A Foam of Blocks:
Lawrence Halprin's Architectural Language

This paper is part of a bigger study on Lawrence Halprin, conducted through the analysis of his personal archives present at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and the Seattle's City archives, together with trips and dedicated surveys for some of his projects. Many of Halprin's urban projects are culturally linked to the 60s and 70s: the assassination of Martin Luther king Jr in Memphis and of Robert Kennedy in Los Angeles, the student protests against the Vietnam War, and the subsequent occupying of university campuses, and the violent clashes between protesters and the police. Yet as public space became the stage for confrontation in many American cities, Halprin's open space projects seemed to encourage a different type of use: joyful playfulness, performance, dace. Many of his designs in fact, were developed with the idea of performance in mind, not surprising, as Halprin's wife, Anna Halprin, was an important contemporary dancer and choreographer with whom he collaborated often, as well as one of his collaborators, Angela Danadjieva, a former designer of constructivist-inspired sets for Bulgarian state films. Larger urban renewal interventions were also fueled by the Federal Housing Act of 1949 that encouraged "slum removal", inner cities-neighborhoods deemed beyond repair, and the "Federal-Aid Highway Act" of 1968, that encouraged the construction of superhighways to increase connectivity between cities and states. What appeared simply radical, is the fundamentally traditional idea of designing public spaces within the city with the deliberate intention for them to be beautiful and pleasurably utilized by the surrounding communities. These ideas had simply been replaced by design principles developed for the car, like multi lane roads, parking lots, shopping centers, drive thrus, etc.... The significance of these spaces can be seen for example in the Portland sequence – "Lovejoy Fountain, Pettygrove Park, and Forecourt (later renamed Ira Keller) Fountain, along with the lesser-known Source Fountain – represented a new kind of urban plaza, a grandly sculptural, metaphorical experience of nature that welcomed an activity largely absent from the midcentury American downtown: play". Skyline park in Denver, project that linked together three downtown blocks also encouraged play though the creation of metaphorical high-mountain cascades, canyons and open fields, designed through a series of fractured geometries of blocks and water basins for fountains. The presence of water features is a constant in Halprin's designs, inspired by the wet and dry environments of the High Sierra. In fact, Halprin believed that only with flowing water can true beauty be achieved. This is very visible in all of his fountains but perhaps particularly in Seattle's Freeway Park, where the water cascades, with their loud roaring manage to drown out the sounds of the adjacent freeway. His fountains are actual pieces of wilderness, geometrically mutated and transplanted into the city that with their glittering and static effects, without any type of barrier, effectively invite active participation, and encourage human activities like splashing, climbing, crawling, bathing, contemplating... In a cultural context that seemed to promote separation and isolation between different parts of established cities, Lawrence Halprin, with small or large commissions in Portland, San Francisco, Minneapolis, Denver, Seattle attempted (and in many ways succeeded) to create connections on the

small, urban, human scale. By the 1990s, Halprin's blend of nature, theater and urbanism would be established in a growing collection of plazas, and parks that, in each case, set the stage for major new public spaces.

Keywords: *Public Spaces, American City, Urban concatenation, Architecture and Nature*

Introduction

The events of the 1960 and 1970s in America are a looking glass through deeply rooted issues present in the country whose reverb still echoes today. Many of the issues brought up at the time and the attempted solutions to those problems still project significant consequences on today's world.

Movement is one of the founding actions of the United States, from the first colonies migrated from the Old Continent, to the Railroad mania, the Gold Rush, and in the 20th century, the interstate Highways. The idea of creating a network of roads that would be able to connect parts of the country that were isolated or simply far away, further helped to dissolve the perception of scale of the Country. This idea of perception of scale or of distance is greatly influenced by a third factor, time. This inverts their relationship; distance becomes subordinate to time. By establishing a new way to measure the city using time as a tool, it is possible to realize through circulation paths, it is possible to define or even identify a city. Urban road networks become the recognizable element of the American cities. It is therefore possible to say that cities are no longer identified through their historic buildings, new constructions, monuments, but through their traces. In fact, tracing means shaping space according to speed; in this way the traces of the streets become both a pragmatic lesson and an interpretation of the evolution of the city as a whole. It is inevitable than, for the trace system to welcome the concepts of direction and measure.

The same distance of a mile, if traveled by car, takes about 2.5 minutes, if traveled by foot, the same distance will take about 20 minutes. It is clear then, that distance alone becomes an inaccurate indicator in this situation. The American city is scaled in proportion to speed and its scale resembles that of the automobile[1]. In this environment then, the public and open spaces of the city become an opportunity to design something different and architects like Lawrence Halprin, succeeded to do exactly this. With his numerous travels to Europe and Asia, his designs for open spaces, always attempt to gift American cities pockets of slowness, of human scale, places where human interaction is the protagonist. In fact, Halprin believed in the collaboration between architecture and human interaction through the concept of performance. All of his public plazas, fountains and parks were all designed with performance in mind, through stage-like open spaces where the city's architecture takes on the role of background and the

[1]Thomas Bisiani and Vittoria Umani, "Geography, Infrastructure and Architecture: From the Immaterial Scenes of the Arts to the Physical Space of the American City," n.d., https://doi.org/10.30958/ajha.X-Y-Z.

different ways in which people live and occupy the space become the performance.

At the same time, Halprin was also in search of an architectural language rooted in the American continent and took inspiration from the varied landscapes of North and South America. His natural references, placed inside the city, are not examples of a kind, soft and pastoral nature, but an active, impetuous and sometimes even dangerous nature; this so able to keep up with the aggressive scale and speed of the city. His designs then, act as moments of relief where people can experience nature and benefit from the interactions it stimulates even if they are located in a tough urban environment.

Literature Review

Issues of scale in the American city

Serge Chermayeff and Christofer Alexander in their book *Community and Privacy* perfectly summarize the 20th century American city in these few words: "The fast and the high-pitched have all but obtained the slow and relaxed. The large and loud have overwhelmed the small and quiet. Extinct are the intimate, the special, the strange experiences of the great cities of the past where once the solitary, the adventurer, or the poet in camouflage could mingle at will with the crowd and find pleasure by very reason of his anonymity"[2]. The once small scaled relationships between neighbors, between communities, between people and the land they occupied has mutated and the introduction of the Interstate highways gave a final push in the direction of the Colossal. The scale of the inhabitants of earth has changed, as well as their relationship to the geography of the earth. Buckminster Fuller expands on this idea imagining what visitors of Mars would see when descending to earth. They would not see people, nor their suburban homes until almost on the earth's surface. The first thing they would see are the highways, the railroads, airports, large wherehouses, skyscrapers, and the moving cars. The Martians might even make the mistake to presume that the real inhabitants of earth are the only moving objects they would be able to see, the motor vehicles. But if the places for human interaction, man to man, are slowly decreasing; man sees its peers through moving vehicles in the highways, and streets, through two dimensional screens in movies or in video calls, hears them through telephones and loudspeakers, soon we too might identify with the objects we interact most often with, technological devices.

Focused on the exciting and the extreme, a rocket departing to the moon, a global virus pandemic, the shocking and disturbing murders of serial killers, man has become unconcerned with the average dimension, with his own, human dimension. "The charm of the small has been transformed into the cult of the cute; indifference has become contempt[3]". Even time isn't our own anymore, as one

[2]Serge Chermayeff` and Christopher Alexander, *Community and Privacy Toward a New Architecture of Humanism* (New York: Doubleday, 1963).
[3]Chermayeff` and Alexander.

minute has become extremely long (videos on tik tok only last 15 seconds) or extremely insignificant (average time for one-way commuters in the united states was 27.6 minutes in 2019[4]).

Highway legislation as catalyst for urban regeneration

It is impossible to ignore the impact that the Interstate Highways have had in speeding up the suburbanization trends of the 20th century United States, although it is true that "they were not the first transportation technology to do this, nor was transportation the only factor in suburbanization[5]". Residential suburbanization developed alongside the outward implementation of rail and streetcar technologies; Philadelphia is a great example of this. By 1957, after suburbanization and decentralization had become the main expansion trends, resulting in the growing dependence on automobiles, Congress passed the Federal-Aid Highway Act, that approved the construction of approximately 41.000 miles of interstate highways across the country (Fig.1). The State investment was approved as a means to connect scattered population through the implementation of infrastructure, as well as channel suburban traffic back to the slowly declining city downtown areas.

The developments of the Interstates in the United States has changed the way people travel, and how frequently, but they have also changed the structure of the existing and new towns, altered the way the population decides where to live, as well as where to work, and where to shop. Naturally, interstates have facilitated long distant movement across the country, they have increased the accessibility of areas otherwise isolated from the rest of the country and lightened the burden of certain high traffic areas inside cities. At the same time, the interstates have decreased the interest (and funding) of alternative modes of transportation, rail systems, busses, both to move inside and outside of cities.

The matter of the size of Highways and their impact on the landscape is also not marginal. If in some cases their insertion were seen as works of art on the geographic scale (giedon) and marvels of technological awe, in other cases, especially in cities, they were just seen as monstruous and overbearing the urban fabric.

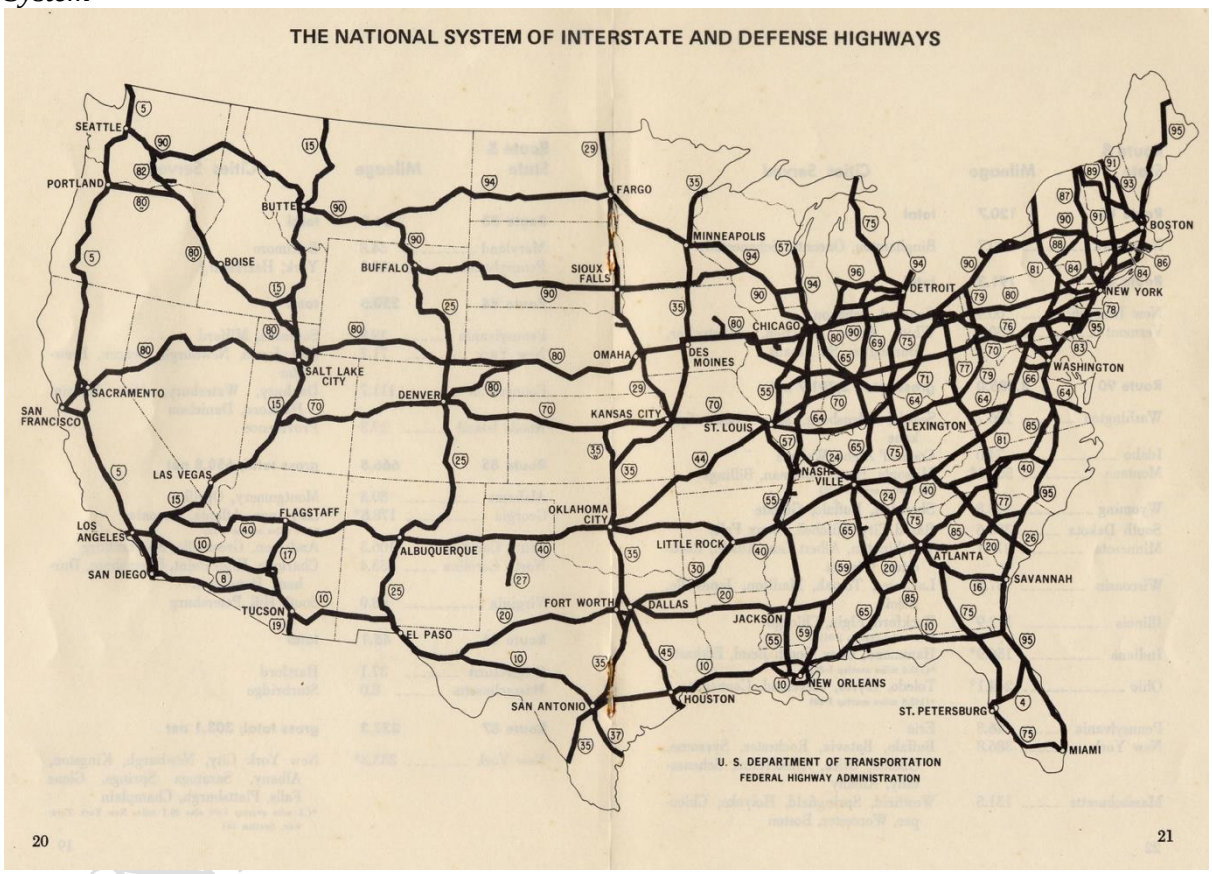
Although "the [Interstate] program imposed uniform, federally established design standards nationwide, to minimize conflicts and to produce a homogeneous flow with an emphasis on speed, safety, and efficiency as primary values[6]", these guidelines only took into consideration the portion of highways to be inserted in the natural landscape.

Only a few sociologists, like Lewis Mumford and Daniel P. Moynihan, predicted conflicts once the Interstates reached the cities. This resulted in

[4]US Census Bureau, "Census Bureau Estimates Show Average One-Way Travel Time to Work Rises to All-Time High," Census.gov, accessed July 21, 2023, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2021/one-way-travel-time-to-work-rises.html.
[5]Elizabeth Deakin, "Social Impacts of the Interstate Highway System," September 1, 2006, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/21c261vg.
[6]Deakin.

numerous freeway revolts in many of the major American cities, San Francisco, Boston, New Orleans, Memphis, Washington, Baltimore, Los Angeles, Sacramento, Phoenix and many other. The American City had slowly turned into a "Donut City[7]", defined as the place where "all the sugarcoated development at the outer edges [left] a hole in the core[8]", thus also predicting the future degradation of the city downtown areas.

Figure 1. *1947 Federal Works Agency planning map for the Interstate Highway System*



The interstate Highway program, along with other programs like the Urban

Renewal one caused increasing disapproval from the population as they favored the disaggregation of social and environmental ecosystems. Although moved by the idea that the Highway programs and the Urban Renewal ones would help local economies, relive traffic from congested streets and even assist with urban safety, the interstate highways were not the problem solvers many had hoped for.

[7]Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (San Diego New York London: Mariner Books, 1968).
[8]Mumford.

Methodology

This paper is part of a larger study being conducted on Lawrence Halprin through the writing of a PhD Thesis. This allowed a stratified knowledge and methodology that contributes to make transversal readings of Lawrence Halprin's work, the impact that these works have had during the years, even in circumstances of partial demolitions, like in the case of Denver's Skyline Park, and the meanings that these architectural projects still hold today. A large portion of this collection of knowledge has been achieved thanks to the extensive percentage of the research that has been made through archival material, first of all, at the Lawrence Halprin Archive held at the University of Pennsylvania. This research has been split into three parts, where the third is still taking place. This first portion, developed before the visit to the archive, included the understanding of the specific finding aid provided by the University of Pensylvania Archive, understanding what the collection was made up of, and how it was organized. It became evident right away that an annotation tool needed to be developed in order to keep track of the material to be consulted and used during all the phases of the research.

This phase translated itself in the form of an excel file where each document of interest was established, and each corresponding line of the finding aid was broken up into multiple items consisting of different types of information creating a column for each. Useful information that was sometimes missing from the finding aid was left blank in the hopes that during the consultations these gaps could be filled. At the same time, in order to accommodate more discursive information into the file, an online questionnaire was designed to allow the reception of different types of information, due to the diverse nature of the materials present in the archive, and that could help, during the third phase, to re-consult the materials viewed during the physical visits to the archive. This online module was designed in order for it to be completed for every item (or group of items) selected for consultation during the visit to the archive, where the basic information would already be known and the further details that only came up upon seeing the documents live, could be added later on.

The second phase happened during the physical visit to the archive. Diverse materials were consulted, each to get a better understanding of the architect and of the selected projects. Along with architectural drawings though, the consultation of newspaper and journal articles of the periods were found to be extremely helpful, not only to understand the construction difficulties, construction site slowdowns, political issues, but also protests, disgruntled members of the population, and generally the cultural background of each project. Photographs of the time (made by Lawrence Halprin itself or by members of his studio) were also helpful to visually understand interpersonal relationships, construction processes along with the contemporaneity of the time. This particular phase was not limited to the Architectural Archives of the Pennsylvania University but it was also extended to the Seattle City Archives, and the "Seattle Room" at the Seattle Public Library, where original materials about Freeway Park were consulted.

The third phase, that is still ongoing, includes the refinement of the material collected during archival visits and the beginning of the subsequent processing of these materials. Some of these (architectural drawings in particular), form the basis for a compositional study through the redrawing of the Freeway Park and Portland Environments projects. The rest of the materials, on the other hand, form the documentary basis for the restitution of active knowledge, of which the writing of this paper and the subsequent doctoral dissertation on Halprin will be a part of.

Findings/Discussion

Designing for the performance

The places Halprin designs inside the city, are not places of resistance, of monumental representation, but spaces that welcome people's interactions as a performance. In fact, the spaces are not hostile, they do not divide and separate but invite the observer to join in the action. This may seem almost counterintuitive, given that many of his commissioned works were part of political contexts of regeneration that often involved the demolition and displacement of large portions of communities. This then, makes Halprin's constructed works political gestures in themselves because they were paid by those political factions, fearful of the insurgent movements of the 1960s, hoping to rebuild parts of the city that were to be dedicated to a certain social class, to a certain way of living, that would be made "their own", authorial spaces that institutions were constructing for themselves. Halprin's work is thus twice as worthy, manages to enter the bourgeois imagination with its cultured references that included nature, the arts, poetics of architecture, even difficult to understand in some ways. But this does not imply that such works are elitist; his is not an architecture that excludes, but rather, it is designed in an open way, completed only once people participate in its conformation.

His designs for the Portland open spaces for example, were intended to serve as interactive stages for public events and “rituals” which actually took place. “Hippie Weddings” and “mystical events” were just some of the occurrences performed by the counterculture youth in Portland, confirming that Halprin’s intention of designing an open score actually became reality here. Despite such positive responses, contestations also emerged over the types of people that were utilizing these spaces. At this point a larger question over who had the right to use what public spaces sparked public interest and many journals, including the famous *Life* magazine, covered this story. Because of the growing tensions emerged from the “hippie” occupancy of the plaza, the Parks Commission actually prohibited any type of activity to occur inside the fountains. A few months later, an attempt was made by the city council to pass a curfew for all of Portlan’s parks, that was later ruled by a judge as unconstitutional. As a result, three hundred people showed up to a Portland City Council meeting in opposition on any further attempts by the city to limit public engagements with the city’s parks. Although in 1968, more important issues were being discussed and fought for in

other parts of the country, the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis, the student protests against the Vietnam War at Columbia University, Portland's political debates over who held the rights to use its public spaces and parks resonates with generation spirit. "Yet, as public space became the site of confrontation in many American cities, the Portland Development Commission reacted counteractively: it continued to build more plazas[9]". Just a few weeks after the August 1968's political clashes between protesters and the police in Chicago, a clay model for a new Portland Plaza, Forecourt Fountain, was revealed by Halprin and his associate Angela Danadjieva. Shortly before the new plaza's inaugurations, students occupied the Portland's South Park Blocks, after four students protesting the war were killed at Kent State University, Ohio. Once their permit expired, the police intervened to displace the crowd, causing fourteen students to be injured and hospitalized.

The Fountains at the new plaza were first tested on the day the U.S. House of Representatives passed the bill lowering the voting age to eighteen, two days later a private celebration for the Plaza's inauguration took place (Fig.2). A crowd of young people gathered to see the celebration facing stern-faced police, with the riots still fresh in everyone's mind, the tension was high. At this point Halpin takes the microphone to deliver a short speech offering the plaza as a "place of civic healing". Once the fountains were turned on, the crowd joyfully strode into the fountain and Halprin, fully clothed (blue jacket and red tie) joined them.

In his book Cities[10], Halprin presents design examples for the acceleration of collective events. His book offers samples of urban forms to demonstrate how people culturally similar or different can actually share the public spaces of cities. He realized that cities are made up of a system of "universal elements", seen as ceremonial opportunities, boulevards for processions and parades, and public spaces for assembly, often enriched with steps and platforms as stages with architectural backdrops, all concurring to enrich public life with a sense of theater in the streets. By focusing on the "unnatural" qualities of these urban elements, "Halprin considers their integrated or choreographed composition essential for a healthy urban ecosystem"[11]. In the revised version of *Cities*[12] Halprin includes an epilogue where some of his constructed works have been added: Ghirardelli Square, Nicolette Ave in Minneapolis, Embarcadero Plaza in San Francisco and the Portland's Plazas. This section serves as real life examples of Halprin's theories and ideas illustrated in the book, that had not been tested at the time of the first publishing. Each Project was chosen to underline specific design principles.

[9]Randy Gragg, Janice Ross, and John Beardsley, *Where the Revolution Began: Lawrence Halprin and Anna Halprin and the Reinvention of Public Space* (Washington, DC: Spacemaker Press, 2009). 9

[10]Lawrence Halprin, *Cities* (Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1963).

[11]Alison Bick Hirsch, *City Choreographer: Lawrence Halprin in Urban Renewal America* (Minneapolis, MN: Univ of Minnesota Pr, 2014). 68

[12]Lawrence Halprin, *Cities: Revised Edition*, Revised edition (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1972). 221-236

Figure 2. *Lawrence Halprin, 1966-8-31, architect Lawrence Halprin speaks Urban renewal ceremony. Source: Portland City Archives*

Besides individuating the "universal elements" present in the city, in his book Cities, Halprin also underlines the importance of movement through them and within the city as a system, in order for the observer to experience these elements as a process of movement through a sequence of environments defined not only by their materiality and form, but by the relationship each one creates with the previous and with the next one. According to Halprin, the open spaces of the city should provide guidance and indication on how to move within the city itself, as well as becoming the stage on which public life can take place and be performed: "the qualities of moving up and down on ramps and steps, of passing under arches and through buildings, of narrowing and widening of spaces, of long and closed views, of stopping and starting are qualities which make a vital urban experience for the walker and his mobile point of view"[13].

[13]Halprin, *Cities*, 1963. 197

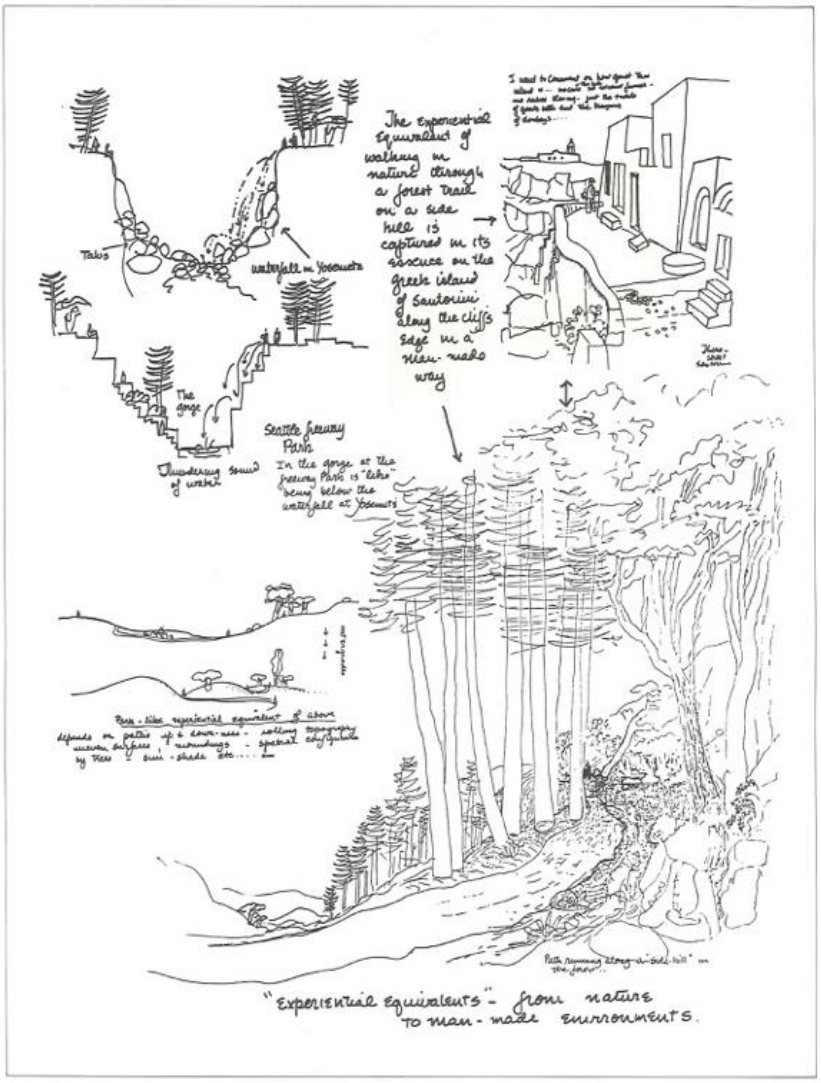
Designing with nature in mind: "experiential equivalence"

In the 1960s, a shift form artists and writers started to occur, resulting in universalism and metanarratives to be traded in favor of pluralism and difference (John Cage is a great example of this). This can't really be said about Halprin and his work as it remained focused on the search for the most absolute form of truth, faithfully affirming his Modernist background. He believed that these truths could only be found in the "natural forces of creation", and humans' origins, their native rhythms and biophysical relationship to earth. He then proceeds forward, considering Nature "pure process made visible"[14], and the basis for the archetypal precedent of natural process as "the biological and ecological origins of things". As humans share their origins with nature, "he thus turns to geologic forms and the processes that shape them as humans' shared aesthetic foundation"[15]. For this reason, Halprin belied that his designs would retain meaning transversally, even to a culturally diverse public, universally attracting interaction. Halprin underlines the importance for every human to come into frequent contact with the "elements of the natural environment". Even if one might think that these "elements of the natural environment" cannot be frequently encountered in the city.[16]

He uses a "vocabulary of forms derived from biological forces meant to inspire basic human sensory and behavioral response"[17] to reinforce the concept of "experiential equivalence" (Fig.3). He describes this concept as a way to achieve the same stimuli one would experience in nature or in what Halprin called "wilderness", within the limits of the urban environment: "The idea that design intention is to provide a kind of experience which is equivalent to & similar to that of nature & therefore taps deep seated human needs & desires… to accomplish this the focus we design need not be 'Natural' but the essence & thus the experience of it should be … caves, waterfalls, shafts of light, enclosures, exits & entrys, feelings of exhilaration & even danger can be designed to evoke these feelings – without copying the exact forms"[18]. It is clear then, that Halprin does not try to imitate the forms of nature but transforms them into compositions of man-made shapes to create an artificial landscape. Understanding that the natural environment is never static, these shapes and compositions resemble natural processes such as stratification, erosion, the presence and movement of water, affirming that for him "forms follow process", unlike the Modernist belief where "form follows function".

[14]Lawrence Halprin, *The RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment*, First Edition (New York: George Braziller, 1970). 26
[15]Hirsch, *City Choreographer*. 118
[16]Halprin, *Cities*, 1963. 11
[17]Hirsch, *City Choreographer*. 119
[18]Lawrence Halprin, *Sketchbooks of Lawrence Halprin* (Tokyo: Intl Specialized Book Services, 1986). 30-35

Figure 3. *"Experimental Equivalents", Lawrence Halprin, Sketchbooks of Lawrence Halprin (Tokyo: Intl Specialized Book Services, 1986). 31*



The movement of water is of particular interest for Halprin, who almost obsessively uses his notebooks to study and document ways in which water moves, creates sounds and prompts sensorial responses, in the most extreme environments, like waterfalls and seashores, but also in the more quiet and intimate environments. All his water features and fountains are a direct demonstration of how these drawings have affected his constructed works, all representative of water's variable natures and the collaborations on the chorographical aspects of his design, affirming that "even in a city, the sound and sights of water stir the most elemental and basic roots of our human natures"[19].

While contributing the extensive talks on architectural ecology at the time, Halprin served as somewhat of a fulcrum as many of his designs actually came to be built, making a direct impact on the city he was called to intervene in. He also

[19]Halprin, *Cities*, 1963. 134

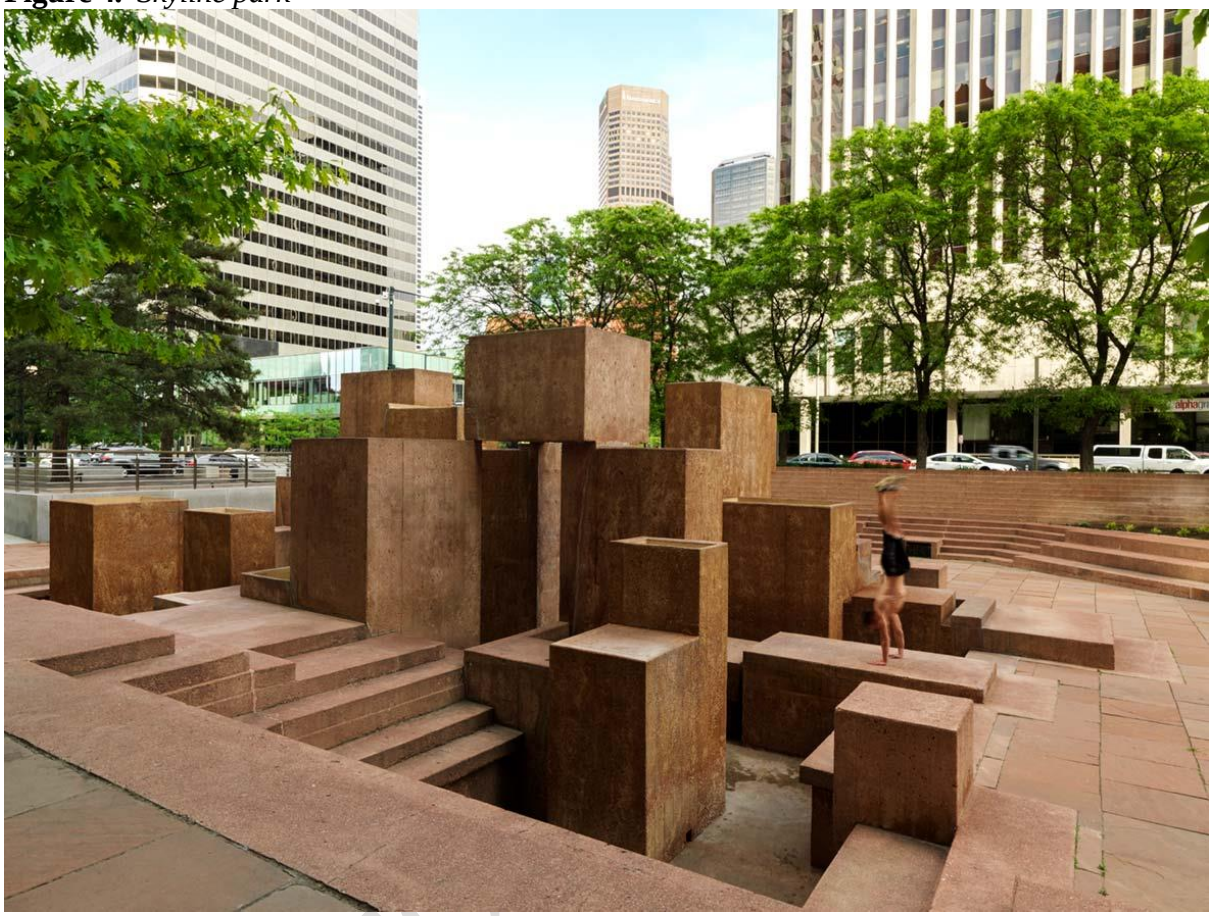
introduced an element of innovation to the discourse as his references to nature, mostly metaphorical, were not alluding to a passive, pastoral character of nature, but rather its powerful force. It is important to mention that his use of nature almost always remains a purely aesthetic matter, "only rarely do his urban spaces actually have an ecologically performative function; the stormwater retention and controlled release of Skyline Park in downtown Denver is one of the few exceptions".[20]

At the early stages of Denver's urban renewal surveys, the city was hit by a destructive natural disaster, "on June 16, 1965, the Platte River overran its banks in the worst flood in the area's 100 year history. Much of the proposed Skyline Urban Renewal area was effected. The event opened the doors for federal funding, and created more favorable atmosphere for public approval of the program"[21]. Initial designs for the area started soon after and in 1966, the firm of Baume, Polivnick and Hatami was selected to start preparing preliminary design concepts for the Skyline area masterplan. It was at this time that the three-block long linear park idea was thought of and it was also quickly accepted by DURA (Denver Urban Renewal Authority). Denver's main attraction, the Daniels and Fisher Tower, a replica of St. Mark's Bell Tower in Piazza San Marco, Venice, was to remain the focal point of the park but, instead of a square block park, Skyline Park was to be a half-block deep, linear park, running along Arapahoe from 15th Street to 18th Street. Once published in 1970, joined by Floyd Tanaka, Hatami's *Urban Design and Development Study*, contained suggestions for the entire Skyline area urban design but also standards and criteria implementations. The plan imagined the park with formal tree alignments, a three block long reflective pond, to follow the classic, City Beautiful design traditions of other Denver parks.

[20]Hirsch, *City Choreographer*. 270

[21]Paul J. Foster and Barbara Gibson, "Denvers' Skyline Park: A History," 2001. 6

Figure 4. *Skyline park*



Source: The Cultural Landscape Foundation

In the same year the Halprin firm was awarded the commission of the park area, indicating the Board's wish to steer away from the suggested Hatami/Tanaka design. With this selection, it was clear that the future of Denver's park was to resemble a different type of evocative image, one that would draw inspiration from nature but that would also encourage participation form the population as the park was to be the first constructed portion of the whole urban renewal area. For the design of this park, Halprin wished to create something very specific to the city Denver, in fact, drawing inspiration from its very own landscape. After a visit to the surrounding landscape, specifically the Red Rocks Park, Halprin was inspired by its "great amphitheater", finding it very exciting. Because he found the rock formations and their color stones to be deeply impressive, he decided to incorporate these aspects of the Denver Landscape into the new Skyline Park.

After studying the design recommendations, Halprin and his team found some limitations in the way the site was conceptualized. First of all, "building a park atop a parking structure would severely limit the loads they could impose, and height of existing and future buildings would cast undesirable shadows on the park"[22]. The presence of the parking structure presented an additional problem in

[22]Foster and Gibson. 21

terms of circulation as there would have been many instances where vehicular elements such as streets and parking ramps would interfere with the pedestrian use of the area. In order to resolve this issue Halprin proposed different solutions in order to redirect traffic away from this area, all proposals that were unfortunately turned down by DURA. In August 1970 the overall concept of the park was finalized, in would consist of three different parks, one for each block, characterized by different themes and detailing, different design elements and water features; "the park became a stylized version of an arroyo, an erosive formation native to the southwest, including Colorado, resulting mainly from excessive rainfall"[23]. It was also important to create an adequate buffer against noise, dust and the pollution of the streets. This was achieved by designing concrete planters to be placed on the edges that would contain berm and soil for a number of different vegetation. The concrete planters were detailed by slightly battering the board forms, that, along with their slightly pink coloration, as the dominant feature reoccurring in the entire park (Fig.4). But the planters were not the only concrete element detailed in this way, the framework also included steps, benches, trash containers and even the light fixtures. Between the three blocks, Halprin envisioned a variety of minor spaces, seating areas, and a walkway system connecting the park to other parts of the Urban Renewal program. This way, a large variety of environments would be proposed, in order to satisfy the very diversified types of users identified by Halprin and his team at the beginning of the design process.

Conclusion

In a cultural context that seemed to promote separation and isolation between different parts of established cities, Lawrence Halprin, with small or large commissions in Portland, San Francisco, Minneapolis, Denver, attempted (and in many ways succeeded) to create spaces where human contact was not only desirable but was actually needed in order to complete his works of architecture. At the end of his long career, Halprin's theories were mostly tested in the real world and it is not by chance that in many cases, his blend of nature, theater and choreography, and urbanism, set the stage for major new public spaces. The general unfortunate outcomes of many of the Interstate highway programs and the urban renewal regeneration efforts of the time allowed, by the late 1960s a growing distrust, for the authority of many municipalities, by not only those people that were displaced from their homes and communities, but it extended to the general urban public. Halprin's approach to designing public places, but also his heavily deliberate and recognizable forms, like a delicate foam of blocks that spreads across the country, represented a sort of counteraction, "he mitigated the degradation of public life by attempting to reintegrate the scale, rhythm, and phenomena of the natural world and the inherited or historic city to counterbalance

[23]Alison B Hirsch, "The Fate of Lawrence Halprin's Public Spaces: Three Case Studies" (Historic Preservation, University of Pennsylvania, 2005). 46

the "disclimax" conditions of urban renewal America[24]". With the acceptance of the new elements that characterized the American city, change, movement and flux, he was able to read the city as much more than a special problem that could be solved with staged master plans that flatted and oversimplified the issues of the modern American city. Instead, he proposed an alternative route of action, one of spatiotemporal processes and interactions between people and people, between places and places and between people and places.

It is not by chance that many of Halprin's designs welcomed the general rebellious spirits of the 1960s and 1970s becoming the backdrop for riots, manifestations, political speeches, as was his hope to provide infrastructure to allow such collective events and aggressive assertations of public life[25].

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