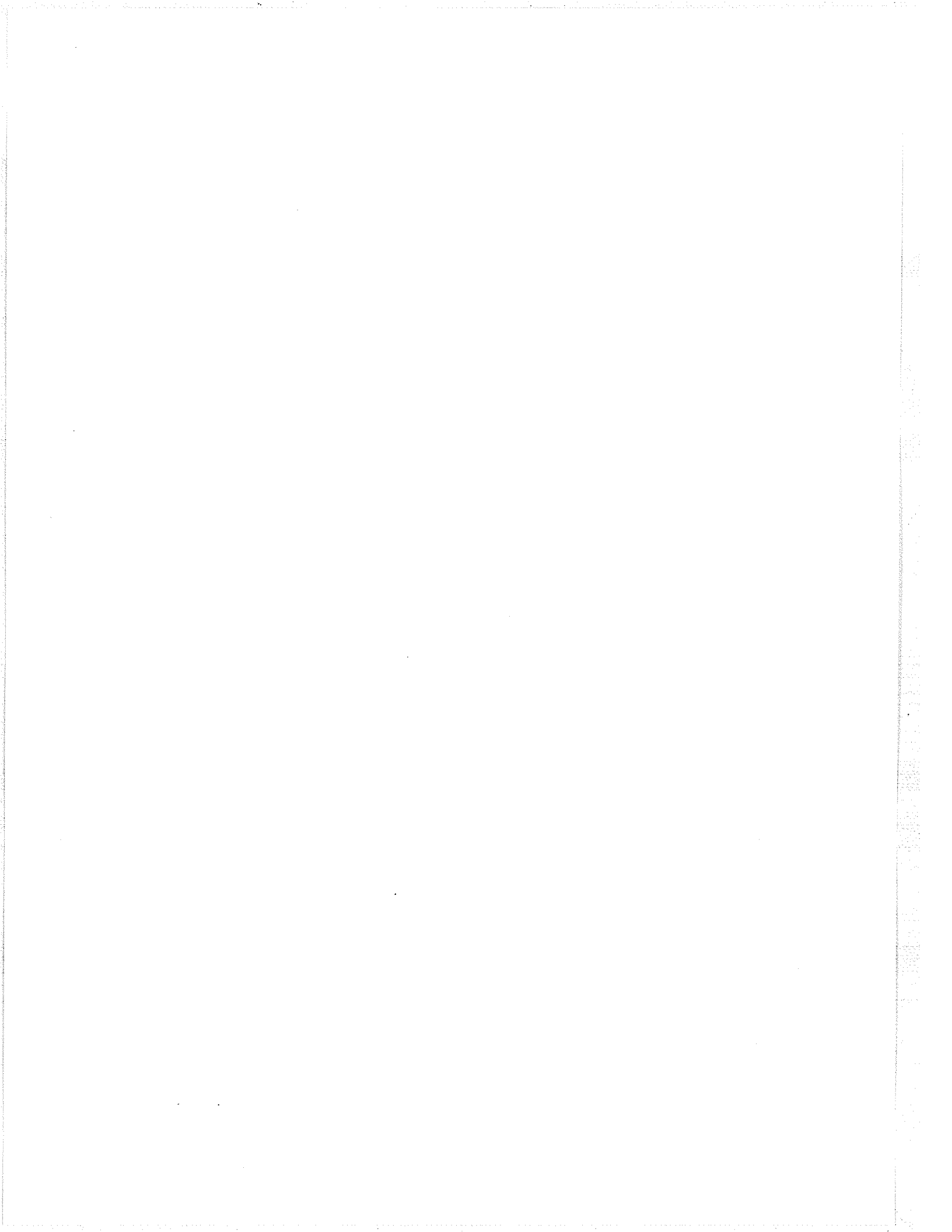
This project seeks to propose a tactic, in the form of urban "furniture" that alters people's relations to the city of Winnipeg. Through these tactics, new filters are generated, reconfiguring the self and therefore ways of both, acting in and interacting with the city and its inhabitants. This will ultimately result in the breakdown of social barriers and therefore the creation of a coherent collective. Through play, perceptions of surroundings and people are altered. Homogenizing stereotypes and generalizations are collapsed and difference is celebrated. The intention of this project is not simply to propose a newer, prettier park bench where priority is

given to those with higher societal status. Nor is it to provide an alternative form of seating solely to the disenfranchised. It is to propose an urban element – a tactic - that enhances the relationship between Winnipeg and its inhabitants (the city and the self), and that is truly public allowing for diverse interactions by any and all users while at the same time enhancing the city's sensory environment.

Currently, cities and the elements they encompass are planned and designed with a top-down approach. The planner or designer – under the influence of wealthy developers - dictates who, where, when, and how spaces are experienced resulting in boredom, fragmentation, and therefore under-use. If meaning is created through "social life, and a narrative richness in the everyday" (Betsky 1998:458) then a bottom-up approach, where everyday spaces are injected with elements of play, can lead to diverse interactions and therefore, rich collective experiences. In the movie houses of the past, "everyday life was suspended for a while in order to be re-constituted as a result of an encounter with the fantastic." (Marling 2001:4) The architecture, names, and furnishings of the theatres were designed to make every visitor feel like royalty. They were places where people of all classes could sit next to one another without discrimination. Another implicit goal of the study is to stimulate the creation of public elements that become tools to help break the monotony of quotidian life? Couldn't we all be made to feel like royalty again – if only for a fifteen-minute coffee break?







5. Design Process

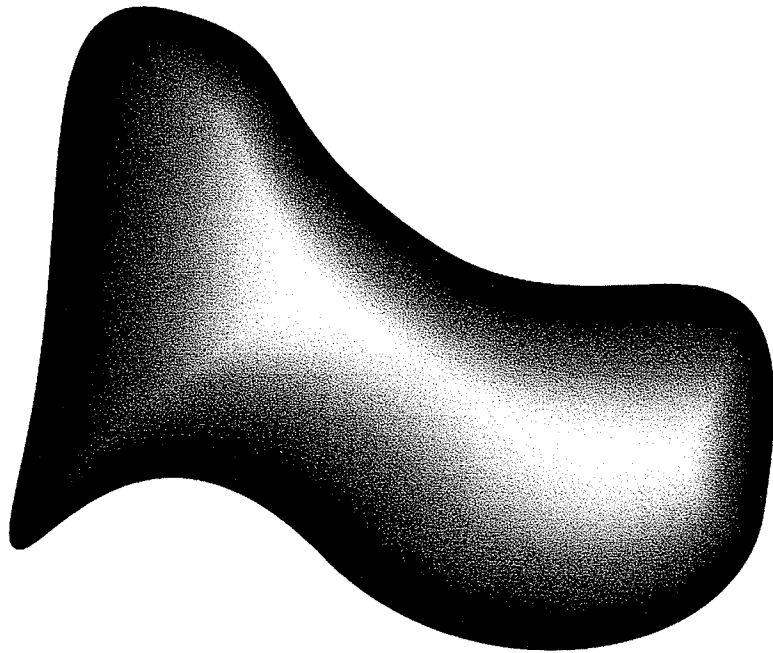


Fig. 5.1 Stylised Drawing of the Final Design

“Human actions always define themselves as choices, as a means of access to what is possible and as an option between those various possibilities, regardless of whether the actions are individual or collective.

Without possibility there can be no activity, no reality, unless it be the dead reality of things in isolation, which have a single possibility: to maintain themselves as they are.”

-Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*

5

Introduction

The previous sections have discussed the past and present conditions of public outdoor seating and the importance of these elements in the urban environment. They have also set up a theoretical framework to aid in the design process. The ultimate intention of this section is to propose a new approach to public outdoor seat design. This is achieved through the construction of an outline of design criteria based on the previously presented information which, in turn, is incorporated into a design proposal. Various stages of the design process are illustrated through sketch and model form, and final design drawings are provided.

Design Intention

Initially, this project sought to design public seating/furniture that would reflect the aspirations, character, and identity of the city of Winnipeg. Upon further study, however, it was quickly noted

that problems arose when attempting to define a single city identity or character. Inevitably, portions of the population would not subscribe to or fit in with a pre-determined, artificially created identity, resulting in their exclusion and segregation from the public realm and, in turn, leading to feelings of hostility – exactly the opposite of the desired outcome. So, rather than attempting to capture the “essence of place”, or creating an identity for the city of Winnipeg (much the same way advertising creates brand identities) as originally intended, this project took the position that the true character of cities is defined by the people who inhabit them and the social networks that occur within them. Or to paraphrase Henri Lefebvre: people make places and places make people.

Since it would be impossible to get to know every inhabitant of the city and the constantly changing social networks within which they operate, how does one begin to create a design that reflects and is inclusive of everyone? Many theorists believe that it is through the understanding of the importance of ubiquitous everyday elements that make up most cities today. While these elements, such as strip malls and parking lots, are often considered to be the result of poor urban planning, they do contribute in large part to the outdoor “character” and day-to-day functioning of a city. It would be extremely difficult for any city dweller to make it through an entire day without coming in contact with at least one of these elements. These ubiquitous elements are often temporarily appropriated and their functions transformed resulting

in a variety of unintended activities. Since every person is unique and since these activities are undertaken by the individuals in specific places at particular times, then it stands to reason that the result of these spontaneous interactions and transformations of everyday functions can help to define place. So in terms of the creation of new urban furniture, it follows that its design should somehow allow for multiple interpretations such that everyone is free to use it in any manner they choose. Its form should not dictate its use.

Design Intention

This project is a response to the current situation in public outdoor furniture. The final result is a proposal for new urban elements that reflect more than simply the designer's ideas about the city. It is intended to allow for any and all users to create their own meanings and ideas through temporary appropriation and play. The design must accommodate a variety of postures, body types, and sizes. Its use, however, must not be dictated by the designer. Rather, its form must leave it up to the individual. It should reflect the everyday cultures occurring in the city while at the same time allowing for the temporary suspension of this everyday in favour of something more leisurely. It should also make users feel as though it was designed specifically for them - to allow them to feel at home and that they are an important part of the city.



Fig. 5.2 Conceptual Collage - Putty-Like Blobs Placed Throughout the City. Users could mould the elements in any configuration to make the perfect seat, sculpture, or anything else they desire.

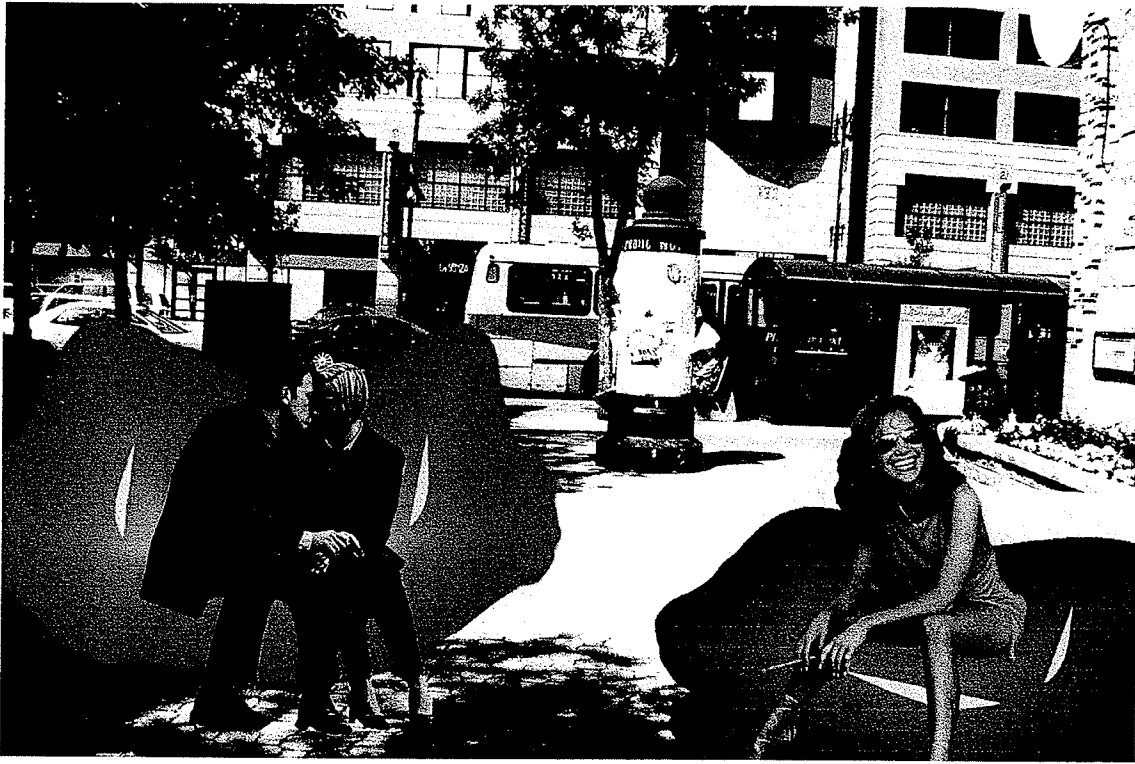


Fig. 5.3 Conceptual Collage - "J.Lo and Ben Affleck Enjoy the Putty Seats During Their Recent Visit to Winnipeg While Filming Their Latest Movie." Often, if the social elite adopt new ideas, the rest of the population tends to follow.

“The degree to which a culture is ‘civilized’ is often measured by criteria such as literacy, the flourishing of the arts, tolerance, socioeconomic equality, etc. We think that modern civilization could also be measured by the degree that “design” is present in a culture, specifically the design of urban areas and public spaces allocated to pedestrians and public exchange. The most civilized cities seem to have the greatest number of parks, piazzas and cafés and the most space for human interaction. If you can relax and feel safe and inspired in public, you most likely live in a locale that values planning, which is the basis for design.”

-Design Within Reach Newsletter



Fig. 5.4 Conceptual Collage - "At Home in the City"

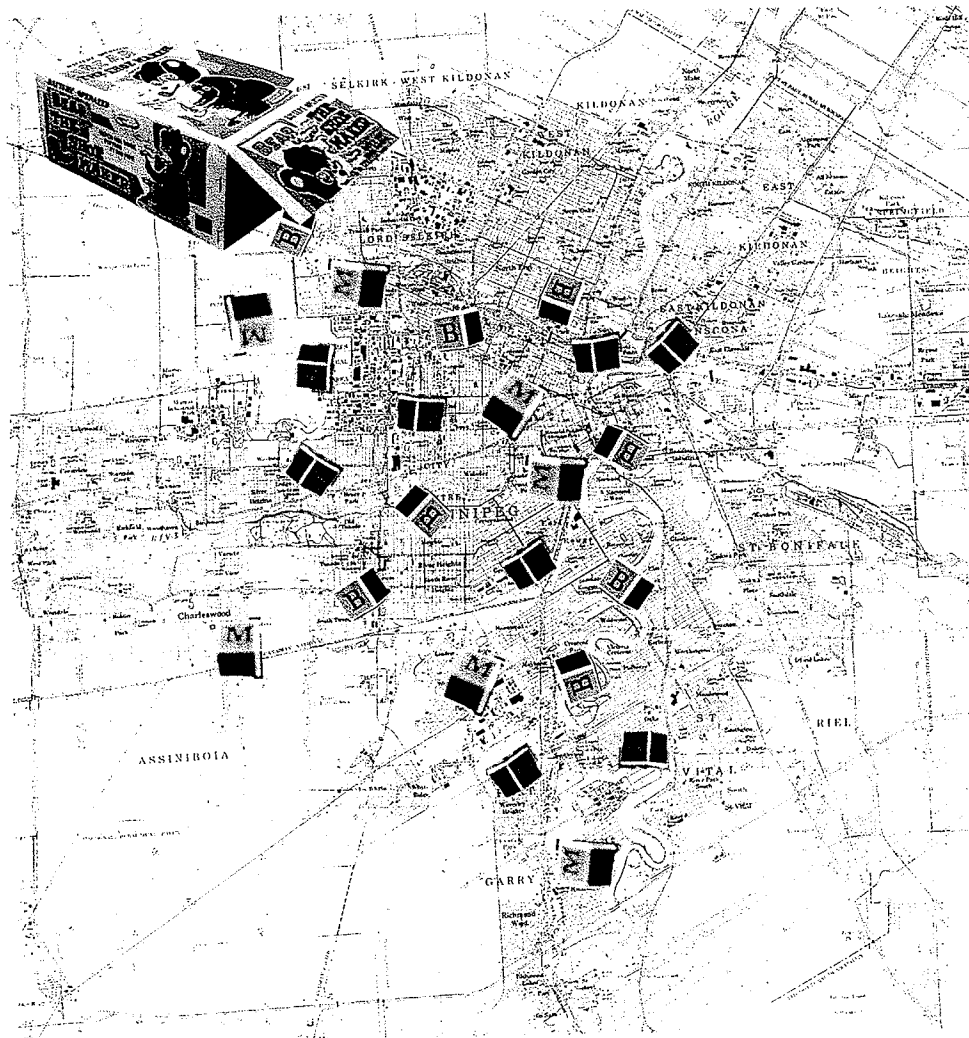


Fig. 5.5 Conceptual Collage - "Play Blocks Dispersed Throughout the City."

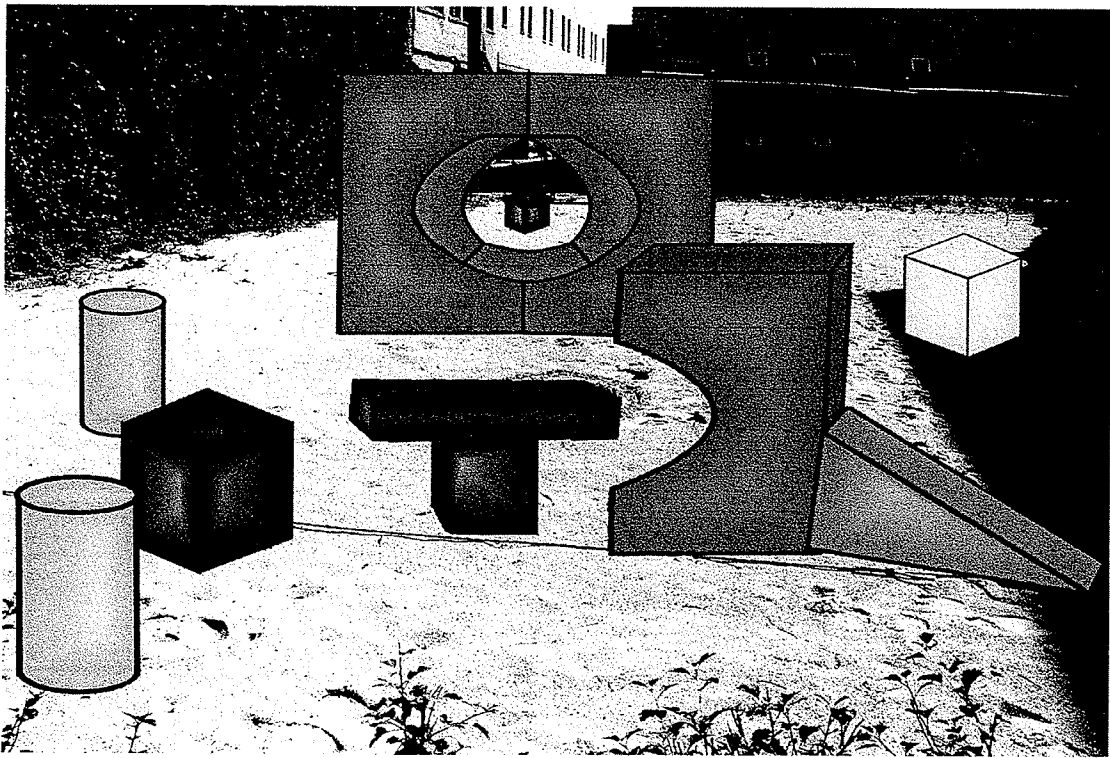


Fig. 5.6 Conceptual Collage - "Play Blocks in an Empty Downtown Lot."



Fig. 5.7 Conceptual Collage - "McSkate" - Temporary Appropriation of a McDonald's Parking Lot by a Group of Skateboarders

The Concept

Sitting cannot be separated from walking in the urban environment. As mentioned earlier, sitting or stopping to take a rest is essentially the suspension of another activity that requires more effort – such as walking.

Our Neolithic ancestors, who were largely nomadic, vertically planted large stones in the ground at key points along their routes. These stones, called menhirs, are said to be the very first objects to be purposely situated in the landscape. Through its magnitude, the menhir would be able to attract the attention of the traveler and therefore could be used to communicate useful information to others about the journey that lay ahead. The area around the menhir then became the space for sitting, meeting, and the sharing of events, stories and myths.



Fig. 5.8 Examples of Ancient Menhirs

Figure 5.8 shows one of the proposed elements in plan view. Its form is partially derived from the photo of the menhir illustrated in Figure 5.9. The varying widths of the “seat” portion of the element are meant to accommodate height variations among people. The indentations allow for perching or leaning if one is not inclined to sit down. The “back” portion (running down the centre of the element varies in height and can also be used to sit, perch, lean, and even lie down on.

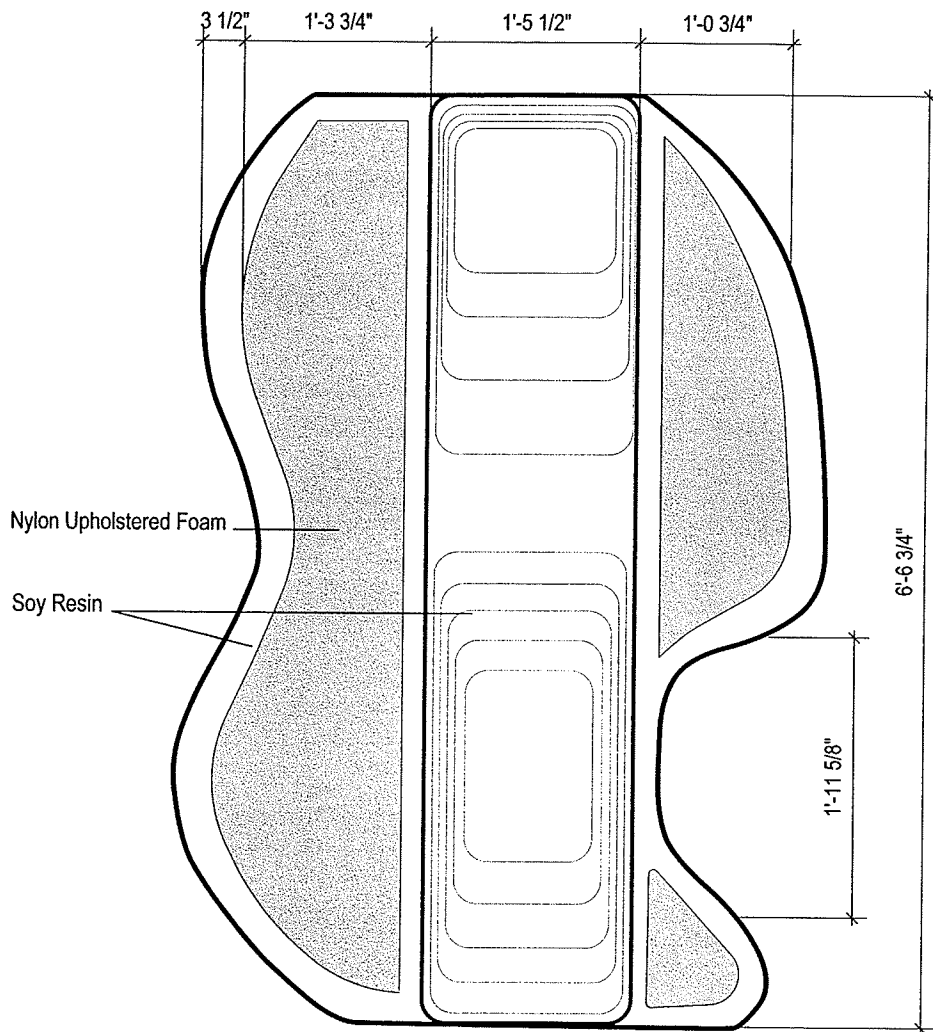


Fig. 5.9 Plan View of One Proposed Element

Figure 5.9 shows the proposed design in elevation. if one chooses to lie down along the top, they are able to maintain the optimal hip-high angle of 135 Degrees.

The proposed element includes castors that lock when the handle is pushed up into the indented area on the side of the seat. When the handle is pulled put, the castors descend and the element is easily pushed or pulled to a more desirable location.

The variation in the "back" height also accommodates variation in height.

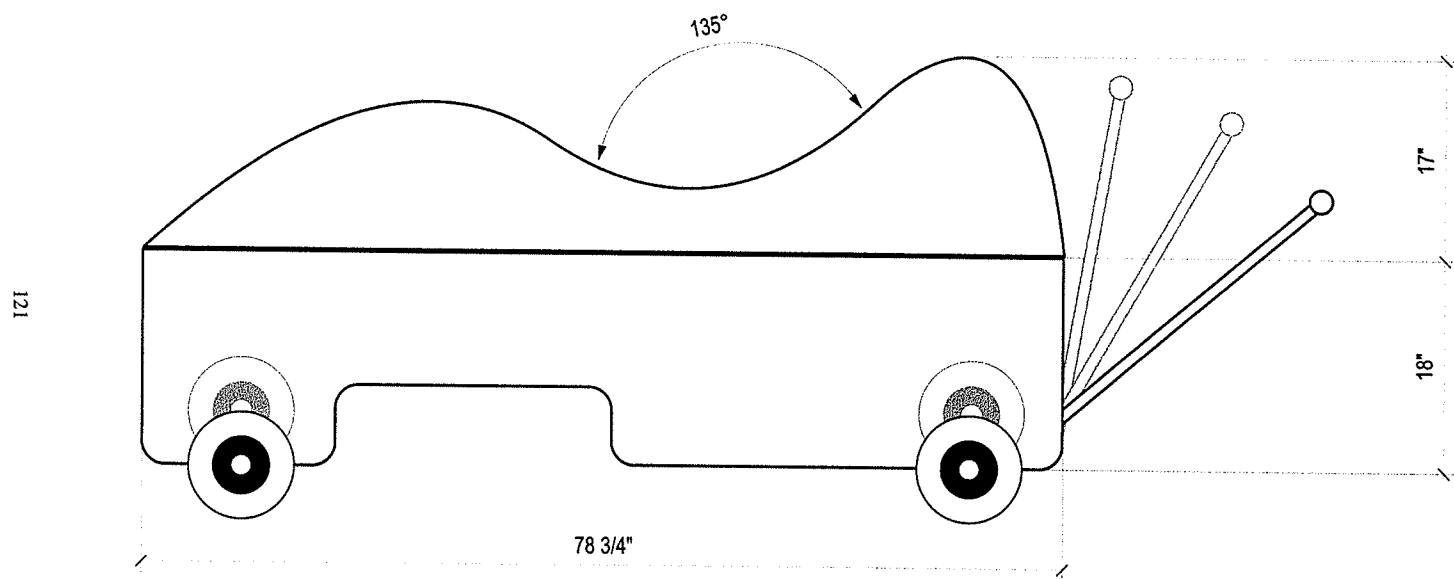


Fig. 5.10 Elevation View of One Proposed Element

The smooth plastic finish is somewhat enticing to write on but at the same time easy to clean. Thus allowing the user to temporarily leave their mark. They all have lockable castors and are lightweight for ease of movement so that they can be moved to any desired location although their bulk may make them slightly awkward to move long distances. There are a series of forms that “fit” together but can be arranged in a variety of ways.

The amorphous shape is purposely ambiguous upon first glance so that its use is completely decided upon by the user. Some specific postures, as outlined previously, have been intentionally incorporated into the design of the elements – but it’s up to you to find them. The bulbous shapes and colourful plastic

make them seem friendly and interactive. All postures and shapes and sizes of people are accommodated. And padding is provided on certain portions of the elements for added comfort.

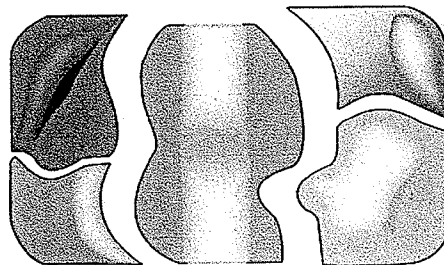


Fig. 5.11 Plan View of A Series of Elements That Fit Together



Fig. 5.12 Collage Depicting a Possible Use of the Proposed Element

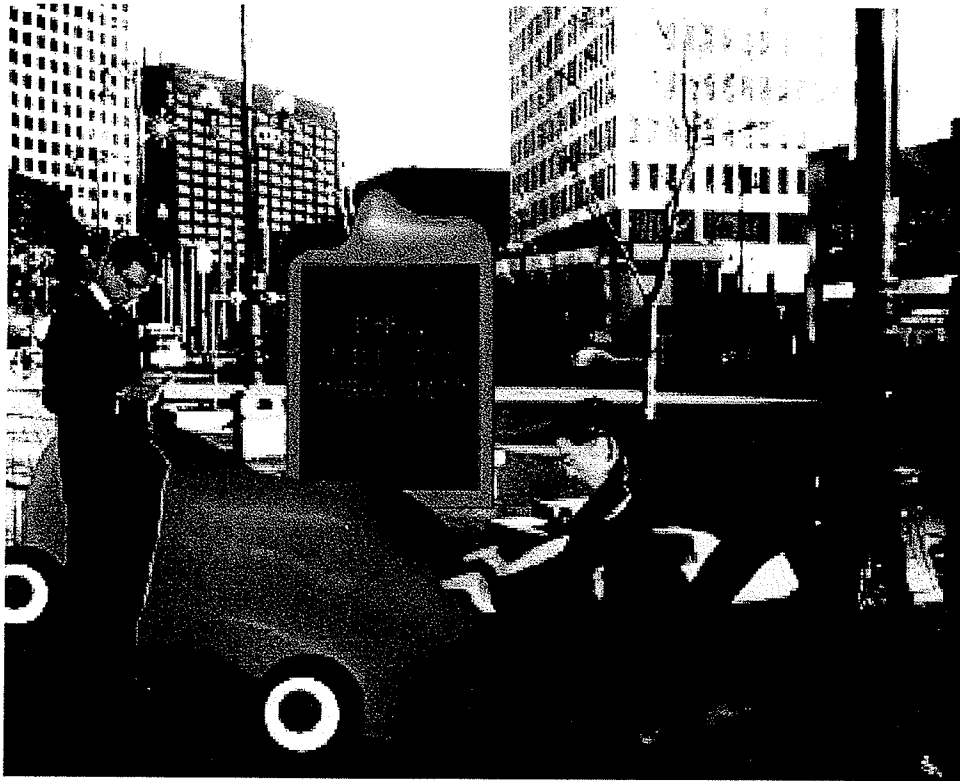


Fig. 5.13 Collage Depicting a Possible Use of the Proposed Element in Conjunction with a "Digital Menhir"

This project also proposes that the seating options work in conjunction with a new type of menhir. These new menhirs could be placed throughout the city such that they are encountered by pedestrians in their daily routines. They could be large video screens or digital display boards that the public could post messages on through their cell phones or home computers. These

devices could be powered by solar energy the same way certain transit shelters around the city are. Or they could be as low tech as whiteboards and markers. Regardless of their materiality, the temporary messages left behind, as well as the seat locations and configurations will reflect place in Winnipeg because they will reflect the people who used them.



Fig. 5.14 Collage Depicting Various Elements Glowing in the Night

The seats are designed to light up at night so that when they are not in use they can become almost sculptural. The seats contain rechargeable battery packs and could “dock” at these new menhirs to “recharge”. This might help to ensure that the seats don’t stray too far for long and would create small places of gathering if it is so desired.

And for those that wonder what happens when they get thrown in the river...



Fig. 5.15 The Perfect Rest Stops for Skaters on the River

... they float of course!

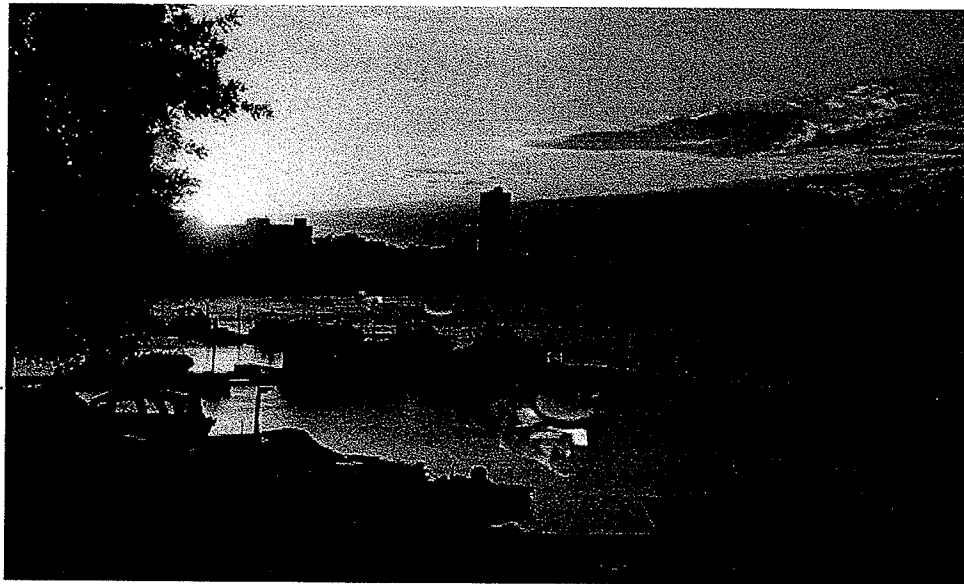


Fig. 5.16 Floating Down the River to a "Docking Station"

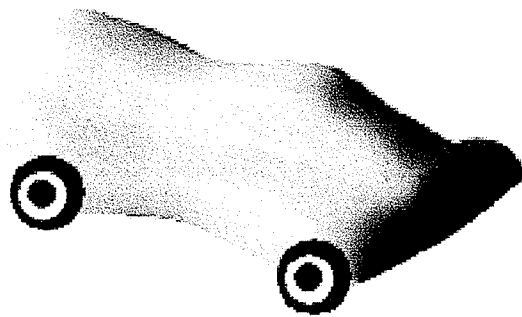


Fig. 5.17 Wax Model

Material Selection

Throughout the form generation process, research was conducted on possible construction materials. Innovative materials that could withstand the pressures of the public realm as well as our somewhat extreme climatic conditions were sought. Of particular interest was finding a material that was somewhat gel or putty-like that could temporarily conform to the pressure being put on it. In other words, the material had to mould itself around the user and then bounce back into shape once the user has left. Given our climate, the material also had to be a good insulator rather than a conductor and it had to be somewhat ecologically sustainable. New materials or new ways to use old materials that could accomplish the above-mentioned criteria were researched. The selection process evolved with the design. I looked at materials like silicone elastomers – or silly putty and different products like stress relief balls and inflatable watercraft like the Zodiacs. I also looked at technogel rubber, neoprene, and various types of foam. Most of these seemed to have problems with durability. (See Appendix 2) As the design evolved, the final materials selected were rotation moulded soy based resin with insets of visco elastic foam - or memory foam encased in the water proof forza vinyl.

Characteristics of Selected Materials

Soy-Based Resin

It was developed by a group of researchers at the University of Delaware and is currently being tested by John Deere for its application in tractor parts. Commercially available epoxidized soybean oil is modified making it more reactive. It is then combined with a styrene monomer, where crosslinking occurs resulting in a resilient material similar to unsaturated polyester resins. The material can also be reinforced with fiberglass. The soybean oil takes the place of the non-renewable petro-chemicals normally used in resin production. The finish can be smoothed and painted allowing it to be used in exterior environments. The current versions of soy plastic perform much like conventional thermoset plastic materials. They are resistant to ambient heat and retain resilience at cold temperatures.

Visco-Elastic Polyfilex or “Memory Foam”

Memory Foam is an open cell, light weight

foam originally developed by NASA and is currently used in some types of mattresses. The foam responds to body temperature and conforms to the pressure put on it. It dissipates heat and greatly decreases flesh pressure associated with sitting by conforming to the exact shape of your body.



Fig. 5.18 Memory Foam

Forza Vinyl

Forza: From the Italian word meaning “strength” or “go for it!” Forza is an extremely strong vinyl upholstery that doesn’t look like vinyl. It has a subtle sheen and is treated with a finish that is stain, oil, and mildew resistant. It exceeds 250 000 double rubs and is available in 19 colorways.

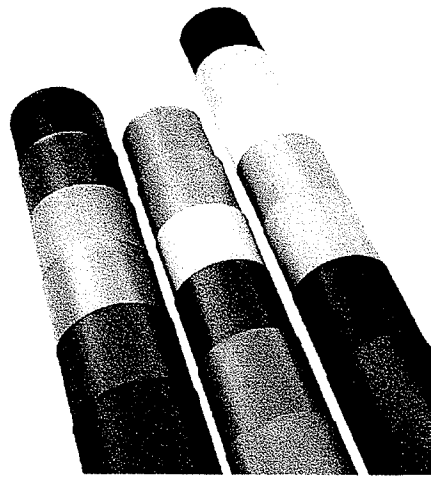


Fig. 5.19 “Forza Vinyl” (Knoll Fabrics, 2003)

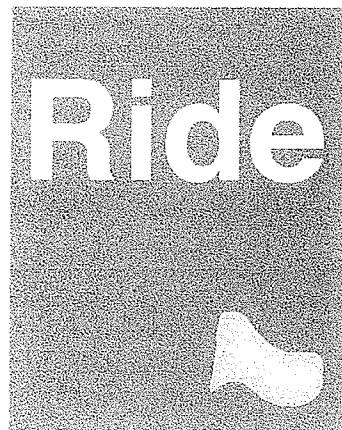
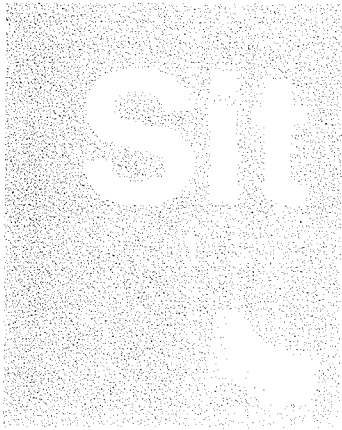


Fig. 5.20 Product Posters



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Appendices:



Appendix 1 People's Park – A History

http://students.berkeley.edu/resource/r_html/r10_3.html

Accessed March 20, 2004
The Regents of the University of California
Maintained by New Student Services
– Berkeley

During the late 1960s, the campus and the Berkeley community became engaged in a controversy over a plot of land now known as People's Park. It all started on April 18, 1969, when The Berkeley Barb (a defunct community newspaper) ran a herald that read: "Bring shovels, hoses, flowers, soil, colorful smiles, laughter, and lots of sweat," to transform the "mud lot," located above Telegraph Avenue between Haste and Dwight, into a "cultural, political, freak-out and rap center for the western world." Originally, this lot had been a block with houses. The University had purchased the property in 1968 and cleared the site to build dormitories. The housing project was stalled however, and people took to parking on the vacant, muddy lot.

The response to The Barb headline was overwhelming. The following Sunday hundreds of people, including faculty members and their families, graduate students, carpenters, street people, cheerleaders, Greeks, and "dormies," came to build a park. With funds from Telegraph Avenue merchants and restaurant owners, the lot was drained and leveled, planted with grass, trees, flowers and shrubs, and

a playground was erected. The following weekends, thousands of people came to plant, play, and work on the park.

During this time, Chancellor Roger Heyns released numerous statements announcing that the park was still University property and that the users were trespassing. On Thursday, May 15, 1969, at 4am, a fencing company, accompanied by 250 police, constructed an 8-foot high chain-link fence around the perimeter of the park. By nine o'clock that same morning, the People's Park Negotiating Committee announced a rally on Sproul Plaza in response to this University action. The rally, which drew 3000 people, soon turned into a riot as the crowd moved down Telegraph towards the park. That day, known as Bloody Thursday, three students suffered punctured lungs, another a shattered leg, 13 people were hospitalized with shotgun wounds, and one police officer was stabbed. James Rector, who was watching the riot from a rooftop, was shot by police gunfire; he died four days later.

At the request of the Berkeley mayor, Governor Ronald Reagan declared a state of emergency and sent 2200 National Guard troops into Berkeley. Some of these guardsmen were even Cal students. At least one young man had participated in the riots, been shot at by police, gotten patched up, and then returned to his dorm to find a notice to report for guard duty. In the following days approximately 1000 people were arrested: 200 were booked for felonies, and 500 were taken to Santa Rita jail.

Many people in Berkeley, regardless of their sentiments about the park, were shocked by the confrontations and the sight of long lines of military vehicles and checkpoints in the Berkeley streets. Much of the opinion on campus and in the community turned when on Tuesday, May 20, a national guard helicopter flew over the campus, and in an attempt to break up a rally on Sproul Plaza, released tear gas that spread throughout the city, affecting school children and college demonstrators alike. In a record turnout in the spring 1969 campus elections, 85 percent of the students voting supported the park in a special ASUC referendum. Many faculty and staff members, fraternities, sororities, radical, and civic groups joined in the appeal and the Berkeley City Council reversed their previous position and urged the University to maintain the property as a park. The University stood firm in its position, and on July 31, 1969, part of People's Park was paved over for a free parking lot and recreational courts. Many students boycotted the new facilities, and they were left largely unused.

For two years, the park was no more than a bittersweet memory for the people who built it. Then on May 11, 1971, The Daily Californian ran a front-page editorial titled, "Let's Go Down and Take the Park-Again." The editorial, which called for supporters to regain the park for its second anniversary, provoked further conflict, and on May 15 police clashed with protesters attempting to tear down the fence around the park. At the time the editorial was published, the newspaper was in the process of declaring

its independence from the ASUC and was under the jurisdiction of the University-run Daily Californian Publishing Board. The board fired three senior editors, but they refused to quit. The resistance of The Daily Cal staff ultimately led to the complete independence of the newspaper, and today The Daily Californian leases only its name from the University.

In 1974, three years after The Daily Cal incident, the People's Park/Native Plants Forum was initiated. An agreement was worked out with the University that allowed community gardening and improvements until the site, which was earmarked for student housing, was developed. In 1978, the People's Park Council built a stage and held concerts and other events. The year 1979 was marked by the Occupation and Liberation of the West End, in which the asphalt strip that had been a free parking lot was ripped up to prevent the University from turning it into a fee parking lot. In 1980, the University rescinded all agreements with the People's Park Project/Native Plant Forum.

A lengthy, but unsuccessful community planning process was started in the 1980s. During that time, the course of the park remained static: the University mowed the lawn area and provided utilities (like garbage pickup and water); Berkeley residents worked on the gardens; and a variety of people, from the homeless with carts and students with frisbees to drug dealers and users, hung out.

In spring of 1989, the University's first

draft of the Berkeley campus Long Range Development Plan (LRDP) included building a residence hall on People's Park. Due to the shortage of housing in Berkeley, many students favored this proposal. However, the LRDP coincided with the 20th anniversary of the park, and the suggestion of changing the area into a dorm did not sit well with some students and community members. Protesters demonstrated on Sproul Plaza and at People's Park. The protest broke into a riot where windows were smashed and stores looted; there was fighting with police. It happened on a night with a full moon, when street youth, drunken partygoers, and anarchists (visiting from a convention in San Francisco) merged with park protesters setting out on a candlelight march along Telegraph Avenue.

The University and the City of Berkeley then began work on an alternative plan that would serve student and community needs. After months of public debate, formal hearings, and consultations involving student and community leaders, the Regents approved the final LRDP, which designated People's Park as recreational open space. An agreement between UC and the city included leasing half of People's Park to the city for \$1 a year for five years, beginning in March 1991.

This arrangement did not initially proceed smoothly. In August 1991, as the University began to install a sand volleyball court, park activists rioted, and demonstrations continued for weeks. (After much vandalism and disuse, the volleyball

court was removed in 1997.) Later park improvements, such as a bathroom facility and basketball court, were also met with opposition. Nevertheless, over time the park quieted, although it continued to be plagued by many urban problems, including drug dealing and crime.

In June 1995, the University and the city embarked on yet another community planning process, which resulted in a Long Range Conceptual Plan for People's Park. This plan, adopted by the city council in January 1996, set out recommendations for future improvements. As the five-year lease came to a close, joint UC and city efforts brought noticeable improvements to the park. The grounds were cleaner and better maintained. Students and community members began to use the park in greater numbers. City and UC police efforts resulted in a drop in crime in and around the park.

In 1996, a Community Advisory Board was established made up of UC students, University staff, and neighborhood and community members to advise on policies, uses, and design of the park. The goal, agreed on by the University and the city, is to maintain the park for the recreational use of UC students, the community, and the south campus area.

Perhaps for the first time in the long history of People's Park, there appears to be reason to hope that it can survive and truly serve as a park for all people.

Appendix 2

Material Selection Notes

Desired Characteristics

Lightweight

Durable

Low Maintenance

Washable – spray it down to remove dust and dirt.

Quick drying – after rain/snow

Something on which snow doesn't collect

Ability to retain color

Insulator

Tactile

Elastic - mould itself around the user and then to bounce back into shape

Adaptable - Lend itself to various uses

I am looking for innovative materials that can withstand the pressures of the public realm as well as our somewhat extreme climatic conditions. I am particularly interested in finding a material that is somewhat gel or putty-like that temporarily conforms to the pressure being put on it. In other words, I would like the material to mould itself around the user and then to bounce back into shape once the user has left. Given our climate, the material should be a good insulator rather than a conductor.

Pros and Cons of Certain Materials

TechnoGel

Comes in various colors and is translucent. It distributes pressure evenly making it

a good ergonomic choice. The material moulds to user's body- making it feel like each seat was designed specifically for them. It is completely recyclable, UV safe, and does not freeze. It is extremely tactile and makes users want to interact with and manipulate it.

However, this tactility is also its flaw. While the material is quite durable its tactility draws people to manipulate it to the point of its destruction. It was also found that where TechnoGel was used in semi-public environments such as bars and restaurants, people were drawn to stealing and/or breaking the products. It was also found that TechnoGel is not suitable for exterior environments. It is a highly conductive material meaning that it heats up and cools down quickly based on ambient temperatures and would dissipate it quickly to the users that sit on it.

Silicone

Silly Putty is a silicone elastomer. Silicone can be used over an exceptional range of temperatures (-100 to 300C) They have properties similar to natural rubber but have a completely different chemical structure. They are the most chemically stable of all elastomers. Silicone resins are chemically inert and do not absorb water. Silicone resins are expensive and are difficult to process. They have relatively low strength. Glass fibers and other fillers are often used as reinforcement. They are energy intensive and not recyclable. They also tend to have a short shelf - life (3-6months) (But how can this be in terms of breast implants???)

Natural Rubber

It is the most widely used of all elastomers. It is an excellent cheap, general purpose elastomer with large stretch capacity and useful properties from -50C to 115 C. It has low hysteresis – and is thus very bouncy.

However it displays poor oil, oxidation, ozone and UV resistance.

Butyl Rubbers and Isoprene

Butyl Rubbers are synthetics that resemble natural rubber. They have good resistance to abrasion, tearing, and flexing. They have useful properties up to 150C.

Isoprene is synthetic natural rubber and is processed in the same way as butyl rubber. It has low hysteresis and high tear resistance making it bouncy and tough.

Both of these elastomers are typically used in inner tubes, belts, hoses and cable insulation.

Polybutadiene Elastomers

They have exceptional low – temperature performance. Exceptional resilience and abrasion resistance retained to -70C. But with poor chemical resistance (is this a problem?) It is used in the cores of solid golf balls.

* Ethylene-Vinyl-Acetate Elastomers (EVA)

They are built around Polyethylene (PE). They are soft, flexible, and tough, and retain these properties down to -60C. They blend well with PE because of their chemical similarity.

EVA is available in pastel or deep hues

and has good clarity and gloss. It has good barrier properties, little or no odor, UV resistance and FDA approval for direct food contact (i.e. not toxic). Toughness and flexibility are retained even at low temperatures and has good stress-crack resistance and good chemical resistance. It can be processed by most thermoplastic processes: co-extrusion for films, blow molding, rotational molding, injection molding, and transfer molding.

It is typically used in medical tubes, milk packaging, beer dispensing equipment, bags, ice trays, cable insulation, inflatable parts, running shoes.

*Chlorinated Elastomers (Hypalon, Neoprene)

Leading non-tire elastomers. Exceptional chemical resistance, ability to be colored, useful properties up to 170C

Used in footwear and wetsuits, vibration control mounts, shoe soles, diaphragms, cable jackets.

Durability??

Thermoplastic Elastomers

They are exceptional in that they can be molded and extruded in standard polymer processing equipment. Their scrap can be re-melted, and products made from them can be recycled. They allow rapid processing by standard thermoplastic methods and recyclability. They are typically used in bumpers, sports shoes, hoses, diaphragms, rollers, seals for automotive and architectural uses.

Ensolute, Closed Cell Foam etc. from <http://www.whitemountain.com.au/info>

[material_faq.html](#)

Oct. 20/03

Open Cell Foam has interconnected air chambers throughout the material, which produces an extremely soft and highly compressible foam. Open Cell Foam is used in the construction of many high quality self-inflating camping mattresses. Whilst Open Cell Foam is very comfortable, self-inflating air mattress have a layer of air that provides support and insulation properties, and is highly compressible once the air is released. Open Cell Foam is not very good as a solitary padding material for backpacks. The high compressibility of the Open Cell Foam can cause shoulder straps and hip belts to over compress under load, providing minimum of comfort. While the padded straps may look great and feel wonderfully soft at the time of purchase, this will not be the case when the backpack is under full load. Determining whether the padded straps are Open Cell Foam is easy enough, simply squeeze with you hand, and if the straps compress to less than one half of the original size it is Open Cell Foam.

Ensolite or Closed Cell Foam has open air chambers surrounded by foam that are not interconnected. The completely encapsulated air cells in the Ensolite Foam do not compress easily yet provides good padding. Ensolite or Closed Cell Foam is used in the production of Closed Cell Foam mats and its construction prevents full compressibility.. Since the Ensolite or Closed Cell Foam is a rubber based material and has completely encapsulated air chambers, it provides excellent

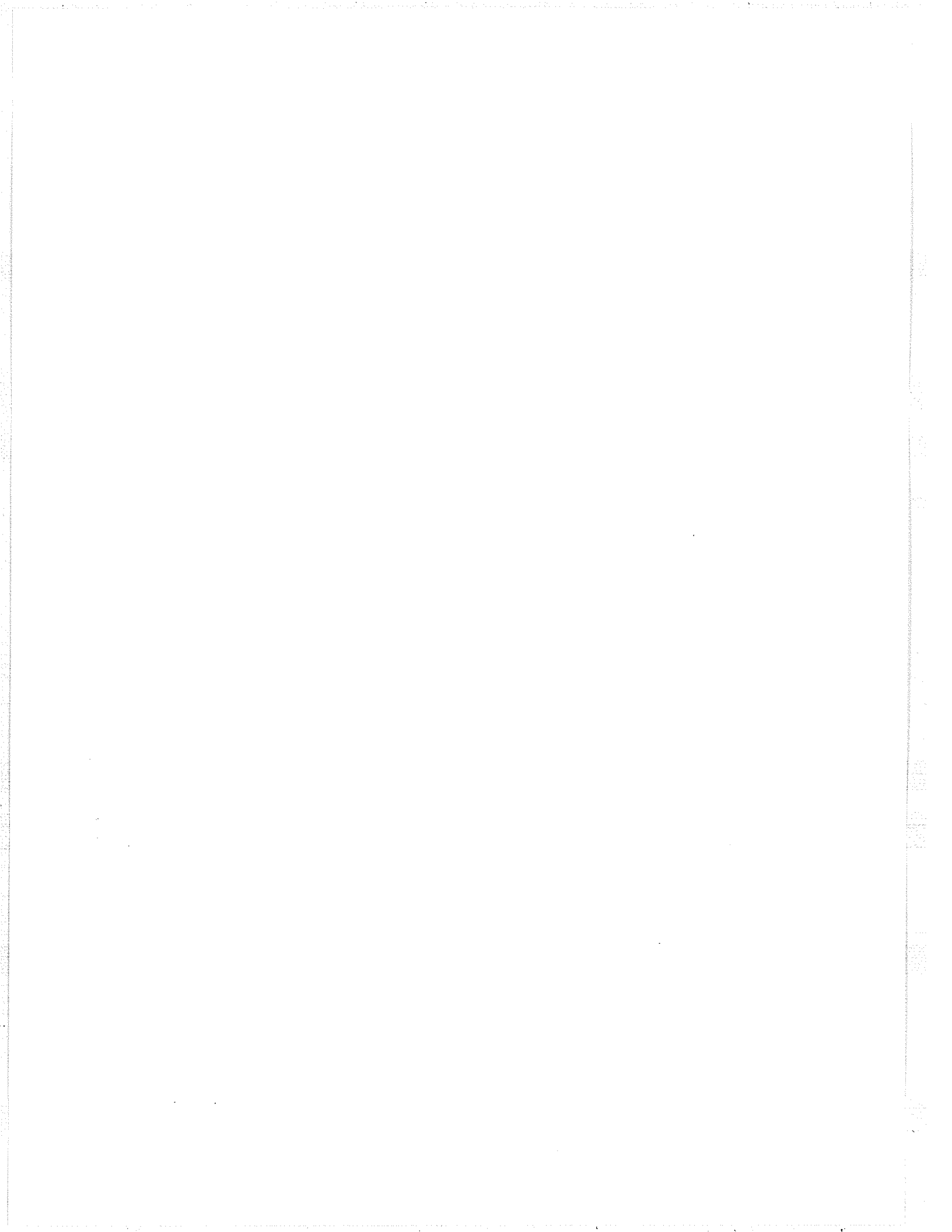
insulation and absorbs very little water.

For many years, better backpack designers cut and sewed the Ensolite or Closed Cell Foam into fabric sleeves providing the main source of shoulder and hip belt padding. The foam is dense, impervious to perspiration, and very comfortable. Ensolite or Closed Cell Foam is the main material used in backpack padding today, and it is a perfectly good material for backpack straps and hip belts. Determining whether the padded straps are Ensolite or Closed Cell Foam is easy enough, simply squeeze with your hand, and if the straps compress very little, then it is Ensolite or Closed Cell Foam.

Density Foam?

Concluding that Open Cell foam is more comfortable next to the body (more compressible, therefore softer) and Ensolite or Closed Cell foam is better next to the load (less compressible, therefore firmer), several manufacturers use Dual Density Foam in padding their backpacks. Backpacks with Dual Density Foam capitalize on the advantages of both foams, placing the Open Cell Foam against the body and the Ensolite or Closed Cell Foam against the load. This combination is more comfortable than either Closed Cell Foam or Open Cell Foam, supporting the load well and providing comfort for body.

Currently all White Mountain™ backpacks are manufactured with high quality Dual Density Foam.



Compression Moulded Foam?

One manufacturing drawback to Ensolite or other Closed Cell Foams concerns the manner of its fabrication. The material is typically poured into a frame and cooked into flat sheets that are cut to size, then cut to create a desired shape. The cost of cutting and shaping foam is highly labour intensive and results in significant material wastage. Because of these reasons another process was developed for the shaping, forming and customisation of the next generation of foam, Compression Moulded Foam.

Compression Moulded Foam originally appeared in European backpacks in the late 1980's and used a different manufacturing technique. The outer nylon material is adhered to a block of polyethylene foam using a heat sensitive adhesive, and then the entire assembly is heated so that the foam and adhesive soften. At this point, the assembly is compressed into a shaped mould to provide the final product. The shaped hip belt, shoulder strap, or lumbar pad is then cooled to resolidify the foam and adhesive. The final product is a pad shaped into a customised form.

Compression Moulded Foam is Ensolite or Closed Cell Foam, although slightly lighter in weight and shaped to the body without cut edges. An added benefit is the cavities formed inside the moulded foam pads, and different densities of foam can be included to provide flexibility to the final shape.

"Memory Foam"

= Visco- elastic polyflex.

Developed by NASA

Open cell foam that dissipates heat to provide relief from pressure.

Responds to body temperature.

Sand/flour filled "balloon"

Flexible, mouldable, interesting texture.

Inexpensive.

Heavy, not enough support?