

Citizen-Building and *Place* Making in the Design of Cities:

Accelerating the Search for Harmony Between an Architecture of Global Consumership and an Urbanism of 'Public' Family

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, which draws from my current research on back-to-the-city movements in America, I suggest a direct correlation between a predominant emphasis on values of self-advancement, individual rights, and mass individual consumption (consumership) and a parallel *underdevelopment* of values focused on family and civic responsibility (citizenship). I define **consumership** as a way of thinking and living, broadly guided by three interconnected perspectives: an overarching emphasis on material relationships, a paramount concern for maximum efficiency in human institutions, and a view that our environment is a commodity. I define citizenship as a unique quality of **community** gained from exercising our human capacity to care, share, and trust beyond our immediate ties of kinship, friendship, and ethnicity; i.e., a quality of caring, sharing, and trusting that honors nature's rhythms and serves as a source of empowerment for individuals seeking to build common opportunities.

Exploring a more inclusive concept of family—*public* family—with the aim of encouraging a more balanced exercise of our **consumership/citizenship** powers, I propose, in essence, a framework of conceptual keys aimed at harmonizing the whole of our design/planning task—conceptual building blocks, if you will, that would serve to bind the ongoing production of “urban *spaces* for consumership” in a more harmonious balance with “urban *places* for citizenship.”

OLD ROOTS, NEW CRISIS

In searching for new roots of balance, I share the general view that America's cities are in crisis. However, my scholarship and practice suggest that this crisis is not one of the more commonly cited three “*ds*”—*de*industrialization, *deterioration*, or *drug*-trafficking (all symptomatic of something deeper); rather, the crisis seems more one of an unsustainable idealism, i.e., the lack, presently, of a clear conceptual frame for fostering critical debate and discussion about the relevance of environmental quality to matters of security, opportunity, and civility.¹ More pointedly, the lack of an inspiring orientational frame has resulted in our failing to collectively decide in some just and informed way as citizens

what we desire our cities to be beyond havens for limitless commerce and competition.

To the extent that a crisis of orientation *is* primary, our central task is not one of problem solving, nor is it a question of reordering priorities; rather, our overriding challenge becomes one of collectively examining and redefining fundamental aims and goals. Speaking metaphorically, the deeper root of our present urban crisis may not be anchored so much in a soil of “drugs, dis-investment, and deterioration” as in a soil of “confusion” about where the city and its citizens now fit within shifting global markets and clashing cultural frames. In short, what is typically perceived as an *urban* crisis, may well be more accurately described as the *urban face* of a deeper “cultural/spiritual crisis”—i.e., a crisis arising fundamentally from a growing loss of faith in collective human capacity; significantly, a growing loss of faith in the power of human collaboration correlates directly with the belief that a commitment to values of community and interdependency negatively affects individual goal achievement. The extent to which a loss of faith in the relevance of community to our personal goals and capabilities underlies our present urban crisis, is the extent to which some manner of rupture has occurred and continues to occur in our cultural/spiritual bonding. I am suggesting that we are obligated to address this potentially widening rupture by initiating a search for new ties of social obligation and collective self-reliance—“new roots” that would serve to nurture grander partnerships between such conventional dichotomies as lay / professional, consumer / entrepreneur, private interest / public service, etc; more specific to our discussion, there is need to establish new roots for achieving greater harmony between the accelerating production and control of physical space and the more illusive, often incidental crafting of human “place.”

NEW ROOTS, NEW POSSIBILITIES

As the ACSA “call for papers” suggests, any initiatives directed toward achieving grander levels of harmony between the production of space and the crafting of *place* in major urban locales will necessarily be pursued within an

array of accelerating shifts in geographies of power. Lest we forget, our quests for harmony will also be pursued across the humandscape of a deeper cultural/spiritual crisis, i.e., across a shifting matrix of widening spiritual gulfs and contentious cultural divides. Recognizing that such widening gulfs, contentious divides and shifting ecologies now serve to significantly define the urban condition, I am suggesting that a new paradigm of genuinely innovative architecture/urban design practices could provide an harmonious medium for navigation — partly by giving spatial expression to an urbanism of ‘public family,’ but also by making clearer the following fundamental relationships. First, *power* — as in “geographies of power” — is, at heart, a collective reservoir of human capacity; specifically, a *capacity to act* on human choices (apart from the intentions and/or consequences of such acts and choices). Second, the recognition that human power is essentially a reservoir of capacity sharpens our capability for perceiving “ecologies of power” for what they primarily are, the affecting distribution of ‘human acts’ on the earth of life.

*Human
Power:*

an individual or collective reservoir of human capacity; specifically, a capacity to create and to exploit “opportunity” as needed to act on human choices; a capacity often exercised through actions focused on control and manipulation; however, can be exercised, just as well, through actions focused on mutual enlightenment and “education”

Education:

*the cumulative sum of one’s lifelong process of self-discovery; i.e., the process of “getting to know one’s self” as one having the capacity—
and, thus, the obligation—to continually (re)examine and (re)shape one’s environment*

Opportunity:

*a “resource” that serves to facilitate the achievement of an end result;
a resource (often present in material form, but present just as often as an idea or as a relationship) which one might inherit—through “privilege”/“luck”/“chance”/ etc.; more importantly, a resource which one might create or help to create through “education” and the exercise of “human power”*

Em(power)ment:

*to be inherently (in)vested with “human power”
[Not to be confused, itself, with the directed exercise of such power; i.e., each of us, in our own unique way, must become increasingly aware of this grand inheritance in order to fully tap its potentially energizing capacity.]*

*Human
Freedom:*

*an inherent capacity to choose;
specifically, one’s inherent human capacity to envision other possibilities and make personal choices*

[Not a gift or a commodity granted by others; not to be confused, either, with its exercise—i.e., one’s daily exercise of this inherent capacity requires the presence of “opportunity” and some elemental exercise of “power.”]

Reflecting further on “ecologies of power”—i.e., on the affecting distribution of human acts on the earth of life—and on our professional commitment to achieving environmental quality at urban-metropolitan scales, it becomes immediately central to consider whether there might be a common *source* from which “acts on the earth of life” might arise. Specifically, might there exist a common source whose essential nature transcends the particularities of any specific cultural milieu? I have come to understand that such a common source might indeed exist and that this source is perhaps best defined as “that unique reservoir of capacity inherent in being human.” Thus, as we set about exploring relationships between environmental quality and prevailing ecologies of power, I would suggest that it is the quality of these “unique reservoir(s) of capacity” — these “unique wellsprings of empowerment,” themselves — which deserve our greater attention. Stated another way, I am suggesting that it is the collective quality of individual wellsprings—i.e., individual wellsprings of capacity exercised in concert—that must be more fully explored if we are to better understand the deeper aspirations underlying “ecologies of power.” Integral to our discussion, I have come to define these unique wellsprings as being the essence of human spirituality.

Spiritual(i)ty:

*[Latin spiritus — “the force of life”]
... not to be confused with the institutional church or with organized religion ...*

that which binds individual human life to all of Creation; i.e., an inner-wellspring of capacity derived from one’s uniquely personal tie to the sustaining energies of Creation;

broadly speaking,

*the
source
of*

*one’s personal (i)dentify, one’s self-esteem and
one’s ind(i)vidual creative powers within the larger un(i)verse;*

specifically,

*the
source*

*of
one’s capacity for individual initiative,*

i.e.,

*the
source
of*

one’s inherent capacity to be self-val(i)dating, self-mot(i)vating, and self-d(i)recting;

*in sum,
 the
 source
 of
 one's pride of being,
 one's capacity for generosity, and
 one's deep sense of connectedness
 to a greater whole,"*
*ie.,
 the inspirational founta(t)nhed
 for all that guides and directs one's individual life—
 one's dreams, one's aspirations, one's ideals /
 one's myths, ones's central beliefs, one's fears;
 the deeper root that sustains one's
 ethical-moral orientation,
 the
 source
 of
 one's capacity for
 (self-) education,
 self-transformation,
 and
 (transcendent)
 regeneration . . .*

Creation:
*that
 boundless
 wellspring
 of all
 existence and capacity;
 specifically,
 the
 source
 of all
 (re)generative / (re)cycling
 processes*

Life:
*that
 energy of Creation
 made manifest as
 in/organic-spiritual
 matter
 and
 recycled through processes of
 growth, change, and transformation;
 "human" life is characterized, as well,
 by its unique quality of "spirituality"
 ie., by its uniquely inherent capacity
 to guide and direct its own
 growth/change/transformation
 processes*

URBAN PLACE MAKING

. . . life, cities, and the "spirit" of place

The idea of *place* making—ie., the idea of crafting physical space in such a way that it resonates with the sustaining qualities of family and human spirituality—serves as an organizing theme and conceptual barometer throughout this essay. In this regard, my ongoing practice and scholarship

within central city environments suggest that the challenge of *place* making in late-20th-century urban America is really not so much about a "search for meaning" through participatory designing—ie., citizen participation, user involvement, grassroots enfranchisement—or through new forms of social action, per se, as it is about articulating models for a more balanced exercise of our consumership/citizenship powers. Toward this end, it is useful to understand that architecture/urban design practices are essentially about the human creation of artifactual shelter—ie, shelter that serves as a medium for adapting human life to its own growth/change/transformation processes. To the extent that such processes are self-guided through what can be defined as human spirituality, it follows that all design practices are fundamentally a quest to enrich the quality of spiritual bonding. It follows, as well, that the quality of our architecture/urban design practices cannot be understood apart from the quality of our spiritual well-being as a profession. Thus, depending on the quality of our collective spirituality — our collective "spiritual literacy," if you will—our architecture/urban design practices can be as facilitating of socially and ecologically destructive "acts on the earth of life" as they can be of acts that sustain grander levels of civility and just order.

URBAN "SPACE" (MAKING)

. . . Life, Cities, and the "American Dream"

From their earliest origins, models for urban design and urban (re)development in America have been inextricably bound with the "American Dream." Specifically, such models have developed within a framework of two primary belief systems:

(1)

. . . the "right" of **self-governance**

(2)

the "right" of **individual enterprise** . . .

Over time, these belief systems have come to be defined as political responsibility and financial independence, respectively, and have evolved as competing poles of orientation for urban design/urban development activities. Specifically, since the end of World War II, the competing rewards, demands, and responsibilities of this emerging polarity can be described as follows:

On the one side,
 there exists a view of the
 city as primarily a
 "Human Community"
 (. . . of *citizens*—"many hands" — making a city)

Citizenship

On the other side,
a view persists of the
city as primarily an
“Economic Commodity”
(. . . of *consumers* exploiting opportunities
within a marketplace)

Consumership

Most contemporary urban development policies reflect some attempt to blend the demands and rewards of this dual belief system. Even so, within a maturing market society, the latter (consumership) orientation prevails; this orientation is primarily focused on land use policies designed to encourage commerce, competition, and individual consumption—urban *spaces for consumership*, if you will. As a principal result, most policy discussions about American cities today are generally limited to questions of tax base, marketable skills, and the ability of individual residents to pay (or, not pay) for city services.

Exploring the earliest roots of *consumership*--in particular, its formative theories of consumerism--one notes that it defines a broad cultural movement designed to address human demands for a sustaining material base. Specifically, consumership was conceived as the vehicle for developing a sustaining material base of opportunity in America; i.e., a base of opportunity upon which every citizen could advance — through relationships of fair and open competition—toward a meaningful measure of financial integrity. Consumership has now evolved into a preoccupation with its material/commercial means, i.e., with its “ever-advancing” technologies and with our human capacity to acquire and to consume to no end; relatively little attention is being given to the relationship of this material vehicle to our larger human/spiritual measure(s) of value. Moreover, the “right of individual enterprise” is presently being advanced through a kind of “win/lose” relationship of competition—an “others must lose in order for me to win” relationship--where financial *independence* is the goal; where money is the measure of value; and where “winners” are defined as “survivors of the fittest.”

Reviewing the earliest roots of *citizenship*, one notes that this dimension of the “American dream” evolved from a cultural milieu of unique social/political expectations; a milieu of ideas and ideals wherein one’s individual measure of value was defined primarily by one’s commitment to sustain “family” — i.e., by the quality of one’s commitment to address the broadest “common good” of caring/sharing/trusting relationships that one could responsibly sustain on a daily basis. This fundamentally noble human commitment has now evolved into an increasing preoccupation with the “self” of self-governance. More specifically, the “right of self-governance” has now evolved from a commitment to be caring, to share, and to be trustworthy into a preoccupation with the (individual) “rights of ‘private’ citizens” — i.e., the “right” of privacy; the “right” to bear arms; the “freedom to be left alone,” etc; presently, less and less attention is being

given to the need for a continual defining of one’s (individual) responsibilities within a highly dynamic market democracy.

URBAN “SPACE” MAKING

. . . *the Present Harvest*

An increasing imbalance in resources and attention being focused on the material possibilities of consumership is clearly evident in the contemporary “American dream” and consequently in:

What

the American city is fast becoming . . .
. . . the “**object**” of mass media campaigns,
designed to market the city as a vast
convention center,
cultural oasis,
and weekend playground
for tourists and conventioners

What

the American city is fast becoming . . .
. . . the “**object**” of public-private financial partnerships
aimed at expanding the city’s **tax**-base
through **revitalized** central business districts
and **recycled** neglected waterfront properties;
municipal incentives deemed necessary to “attract”
private investment capital to such ventures
typically include massive infrastructure
subsidies, unilateral tax concessions,
and the highly *discriminate*
exercise of ‘eminent
domain’ powers

What

the American city is fast becoming . . .
. . . a budding showcase for fortress architecture;
an architecture reflecting a perception that “urban decline”
is principally a problem of physical deterioration
and the endangering *physical* presence of a
mis-placed “underclass”

[While *physically*, “new,” the social roots of such fortress-like designs remain *conceptually*, “old”—i.e., self-contained, inward-focused, auto-oriented, enclaves designed to “**withstand a riot**”]

What

the American city is fast becoming . . .
. . . an **academic laboratory** for transplanted
urban experts and urban managers who tout *problem-*
solving skills and speak increasingly of a
“ghetto culture,” of “marginal consumers,”
and of an ill-breeding “underclass”
when describing the city’s
indigenous human
resources

What

the American city is fast becoming . . .
. . . the urban face of a highly-problematic “**caste system**” based on “*marketable* skills” and (formal) academic credentials; a system whose “caste” base is presently comprised of a growing mass of permanently unemployed, distinguishable as much by their race, gender, and age, as by their lack of formal educational skills

*What**the American city is fast becoming . . .*

. . . a haven for a broadly-organized, highly-competitive **drug-trafficking** enterprise; a "life-destroying" enterprise that continues to attract recruits and to place massive strains on all primary cultural institutions of the city--particularly, those institutions having most direct impact on public safety, public education, and the care and well-being of "family"

*What**the American city is fast becoming . . .*

. . . a **Medical Service/ Medical Research** Center for regional hospital care, advanced clinical research, and formal medical school training; these *profit*-oriented medical institutions are continually hard-pressed to maintain a balance between requirements for 'fiscal competitiveness' and compassionate human service

*What**the American city is fast becoming . . .*

. . . a **Service / Information Center** for electronic banking, international finance, and global telecommunications; such "centers"--often, packaged in partnership with City government--have financed expansive developments of housing, entertainment, and office-hotel-retail construction consciously designed to recruit "service" managers and skilled "service" technicians; in pursuit of their objectives, such centers have served to fuel an unprecedented back-to-the-city movement of young, upwardly mobile professionals; the construction of such centers--typically, built in a fortress architecture style--has also served to fuel the clear beginnings of a "**double-donut**" pattern of economic and racial segregation

REVISITING THE "AMERICAN DREAM"*. . . a point of departure*

My own personal introduction to the subject of urban *place* making occurred some years ago in the midst of my practice in inner city Detroit. I was invited to assist in the evaluation of a municipal proposal intended to introduce several dozen units of prefabricated housing systems into an intensely urban (high-density, racially and ethnically-mixed) neighborhood. Accompanied by sophisticated charts of lifecycle cost analyses citing ease of maintenance and other positive benefit-to-cost ratios, municipal architects argued that the proposal offered a unique opportunity for this community of residents to dramatically increase its housing stock. A rather lengthy architectural presentation followed, promising compatible site planning, sensitivity to public and private space, a reasonable diversity of materials, facades, and sections, and the latest in prefabrication construction technology. Upon completion of the architects' presentation, the community leadership caucused and returned to share its decision. Expressing genuine appreciation for the professional expertise and advice that had been offered, this grassroots body had nonetheless decided that it would "pass up" (ie., not

accept) the city's offer. The logic of this decision was hardly understood by any of us professionals at the time, but the reason given by this richly diverse slice of residents was quite succinct—"We are building *families*, not houses."

Recognizing that family is one of the more enduring and ideal social models we still have, this Detroit experience was a formative moment in my professional journey of self-discovery. I was reminded that it was due time to revisit the guiding principles and assumptions of my earliest education in the academy. In short, this formative moment marked the beginning of an humble search for fundamentals—a search wherein I am continually seeking to look outward and inward at once.

I have recently come to understand that my search for fundamentals is perhaps best viewed as the challenge to move conceptually beyond the conventional practice of "giving quality to form" toward the grander ideal of giving form to **quality**. Broadly speaking, the challenge of "giving form to quality" can be seen, itself, as a more encompassing challenge--ie., the challenge of crafting a framework of performance criteria that would guide efforts to address two conceptual keys in urban *place* making: 1) the critical need for resident citizens and design professionals to gain a view of environmental quality as an 'environment of relationships' far richer than its physical aggregation and 2) the critical need for resident citizens and design professionals to continually enlarge their concept of *family*—particularly, as relates to the potential and well-being of "public family."

*Public
Family:*

*a "community" of relationships
capable of engaging persons who are neither kin, nor friend,
as something other than strangers; a unique spiritual/cultural bonding
rooted in the concept of everyone advancing—
of leaving no one behind*

Community:

*an omnipresent bonding energy of Creation
through which each of us grows to understand that
(our) individual well-being is impossible,
apart from the well-being of others,
and of nature;*

*not, the community;**not, a community;*

*not so much a "physical collection of people,"
as a primary medium for one's lifelong development
as a human being within the larger universe*

Lest we forget,

*we do not make (ie., "create") community; rather,
we open ourselves up to this unique bonding energy
through human relationships of caring/ sharing/ trusting;
"community," in a very real sense, continually (re)makes us
as we make "places"*

Nature:

*a systemic web of infinitely complex
and interdependent eco-systems (of energy)
inherently sustaining of "life"—
in all of its forms*

Culture:

(an)
 evolving / enabling
 reservoir
 of
 "v a l u e s"
 through which one makes continuing choices
 about one's own intended self-development
 and about one's
 broader commitment to the well-being of
 nature and the well-being of others;
 metaphorically-speaking,

(a)
 "filtering lens"
 (of relationships and resources)
 through which one perceives
 and thinks about his/her
 surrounding reality
 and his/her status
 within

Environment:

the boundless sum of Creation's primary energy fields—
 community / nature / spirituality / human cultural systems, etc;
 a dynamic and encompassing whole within which "life" is
 sustained . . . or
 diminished (and within which each of us must, first, imagine
 and,
 then, seek to create 'places' for 21st century living)

Space:

a human conception of environment;
 specifically, a way of perceiving and comprehending "environ-
 ment"
 such that its totality can be selectively engaged and organized
 as a resource for human activity

Designed

Space:

the deliberate and selective
 organization of "space" as a manipulable
 resource for human activity

URBAN PLACE MAKING

. . . within a 'Democracy' of the Market

Lest we forget, performance guides enfolded within the "American dream" yet provide the conceptual context for our urban designing task. In essence, these guides require that all efforts to shape cities in America be pursued within the prevailing cultural/spiritual milieu of a market-driven, self-governing democracy. In seeking to achieve an harmonious consumership/citizenship balance within this distinctive market democracy, I have come to understand that any conceptual frame for urban place making is required to address at least three primary spheres of well-being: 1) "personal and social" well-being--a standing human need for individual and collective self-reliance, 2) "environmental" well-being--a standing human need to participate actively in the creation of dwelling networks through human and material ties that sustain a sense of grounding, a sense of identity, and a sense of belonging, and 3) "political and economic"

well-being--a standing human need for financial integrity and civic self-reliance.

The place making guide that shortly follows is comprised of performance criteria designed to address all three primary building blocks of well-being. In general, these criteria are intended to facilitate the mutual crafting of "opportunity." More specifically, these criteria are intended as guides for creating broadly diverse places of opportunity within which lay/professionals are encouraged to care, share, and trust, through partnerships of creative collaboration.

URBAN PLACE MAKING

. . . within the 'Market' of a Democracy

In seeking to develop explicit performance criteria for urban place making that would achieve a more balanced exercise of our consumership/citizenship powers, it is important to acknowledge the 'market' in market democracies. Such acknowledgement is crucial primarily because of how market values serve to shape understandings of quality. In the main, such shaping is accomplished through processes that serve to define professional self-conceptions. As part of this conditioning process, all professions are generally expected to pursue their crafts as neutral tools within market cultures and to adopt a self-concept which is purely skill-oriented. Consistent with this expectation, our real and active work in professional offices and in schools of architecture is typically organized so as to advance individual skills of specialization. Indeed, a skill-oriented, self-promoting norm lies at the pedagogical heart of contemporary architectural education and practice. My experiences in Detroit, particularly, suggest that a longstanding selfish-centered promotion of the "egoistic self" is having significant impact on the essential nature and quality of professional self-conceptions. In the case of professional designers, I would argue that such an orientation has had the effect of bloating our own sense of importance and, thus, of severely limiting our capacity to acknowledge the primacy of family and spiritual bonding in the rebuilding and transformation of built environments. I would argue further that prevailing models for architectural education and training tend to *undervalue* the importance of the spiritual dimension in our professional lives and development. Consequently, we learn to *undervalue* its importance in the lives of our professional clients and others. In short, the narrowness of our own professional self-conception blinds us to the value of "spirituality" as an antidote for professional arrogance; a narrow professional self-conception also blinds us to the importance of spirituality as an essential building block in the potential transformation of American cities.

Performance
 Criteria
 for
 Urban Place making:

S p a c e
is to be
crafted
so as to
provide
mutual
opportunities
for
Empowerment
ie.,
for
developing/exercising
“Individual and Collective Self-Reliance”

Such
 space
 would
 provide
 building
 blocks
 fundamental to
Environmental
well-being

ie.,
building blocks
best developed and sustained through
‘face-to-face’ participation
in the creation of

Such
 space
 would
 provide
 building
 blocks
 fundamental to
Personal and Social
well-being

Neighborhood	Home	Family
one’s	one’s	one’s
<i>physical</i>	<i>Spiritual</i>	<i>human</i>
connection	connection	connection
and	and	and
sense of ground	sense of identity	sense of belonging

ie.,
building blocks best
strengthened through expanded awareness
of one’s inherent human capacity for
“power-making”:

through
designed
activities
for
(self-)
Education
and a
mutual
broadening of
professional/client
Knowledge
through
creative
sharings
of
Intellect
 and
Reasoning

through
unconditional
respect
for
individual
Spirituality
as required to
mutually broaden
and tap
professional/client
Intuition
through
creative
sharings
of
Instinct
 and
Faith

S p a c e
is to be
crafted
so as to
provide
mutual
opportunities
for
Enterprise
ie.,
for
developing
“Civic Self-Reliance and Financial Integrity”

Such
 space
 would
 provide
 building
 blocks
 fundamental to
Political and Economic
well-being

ie.,
building blocks
best developed and sustained through

S p a c e
is to be
crafted
so as to
provide
mutual
opportunities
for
Dwelling
ie.,
for
achieving
“Physical and Psychological Security”

Governance	and	Commerce
Stewardship		Entrepreneurship
H u m a n	and other	R e s o u r c e s
<i>guided by a</i>		<i>guided by a</i>
Pursuit of Truth,		Pursuit of Profit,
Compassion,		Management,
and		and
justice		labor

URBAN PLACE MAKING

... searching for a Sustainable Urbanity

Thinking about cities metaphorically and ideally as building blocks of collective opportunity for human empowerment, dwelling, and enterprise, the essential character and potential grandness of the 21st century city begins to unfold. Stated another way, it is quite likely that the ultimate challenge of “sustainable” design/planning practices in 21st-century urban America will be the challenge of crafting a deeper commitment to the ideal of “urbanity”—ie., to the collective making of urban environments in ways that ensure security, opportunity, and civility.

Crafting a sustaining urbanity in American cities will likely remain a difficult and painful task, however, because not only has the ideal of “civitas” been stunted, but our longstanding preoccupation with the endless capacity to remake ourselves (the central promise of consumerism) has left us with no “urb”—no “stones” of tradition and permanence upon which to build. Given such a legacy, we are obligated to invent models of urban designing that would encourage a crafting of public and private space around qualities of ‘ritual’ and ‘timelessness.’

Serving on the one hand to provide an harmonious antidote to our present passion for entrepreneurial immediacy, the crafting of public and private space around qualities of ritual and timelessness would also most certainly involve our youth.

URBAN PLACE (MAKING)

... a point of Present Closure

Through this essay, I have sought to sketch out a conceptual frame for addressing the whole of our “place” making task as educators and practitioners. I suggest that the essence of this whole is the challenge of “giving form to **quality**.” As part of this broader journey, I am further suggesting that place making guides designed to address the challenge of

“giving form to quality” would invariably serve, as well, as guides for facilitating what is perhaps our most distinguishing professional obligation—ie., the obligation to tap and bind collective *aspirations* of human spirituality in a grander spatial dance with the programmatic *requirements* of human physicality.

For design educators and practitioners committed to the ideal of crafting balanced expressions of physicality and spirituality, it is important that we critically assess the status of our own ethics, education, vision, and leadership, in concert with our own planned innovations in design and technology. Such a continuing personal/professional assessment is fundamental because our commitment to a *place* making paradigm for American cities is necessarily a commitment to a quest for urbanity through a spirit of truth-seeking; it is not a commitment, per se, to a new method of research or to a new design style. In sum, a commitment to the crafting of urban “places” is a commitment to a lifelong journey of partnership-building and self-transformation. The essence of such a journey is expressed below by one of my former students:

I cannot see design services being anything other than a commodity until we stop seeing our environment as a commodity. A designer is one contributor among many to this collective human endeavor we call the built environment. One designer does not change the profession, the design process, or the environment. One designer can only change the way s/he views the world. If an ethical foundation can solidify that view into a vision, then there is a beginning.²

NOTES

¹ A wide range of references make note of the fact that an environment offering protection, opportunity, and civility was the recurring promise of urban settlements

² *Notes by Eric Geiser taken from a forthcoming text, New Roots for Architecture, by the author.*