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Why start with buildings and work outward? For one, buildings are difficult to avoid these days. Even in the wilderness, just when we think we have completely escaped the presence of human intervention, frequently some structure appears on the scene. That isn't necessarily bad, however, but the ubiquity of building suggests that we do look not only at structures in isolation. Being a child of the city, buildings were a natural starting point for my formulating this issue of *Places*: starting from the constructed zone and moving outward.

It would seem that a matrix of the possible relations between buildings and nature or buildings and buildings would provide an appropriate structure for looking at designed places. I should note at the outset that several authors did not produce their contributions, in spite of countless promises. As a result, we are short of a seamless gradation from the natural to the completely built environment, but sufficient pieces are in place to create a superstructure.

As words in isolation express only semantic potential, the single structure understood alone offers only a fragment of its potential significance. Power and meaning both derive from context and in certain configurations both can be effectively neutralized, diminished or enhanced. Context, a term of literary origin, suggests that meaning, and we might add experiential effect, are as much the product of situation as intention. We have all had experiences where

the sum total was far greater than the banality of the constituent architectural fragments. Other structures, however brilliant in themselves, are pulled down by new structures around them or diminished by a poor understanding of architectural or social setting. But one need not labor the point as it is well understood and acknowledged, if frequently disregarded. In this issue, then, we will focus on that notion of context and configuration seeing buildings in settings rather than as distinct structures.

In the opening essay Michael Auping discusses the work of Hamish Fulton and explains why this artist walks *from* buildings and includes no structures in the photographs he uses to document his walks. My own essay concerns the first level of site disturbance, in this case by means of subtraction. Two essays, by John Brinckerhoff Jackson and Frances Butler, investigate the front yard generically and specifically. Following these are the topics more specifically architectural: David Bell examines Thomas Jefferson's works at the University of Virginia; Errol Barron analyzes the Louisiana plantation Oak Alley; Lars Lerup guides us up the Bishop's stairs in Gerona; while Betsy Cann and Catherine Howett question the relationship between the built and the "natural" in the city. Life on the bus that moves through rows of buildings appears in the sketches of Anthony Dubovsky. And as an epilogue, Michael Dundas and Sarah Bodine trade recollections of growing up

on the urban street or the rural towpath.

What these essays offer us collectively are commentaries on the structure, structures, and the life in the zone between aspects of the built world and those of the natural.

Since the time for assembling this issue was severely limited, I suggested to the authors that they send me the *precis* of the article they would write if they had had more time. Condense the idea and don't worry about a full explication, was the request. On the other hand, I requested a "moral" to the story. The gentle reader should thus approach these articles as if they were a cross between the article that would have been and an environmental *Aesop's Fable*. Hopefully, the stories these essays tell us apply far beyond the particular example discussed, and have a resonance "around" many more buildings or places than those specifically cited.



Marc Treib