

UC Berkeley

Places

Title

Patterns of Association: Juxtaposition and Analogues

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7026s4fr>

Journal

Places, 4(2)

ISSN

0731-0455

Author

Myer, John

Publication Date

1987-07-01

Peer reviewed

Patterns of Association: Juxtaposition and Analogues

John Myer

Some years ago, Gary Hack, Bob Slattery, and I undertook teaching an introductory studio in environmental design. At the time it was a new endeavor for us. Early in the preparatory work we struggled with how we and students alike might model our thought. What bridged both our physical architectural models and the verbal/numerical/diagrammatic models of planning? We had set out to approach the design of environment where physical/spatial order was addressed simultaneously with institutional order. What model would work continuously to map our growing understanding of the design in both fields?

In time the idea surfaced that analogues would work equally powerfully across both orders and in many others as well. In

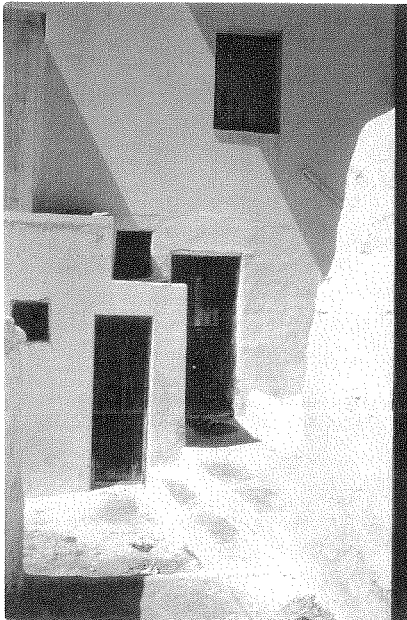
nondesignated and designed areas analogues answered the question “What is it?” by transforming the question into “What is it like?” It also occurred to us that not only were analogues a powerful tool for design—one we had long used naturally in our work—but also one that we used regularly in our daily lives. Was this then not a powerful way to undertake exchange with our beginning students? Could they not (as they had already in their lives) project an understanding of a place through analogues?

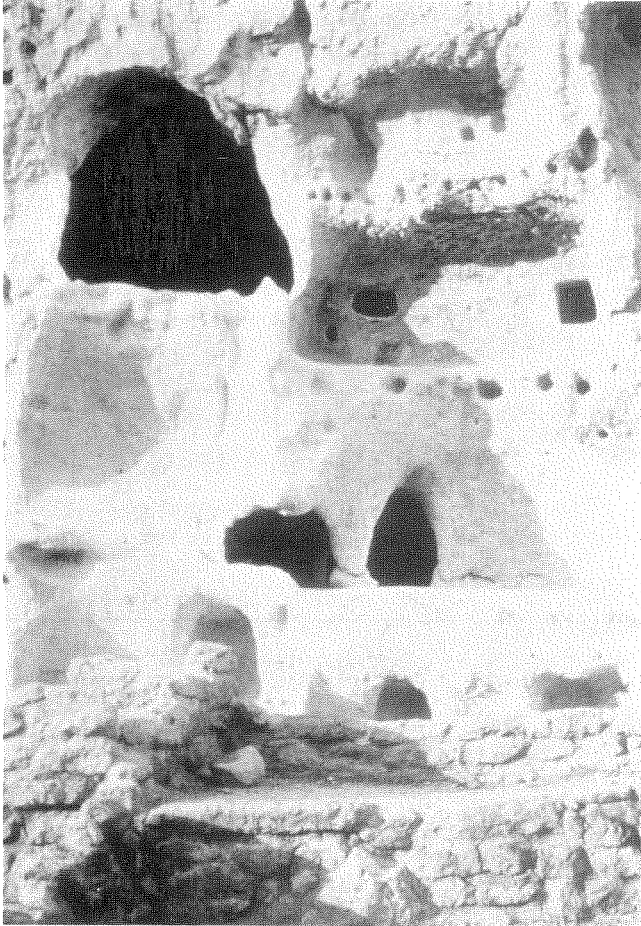
We then proceeded to prepare a slide sequence in which we put forward a range of visual analogues. The first year we ordered them randomly. Over a period of time, as we began to discern differences between types of analogues, we undertook to diagram and discuss

the different types. In the process, we discovered that it was necessary to deal with a broader condition, that of juxtaposition of elements, since only some of the pairs of images were similar and others were different or opposite.

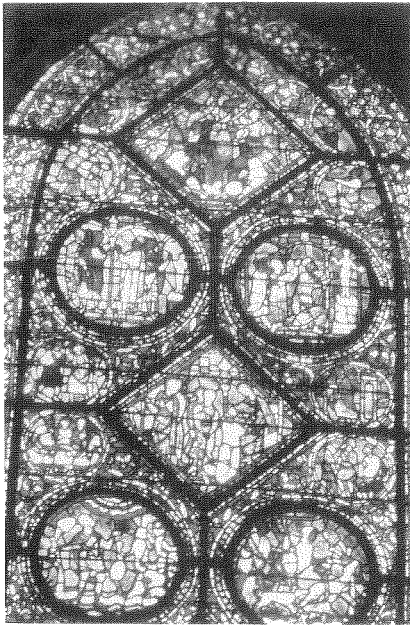
These first three pairs of images are simply examples of analogues used to clarify or heighten understanding in design work, the sort that we as designers would use among ourselves or in exchange with clients.

The ledge on the right picks up in the Mykonos image the spatial envelope, direction of light, and slope of the ground and allows us to see those attributes in a heightened way.





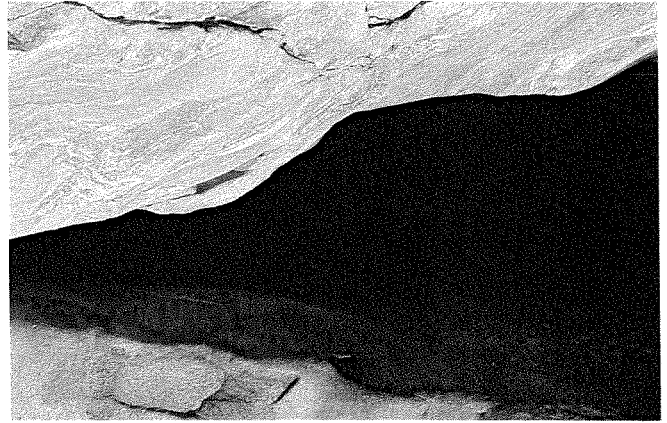
For me and others, the image on the right heightens a sense of the bony rims of the openings in the image on the left.



Did the architectural screen on the left come from the natural screen on the right? May not such found natural references be associative beginnings for new architectural screens?

In time we felt the need to differentiate kinds of analogues and other juxtapositions that were beginning to occur in our minds. This led to the need for a construct to share with each other and the students. In our model an element is understood in a context that is shared with the observer. This understanding is stable enough when that context remains unchanged, but when a new element is brought in juxtaposition with the first, the understanding of both the first element and its context will go through a partial shift. They will seem to have a somewhat altered identity.

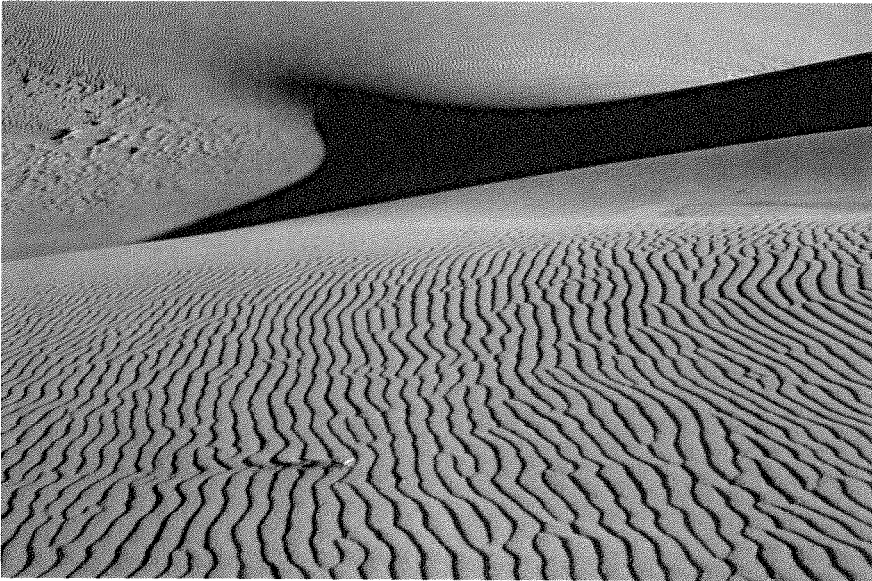
Bringing together different elements is basic in our work as designers. Their selection and aggregation is a crucial step in place-making. Not only do we experience a shifting sense of an element's identity as it is brought next to another, we also understand it as similar to or different from the other. Since elements are normally composed of multiple attributes, it often happens that two elements will have some like attributes and some different ones. If the relationship is largely one of likeness, then the elements seem to come closer together. If it is largely one of difference, they seem to be driven apart.



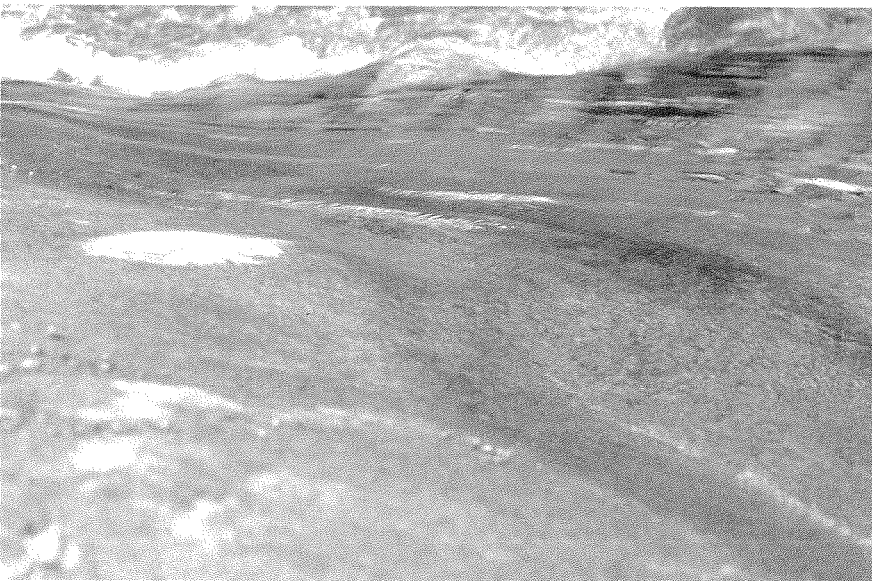
For example, the size of these two caves is very different—one a few hundred feet long, the other a few feet—yet they are almost the same to us as secure habitable concavities. Projected as slides on the wall side by side, one can merge them and they seem almost one continuous image.

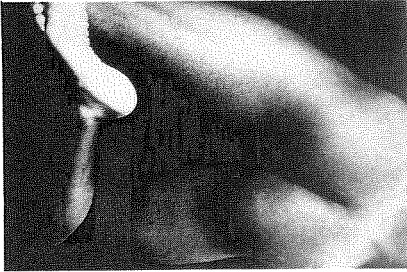


These two images seem uneasy next to each other. The one on the left suggests habitable space not only in one's imagination but in reality, with lichen, beetles, falling leaves. The one on the right has seemingly similar horizontal strata, but where on the left we found habitable void, here we find it filled with sand. There is in its juxtaposition with the left image a sense of filled voids, of being smothered. The two in this way seem at root opposite.

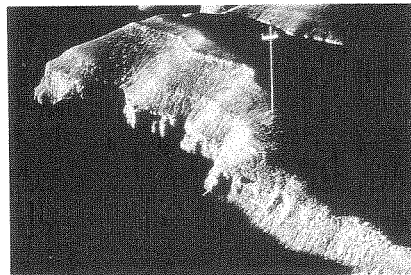


Many of the attributes in these two images are opposites: hot/cool, dry/wet, granular/continuous. Yet the dynamic, fluid process that put the two materials in place is essential in the nature of each. The opposites pull the images apart; the similarities draw them together. Thus, the mind is forced to consider likeness and difference alternatively. The two understandings do not want to become one, do not integrate into one common meaning. Instead there is a kind of uneasy partnership in the mind: now together, alike; now apart, opposite.

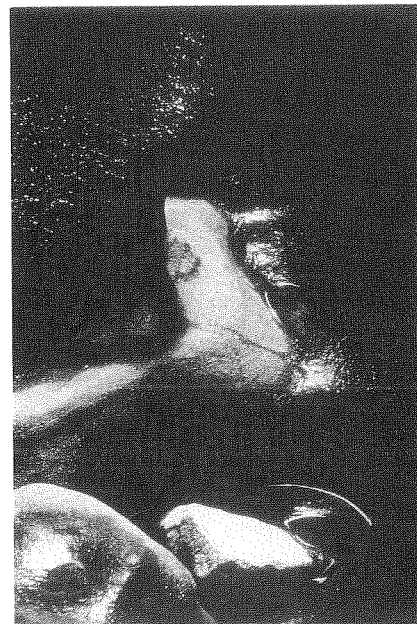




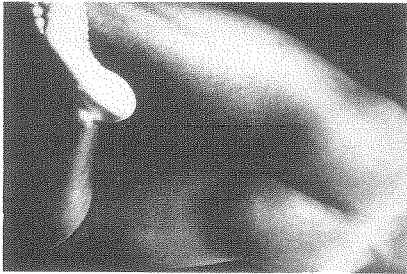
We have said that in the process of juxtaposition our perception of a form changes as it is placed next to another form. Next to the nude form on the left we will place three different images and discuss how our focus shifts to a different understanding each time.



Many people doubt the suggestion that we read landscape forms in our own bodies and feel them as some part of ourselves. But when we juxtapose these two forms and ask whether the hypodermic needle is in the right place, most people concur. Clearly the association here between ridges and body is with the left thigh and buttock.



After scrutinizing this juxtaposition for a moment, people make a couple of different associations. The first is between the L-shaped form of the rock in the right image and the bent right leg in the left. A second and more important association is the lit rounded tops of the rocks with the rounded buttocks and the mid-portion of the nude's body. This is a dramatic shift from focus on the left thigh and buttock in the first juxtaposition.



The connections in this juxtaposition are more elusive than in the previous two. Some associate the sandy areas between the rocks with the tissue between the pelvic bones; others associate the smooth surface of the rocks with that of the nude's surface. A smaller number of others think that possibly the body is leaking or bleeding and associate that with the drainage occurring in the right image. Even if the associations are diverse, no one so far seems to feel that the connection between the images is slight.

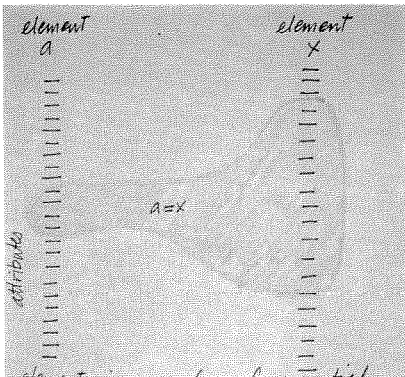
Although we see several different and nonexclusive associations in each pair of these three juxtapositions, our focus on territory in the nude form is quite different in each: long muscular vitality in the first; rounded, middleness in the second; and

the fluids, viscera, and pelvic bones in the third.

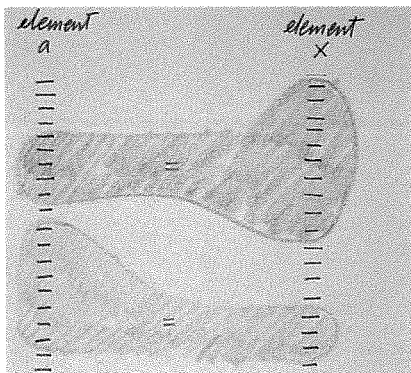
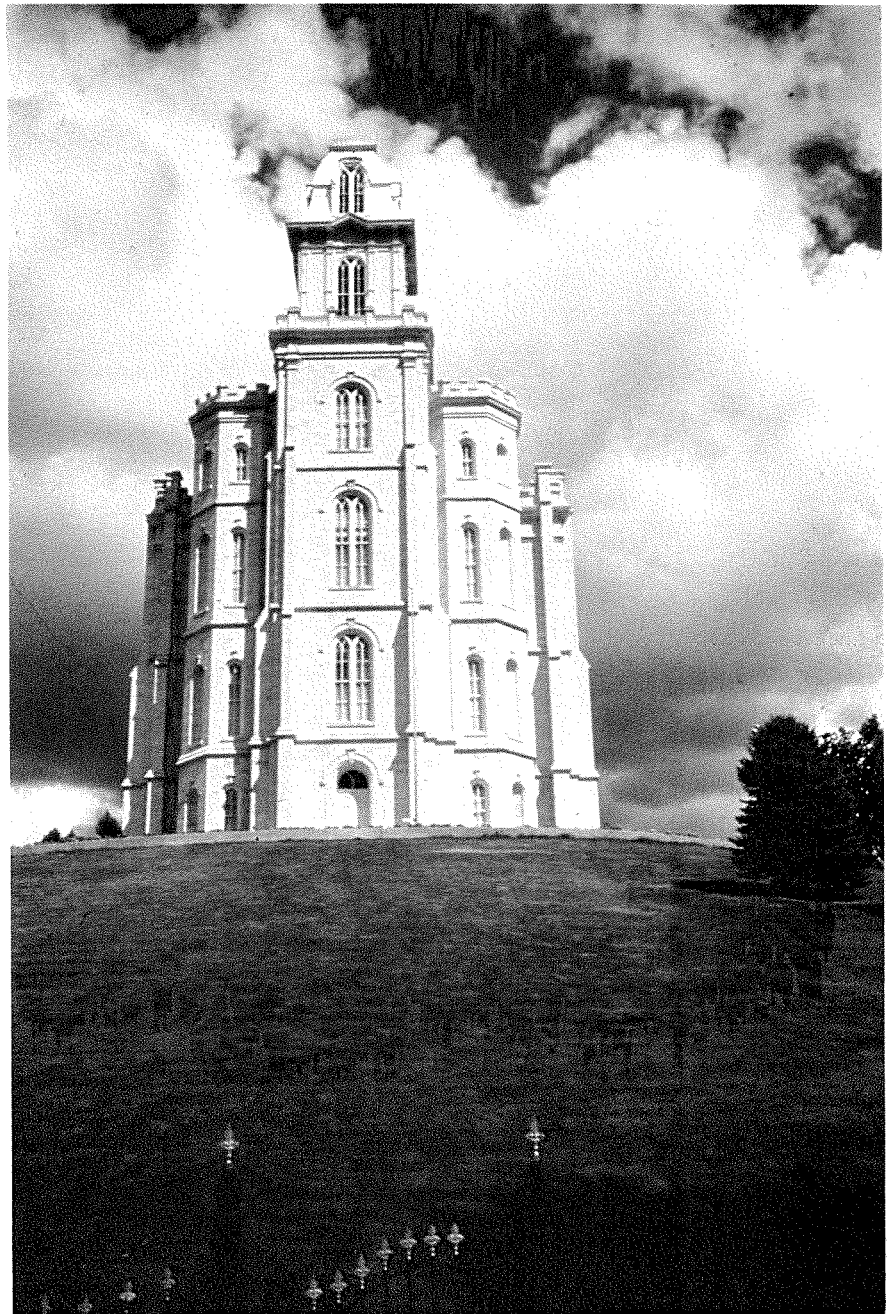
When we bring the foregoing construct of shifts in understanding that occur by multiple juxtapositions to place-making, we become more aware of the complexity of design and the exploring through juxtaposition that we must do if we are to be clear about meaning and place.

In the juxtaposition of analogy, we use the similarity of one element to another to illustrate our understanding of the first. It is through likeness that I am able to tell another designer or client or student that an element being considered in a work at hand is like something that already exists. We also use analogy when we attempt to bring to the surface our own half-understood sense of something.

We ask ourselves, "What is it like?" The answer is often an aggregation of attributes: "It is close to *x* but has a bit of *y* and some of *z* in it." While both uses of analogy are common in the work of the designers of places, the second one is central to designing itself. It is how we surface and deal with thoughts that at first are principally intuitive, thoughts not readily described by words or numbers.



Usually the first analogues we come upon as we begin a search are partial analogues. When element x , which has a plurality of pink attributes, is brought next to element a , our attention focuses on the pinkness in a .



The most frequently occurring partial analogue might be described as a reciprocal partial analogue. Here x makes us more aware of a 's pinkness while at the same time a makes us more aware of x 's yellowness. We can become confused as to which is doing what to what. But this needs to be overcome so that if we mean to focus on the pink in a , we do not at the same time and in equal focus consider its yellowness

or the yellowness of x . To do this we must locate another x , say x_1 , which does not pick up on a 's yellow at all. Or we may also be able to screen out the yellow association by selective screening of the image itself or by accompanying words that guide the mind toward pink and away from yellow.



This pair of images is another example of reciprocal partial analogy. Without words we see the archetypal massing of the crowning smaller mass set upon a greater one in both the natural mass and the architectural one. It is a strong and direct analogue.

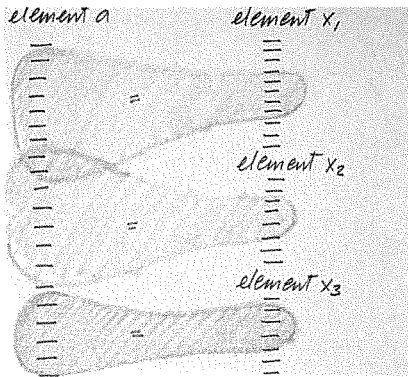
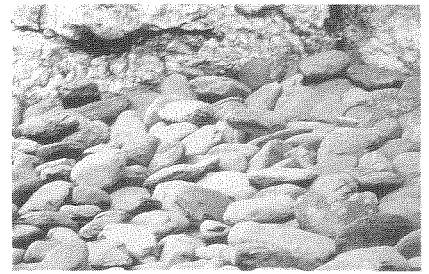
As we consider the two images further, a second and reciprocal analogy arises having to do with apparent accessibility for habitation. At first one would think that the architecture would be more habitable than the mountaintop. But as our eyes move over the forms, we closely see that there is no path leading to the building from the spiked gate. The lawn seems bleak and untraveled, even uncomfortable to inhabit. The height and verticality of the building added to the rising ground of the hill yield an aristocratic image; perhaps whoever is within would open the door only at their

own wish, not to the uninvited knock of any visitor. There is a good chance that the door would not open for us. We feel to a degree put off, excluded.

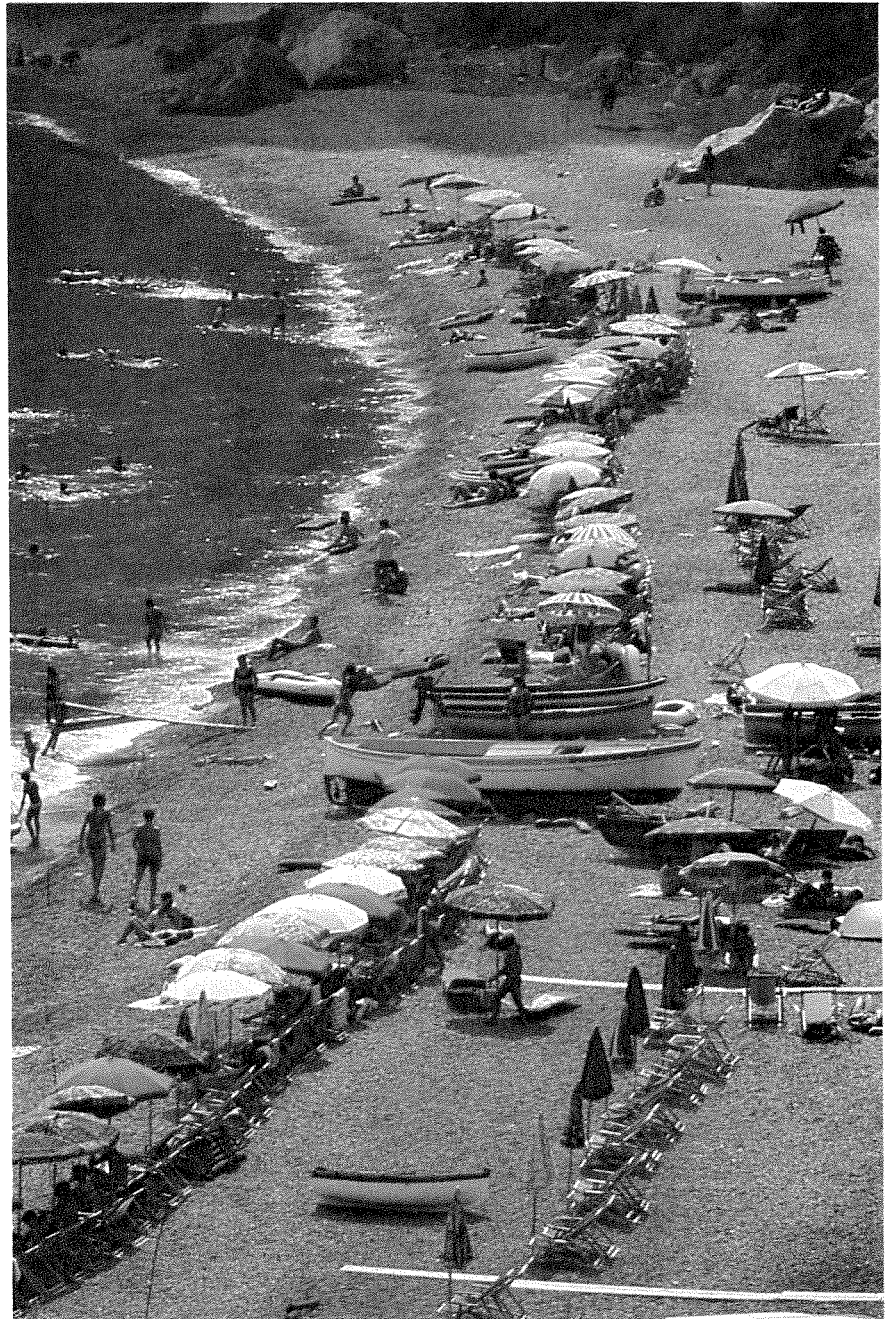
Crossing the talus to the rocky tower would probably be difficult, but there is no sense of intended exclusion. In fact, as people discuss the tower, they become enthusiastic about the possibility of occupying this nook, climbing that chimney, or sitting in a high seat to survey the world. In short, the mountaintop seems to offer comfortable habitability more readily than the building, and only rarely does someone decide the reverse.

Thus, while the mountaintop brings our mind to bear on the mass of the building we also deal with how we might happily inhabit the mountaintop. Confusion arises about which image was brought next to which for what purpose.

If we wish to focus on mass, then we need to find ways to keep habitability from confronting us in a reciprocal manner. We need to find another massing analogue that does not introduce another strong message.

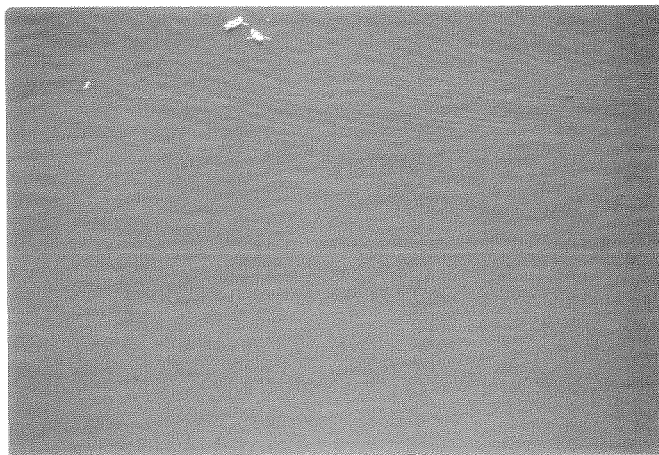


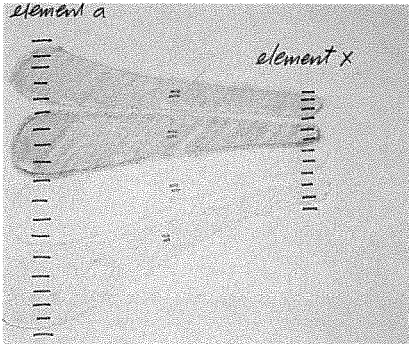
With a series of partial analogues x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n used additively, we may describe a as an aggregation of attributes. For example, I will describe a beach in Positano, Italy, using a set of its key aspects. The beach is stony and hard to walk on in bare feet. That is why boards are laid down and the chairs and umbrellas are so close to the water.





The beach confronts a sparkling sea with mountainous edges. Unlike American beaches, where one instinctively seeks a position as far away from other picnic gear and people as possible, here habitation is deliberately contiguous. This is a place of maximum social contact, a place to meet. It might even be thought of as a courting beach. And if one seeks a more solitary beach picnic, one can hire a boat or two and captain and sail up the coast. While there is some of the beach I have not described, in a short time, thought a set of partial analogues, I have been able to sketch a picture. It is interesting that three of the four analogues were drawn from other places but were sufficiently close to the mark to serve the description. In the same way, we as designers can project an intended place that still is in our minds.





Another kind of analogue is the epitome, which gathers together the key attributes or a key theme pervading the whole. This pair of images presents an epitomizing analogue Bob Slattery and I used for designing the Worcester/Hampshire College student residences in Amherst, Massachusetts, the first project of this size we had undertaken. The program called for too many student rooms, and the budget was too low. We feared residences would be like a low-cost housing project—stillborn, not alive.



And then a countervailing thematic reference occurred to both of us at the same time: a hut in the Pemigewasset Wilderness, which spoke of elemental shelter, Bachelard's hut in the storm. If the sense of the essential shelter of the hut and its form consequences could cut through the limits of

the budget or the belittling sense of being one among too many, we felt it would be all right in an architectural way. In the end, the design results from using this analogue were much better than our earlier tries on the drawing board.



In conclusion, it is worth noting that the associations discussed here can be found in varied relationships in the places that we inhabit and love. Not only will we find similarities between things, but there will be degrees of difference, even true oppositeness. Like people, elements of place have complex relationships with things around them. Despite great differences, which may even be repelling, they may share some deep quality of being, and they may be brightened, lifted up, by some important presence in another. At times associations will be additive; at other times a theme will run through a place, as the sense of the hut in the storm is meant to pervade the Worcester/Hampshire student housing. A formula for good place-making might be the following: for places to be rich and alive, they should include the juxtaposed forms of associative relationships discussed here. In this way we can relate them to our own lives—our bodies, emotions, minds.