

that is possible, and downgrading and minimizing their social and their economic part in city life is the most mischievous and destructive idea in orthodox city planning. That it is so often done in the name of vaporous fantasies about city child care is as bitter as irony can get.

## 5

### The uses of neighborhood parks

Conventionally, neighborhood parks or parklike open spaces are considered boons conferred on the deprived populations of cities. Let us turn this thought around, and consider city parks deprived places that need the boon of life and appreciation conferred on *them*. This is more nearly in accord with reality, for people do confer use on parks and make them successes—or else withhold use and doom parks to rejection and failure.

Parks are volatile places. They tend to run to extremes of popularity and unpopularity. Their behavior is far from simple. They can be delightful features of city districts, and economic assets to their surroundings as well, but pitifully few are. They can grow more beloved and valuable with the years, but pitifully few show this staying power. For every Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia, or Rockefeller Plaza or Washington Square in New York, or Boston Common, or their loved equivalents in other cities, there are dozens of dispirited city vacuums called parks,

eaten around with decay, little used, unloved. As a woman in Indiana said when asked if she liked the town square, "Nobody there but dirty old men who spit tobacco juice and try to look up your skirt."

In orthodox city planning, neighborhood open spaces are venerated in an amazingly uncritical fashion, much as savages venerate magical fetishes.\* Ask a houser how his planned neighborhood improves on the old city and he will cite, as a self-evident virtue, More Open Space. Ask a zoner about the improvements in progressive codes and he will cite, again as a self-evident virtue, their incentives toward leaving More Open Space. Walk with a planner through a dispirited neighborhood and though it be already scabby with deserted parks and tired landscaping festooned with old Kleenex, he will envision a future of More Open Space.

More Open Space for what? For muggings? For bleak vacuums between buildings? Or for ordinary people to use and enjoy? But people do not use city open space just because it is there and because city planners or designers wish they would.

In certain specifics of its behavior, every city park is a case unto itself and defies generalizations. Moreover, large parks such as Fairmount Park in Philadelphia, Central Park and Bronx Park and Prospect Park in New York, Forest Park in St. Louis, Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, Grant Park in Chicago—and even smaller Boston Common—differ much within themselves from part to part, and they also receive differing influences from the different parts of their cities which they touch. Some of the factors in the behavior of large metropolitan parks are too complex to deal with in the first part of this book; they will be discussed later, in Chapter Fourteen, *The Curse of Border Vacuums*.

Nevertheless, even though it is misleading to consider any two city parks actual or potential duplicates of one another, or to believe that generalizations can thoroughly explain all the peculiarities of any single park, it is possible to generalize about a few

\* E.g., "Mr. Moses conceded that some new housing might be 'ugly, regimented, institutional, identical, conformed, faceless.' But he suggested that such housing could be surrounded with parks"—from a *New York Times* story in January 1961.

basic principles that deeply affect virtually all neighborhood parks. Moreover, understanding these principles helps somewhat in understanding influences working on city parks of all kinds—from little outdoor lobbies which serve as enlargements of the street, to large parks with major metropolitan attractions like zoos, lakes, woods, museums.

The reason neighborhood parks reveal certain general principles about park behavior more clearly than specialized parks do is precisely that neighborhood parks are the most generalized form of city park that we possess. They are typically intended for general bread-and-butter use as local public yards—whether the locality is predominately a working place, predominately a residential place, or a thoroughgoing mixture. Most city squares fall into this category of generalized public-yard use; so does most project land; and so does much city parkland that takes advantage of natural features like river banks or hilltops.

The first necessity in understanding how cities and their parks influence each other is to jettison confusion between real uses and mythical uses—for example, the science-fiction nonsense that parks are "the lungs of the city." It takes about three acres of woods to absorb as much carbon dioxide as four people exude in breathing, cooking and heating. The oceans of air circulating about us, not parks, keep cities from suffocating.\*

Nor is more air let into the city by a given acreage of greenery

\* Los Angeles, which needs lung help more than any other American city, also happens to have more open space than any other large city; its smog is partly owing to local eccentricities of circulation in the ocean of air, but also partly to the city's very scatter and amplitude of open space itself. The scatter requires tremendous automobile travel and this in turn contributes almost two-thirds of the chemicals to the city's smog stew. Of the thousands tons of air-polluting chemicals released each day by Los Angeles' three million registered vehicles, about 600 tons are hydrocarbons, which may be largely eliminated eventually by requiring exhaust after-burners on cars. But about 400 tons are oxides of nitrogen, and, as this is written, research has not even been started on devices for reducing this component of exhausts. The air and open land paradox, and it is obviously not a temporary paradox, is this: in modern cities generous scatters of open space promote air pollution instead of combating it. This was an effect Ebenezer Howard could hardly have foreseen. But foresight is no longer required; only hindsight.

than by an equivalent acreage of streets. Subtracting streets and adding their square footage to parks or project malls is irrelevant to the quantities of fresh air a city receives. Air knows nothing of grass fetishes and fails to pick and choose for itself in accordance with them.

It is necessary too, in understanding park behavior, to junk the false reassurance that parks are real estate stabilizers or community anchors. Parks are not automatically anything, and least of all are these volatile elements stabilizers of values or of their neighborhoods and districts.

Philadelphia affords almost a controlled experiment on this point. When Penn laid out the city, he placed at its center the square now occupied by City Hall, and at equal distances from this center he placed four residential squares. What has become of these four, all the same age, the same size, the same original use, and as nearly the same in presumed advantages of location as they could be made?

Their fates are wildly different.

The best known of Penn's four squares is Rittenhouse Square, a beloved, successful, much-used park, one of Philadelphia's greatest assets today, the center of a fashionable neighborhood—indeed, the only old neighborhood in Philadelphia which is spontaneously rehabilitating its edges and extending its real estate values.

The second of Penn's little parks is Franklin Square, the city's Skid Row park where the homeless, the unemployed and the people of indigent leisure gather amid the adjacent flophouses, cheap hotels, missions, second-hand clothing stores, reading and writing lobbies, pawnshops, employment agencies, tattoo parlors, burlesque houses and eateries. This park and its users are both seedy, but it is not a dangerous or crime park. Nevertheless, it has hardly worked as an anchor to real estate values or to social stability. Its neighborhood is scheduled for large-scale clearance.

The third is Washington Square, the center of an area that was at one time the heart of downtown, but is now specialized as a massive office center—insurance companies, publishing, advertising. Several decades ago Washington Square became Philadelphia's pervert park, to the point where it was shunned by office

lunchers and was an unmanageable vice and crime problem to park workers and police. In the mid-1950's it was torn up, closed for more than a year, and redesigned. In the process its users were dispersed, which was the intent. Today it gets brief and desultory use, lying mostly empty except at lunchtime on fine days. Washington Square's district, like Franklin Square's, has failed at spontaneously maintaining its values, let alone raising them. Beyond the rim of offices, it is today designated for large-scale urban renewal.

The fourth of Penn's squares has been whittled to a small traffic island, Logan Circle, in Benjamin Franklin Boulevard, an example of City Beautiful planning. The circle is adorned with a great soaring fountain and beautifully maintained planting. Although it is discouraging to reach on foot, and is mainly an elegant amenity for those speeding by, it gets a trickle of population on fine days. The district immediately adjoining the monumental cultural center of which it is a part decayed terribly and has already been slum-cleared and converted to Radiant City.

The varying fates of these squares—especially the three that remain squares—illustrate the volatile behavior that is characteristic of city parks. These squares also happen to illustrate much about basic principles of park behavior, and I shall return to them and their lessons soon.

The fickle behavior of parks and their neighborhoods can be extreme. One of the most charming and individual small parks to be found in any American city, the Plaza in Los Angeles, ringed with immense magnolia trees, a lovely place of shade and history is today incongruously encircled on three sides with abandoned ghost buildings and with squalor so miserable the sink of it rolls over the sidewalks. (Off the fourth side is a Mexican tourist bazaar, doing fine.) Madison Park in Boston, the residential grassy square of a row-house neighborhood, a park precisely of the kind that is popping into many of today's sophisticated redevelopment plans, is the center of a neighborhood that appears to have been bombed. The houses around it—inherently no different from these in high demand at outer reaches of Philadelphia's Rittenhouse Square neighborhood—are crumbling from lack of value, with consequent neglect. As one house in a row cracks, it is de-

molished and the family in the next house is moved for safety; a few months later that one goes and the house beyond is emptied. No plan is involved in this, merely purposeless, gaping holes, rubble and abandonment, with the little ghost park, theoretically a good residential anchorage, at the center of the havoc. Federal Hill in Baltimore is a most beautiful and serene park and affords the finest view in Baltimore of the city and the bay. Its neighborhood, although decent, is moribund like the park itself. For generations it has failed to attract newcomers by choice. One of the bitterest disappointments in housing project history is the failure of the parks and open grounds in these establishments to increase adjacent values or to stabilize, let alone improve, their neighborhoods. Notice the rim of any city park, civic plaza or project parkland: how rare is the city open space with a rim that consistently reflects the supposed magnetism or stabilizing influence residing in parks.

And consider also the parks that go to waste most of the time, just as Baltimore's beautiful Federal Hill does. In Cincinnati's two finest parks, overlooking the river, I was able to find on a splendid, hot September afternoon a grand total of five users (three teen-age girls and one young couple); meanwhile, street after street in Cincinnati was swarming with people at leisure who lacked the slightest amenity for enjoying the city or the least kindness of shade. On a similar afternoon, with the temperature above ninety degrees, I was able to find in Corlears Hook park, a landscaped breezy river-front oasis in Manhattan's heavily populated Lower East Side, just eighteen people, most of them lone, apparently indigent, men.\* The children were not there; no mother in her right mind would send a child in there alone, and the mothers of the Lower East Side are not out of their minds. A boat trip around Manhattan conveys the erroneous impression that here is a city composed largely of parkland—and almost de-

\* By coincidence, when I arrived home, I found the statistical equivalent to the population of this park, eighteen people (of both sexes and all ages), gathered around the stoop of the tenement next door to us. Every park-like amenity was missing here except those that count most: enjoyment of leisure, each other and the passing city.

void of inhabitants. Why are there so often no people where the parks are and no parks where the people are?

Unpopular parks are troubling not only because of the waste and missed opportunities they imply, but also because of their frequent negative effects. They have the same problems as streets without eyes, and their dangers spill over into the areas surrounding, so that streets along such parks become known as danger places too and are avoided.

Moreover, underused parks and their equipment suffer from vandalism, which is quite a different matter from wear. This fact was obliquely recognized by Stuart Constable, Executive Officer, at the time, of New York City's park department, when he was asked by the press what he thought of a London proposal to install television in parks. After explaining that he did not think television a suitable park use, Constable added, "I don't think [the sets] would last half an hour before they disappeared."

Every fine summer night, television sets can be seen outdoors, used publicly, on the busy old sidewalks of East Harlem. Each machine, its extension cord run along the sidewalk from some store's electric outlet, is the informal headquarters spot of a dozen or so men who divide their attention among the machine, the children they are in charge of, their cans of beer, each others' comments and the greetings of passers-by. Strangers stop, as they wish, to join the viewing. Nobody is concerned about peril to the machines. Yet Constable's skepticism about their safety in the Parks Department's territories was amply justified. There speaks a man of experience who has presided over many, many unpopular, dangerous and ill-used parks, along with a few good ones.

Too much is expected of city parks. Far from transforming any essential quality in their surroundings, far from automatically uplifting their neighborhoods, neighborhood parks themselves are directly and drastically affected by the way the neighborhood acts upon them.

Cities are thoroughly physical places. In seeking understanding of their behavior, we get useful information by observing what

occurs tangibly and physically, instead of sailing off on metaphysical fancies. Penn's three squares in Philadelphia are three ordinary, bread-and-butter types of city parks. Let us see what they tell us about their ordinary physical interactions with their neighborhoods.

Rittenhouse Square, the success, possesses a diverse rim and diverse neighborhood hinterland. Immediately on its edges it has in sequence, as this is written, an art club with restaurant and galleries, a music school, an Army office building, an apartment house, a club, an old apothecary shop, a Navy office building which used to be a hotel, apartments, a church, a parochial school, apartments, a public-library branch, apartments, a vacant site where town houses have been torn down for prospective apartments, a cultural society, apartments, a vacant site where a town house is planned, another town house, apartments. Immediately beyond the rim, in the streets leading off at right angles and in the next streets parallel to the park sides, is an abundance of shops and services of all sorts with old houses or newer apartments above, mingled with a variety of offices.

Does anything about this physical arrangement of the neighborhood affect the park physically? Yes. This mixture of uses of buildings directly produces for the park a mixture of users who enter and leave the park at different times. They use the park at different times from one another because their daily schedules differ. The park thus possesses an intricate sequence of uses and users.

Joseph Guess, a Philadelphia newspaperman who lives at Rittenhouse Square and has amused himself by watching its ballet, says it has this sequence: "First, a few early-bird walkers who live beside the park take brisk strolls. They are shortly joined and followed, by residents who cross the park on their way to work out of the district. Next come people from outside the district, crossing the park on their way to work within the neighborhood. Soon after these people have left the square the errand-goers start to come through, many of them lingering, and in mid-morning mothers and small children come in, along with an increasing number of shoppers. Before noon the mothers and children leave, but the square's population continues to grow

because of employees on their lunch hour and also because of people coming from elsewhere to lunch at the art club and the other restaurants around. In the afternoon mothers and children turn up again, the shoppers and errand-goers linger longer, and school children eventually add themselves in. In the later afternoon the mothers have left but the homeward-bound workers come through—first those leaving the neighborhood, and then those returning to it. Some of these linger. From then on into the evening the square gets many young people on dates, some who are dining out nearby, some who live nearby, some who seem to come just because of the nice combination of liveliness and leisure. All through the day, there is a sprinkling of old people with time on their hands, some people who are indigent, and various unidentified idlers."

In short, Rittenhouse Square is busy fairly continuously for the same basic reasons that a lively sidewalk is used continuously: because of functional physical diversity among adjacent uses, and hence diversity among users and their schedules.

Philadelphia's Washington Square—the one that became a pervert park—affords an extreme contrast in this respect. Its rim is dominated by huge office buildings, and both this rim and its immediate hinterland lack any equivalent to the diversity of Rittenhouse Square—services, restaurants, cultural facilities. The neighborhood hinterland possesses a low density of dwellings. Washington Square thus has had in recent decades only one significant reservoir of potential local users: the office workers.

Does anything about this fact affect the park physically? Yes. This principal reservoir of users all operate on much the same daily time schedule. They all enter the district at once. They are then incarcerated all morning until lunch, and incarcerated again after lunch. They are absent after working hours. Therefore, Washington Square, of necessity, is a vacuum most of the day and evening. Into it came what usually fills city vacuums—a form of blight.

Here it is necessary to take issue with a common belief about cities—the belief that uses of low status drive out uses of high status. This is not how cities behave, and the belief that it is (Eight Blight) renders futile much energy aimed at attacking

symptoms and ignoring causes. People or uses with more money at their command, or greater respectability (in a credit society the two often go together), can fairly easily supplant those less prosperous or of less status, and commonly do so in city neighborhoods that achieve popularity. The reverse seldom happens. People or uses with less money at their command, less choice or less open respectability move into already weakened areas of cities, neighborhoods that are no longer covered by people with the luxury of choice, or neighborhoods that can draw for financing only upon hot money, exploitative money and loan-shark money. The newcomers thereupon must try to make do with something which, for one reason or another, or more typically for a complexity of reasons, has already failed to sustain popularity. Overcrowding, deterioration, crime, and other forms of blight are surface symptoms of prior and deeper economic and functional failure of the district.

The perversers who completely took over Philadelphia's Washington Square for several decades were a manifestation of this city behavior, in microcosm. They did not kill off a vital and appreciated park. They did not drive out respectable users. They moved into an abandoned place and entrenched themselves. As this is written, the unwelcome users have successfully been chased away to find other vacuums, but this act has still not supplied the park with a sufficient sequence of welcome users.

Far in the past, Washington Square did have a good population of users. But although it is still the "same" park, its use and essence changed completely when its surroundings changed. Like all neighborhood parks, it is the creature of its surroundings *and of the way its surroundings generate mutual support from diverse uses, or fail to generate such support.*

It need not have been office work that depopulated this park. Any single, overwhelmingly dominant use imposing a limited schedule of users would have had a similar effect. The same basic situation occurs in parks where residence is the overwhelmingly dominant neighborhood use. In this case, the single big daily potential reservoir of adult users is mothers. City parks or playgrounds cannot be continuously populated by mothers alone, any more than by office workers alone. Mothers, using a park in their

own relatively simple sequences, can populate it significantly for about a maximum of five hours, roughly two hours in the morning and three in the afternoon, and that only if they comprise a mixture of classes. \* Mothers' daily tenure of parks is not only relatively brief but is circumscribed in choice of time by meals, housework, children's naps and, very sensitively, by weather.

A generalized neighborhood park that is struck with functional monotony of surroundings in any form is inexorably a vacuum for a significant part of the day. And here a vicious circle takes over. Even if the vacuum is protected against various forms of blight, it exerts little attraction for its limited potential reservoir of users. It comes to bore them dreadfully, for moribundity is boring. In cities, liveliness and variety attract more liveliness, deadness and monotony repel life. And this is a principle vital not only to the ways cities behave socially, but also to the ways they behave economically.

There is, however, one important exception to the rule that it takes a wide functional mixture of users to populate and enliven a neighborhood park through the day. There is one group in cities which, all by itself, can enjoy and populate a park long and well—although it seldom draws other types of users. This is the group of people with total leisure, the people who lack even the responsibilities of home, and in Philadelphia these are the people of Penn's third park, Franklin Square, the Skid Row park.

There is much distaste for Skid Row parks, which is natural because human failure in such undiluted doses is hard to swallow. Customarily, too, little distinction is drawn between these and criminal parks, although they are quite different. (With time, of course, one may become the other, just as in the case of Franklin Square, an originally residential park that eventually turned into a Skid Row park after the park and its neighborhood had lost their appeal to people with choice.)

A good Skid Row park like Franklin Square has something to

Blue-collar families, for example, eat supper earlier than white-collar families because the working day of the husbands, if they are on a day shift, starts and ends earlier. Thus in the playground near where I live, mothers of blue-collar families leave before four; mothers in white-collar families come in later and leave before five.



be said for it. Supply and demand have come together for once, and the accident is clearly appreciated among those who have been disinherited by themselves or circumstance. In Franklin Square, if the weather permits, a day-long outdoor reception holds sway. The benches at the center of the reception are filled, with a voluble standing overflow milling about. Conversational groups continually form and dissolve into one another. The guests behave respectfully to one another and are courteous to interlopers too. Almost imperceptibly, like the hand of a clock, this raggle-taggle reception creeps around the circular pool at the center of the square. And indeed, it is the hand of a clock, for it is following the sun, staying in the warmth. When the sun goes down the clock stops; the reception is over until tomorrow.\*

Not all cities have well-developed Skid Row parks. New York lacks one, for example, although it has many small park fragments and playgrounds used primarily by bums, and the vicious Sara Delano Roosevelt park gets a lot of bums. Possibly America's biggest Skid Row park—its population vast compared with Franklin Square—is the main downtown park of Los Angeles, Pershing Square. This tells us something interesting about its surroundings too. So spattered and decentralized are the central functions of Los Angeles that the only element of its downtown that has full metropolitan dimensions and intensity is that of the leisured indigent. Pershing Square is more like a forum than a reception, a forum composed of scores of panel discussions, each with its leading monologist or moderator. The confabs extend all around the periphery of the square, where the benches and walls are, and rise to crescendos at the corners. Some benches are stenciled "Reserved for Ladies" and this nicety is observed. Los Angeles is fortunate that the vacuum of a disintegrated downtown has not been appropriated by predators but has been relatively respectably populated by a flourishing Skid Row.

But we can hardly count on polite Skid Rows to save all the unpopular parks of our cities. A generalized neighborhood park

\* This is not where you find drunks lying around with bottles in the morning. They are more apt to be in the city's grand Independence Mall, a new vacuum uninhabited by any recognizable form of society, even Skid Row.

that is not headquarters for the leisured indigent can become populated naturally and casually only by being situated very close indeed to where active and different currents of life and function come to a focus. If downtown, it must get shoppers, visitors and strollers as well as downtown workers. If not downtown, it must still be where life swirls—where there is work, cultural, residential and commercial activity—as much as possible of everything different that cities can offer. The main problem of neighborhood park planning boils down to the problem of nurturing diversified neighborhoods capable of using and supporting parks.

However, many city districts do already possess precisely such ignored focal points of life which cry out for close-by neighborhood parks or public squares. It is easy to identify such centers of district life and activity, because they are where people with leaflets to hand out choose to work (if permitted by the police). But there is no point in bringing parks to where the people are, if in the process the *reasons* that the people are there are wiped out and the park *substituted* for them. This is one of the basic errors in housing-project and civic- and cultural-center design. Neighborhood parks fail to substitute in any way for plentiful city diversity. Those that are successful never serve as barriers or as interruptions to the intricate functioning of the city around them. Rather, they help to knit together diverse surrounding functions by giving them a pleasant joint facility; in the process they add another appreciated element to the diversity and give something back to their surroundings, as Rittenhouse Square or any other good park gives back.

You can neither lie to a neighborhood park, nor reason with it. "Artist's conceptions" and persuasive renderings can put *pictures* of life into proposed neighborhood parks or park malls, and verbal rationalizations can conjure up users who ought to appreciate them, but in real life only diverse surroundings have the practical power of inducing a natural, continuing flow of life and use. Superficial architectural variety may look like diversity, but only a genuine content of economic and social diversity, resulting in people with different schedules, has meaning to the park and the power to confer the boon of life upon it.

Given good location, a bread-and-butter neighborhood park can make much of its assets, but it can also fritter them away. It is obvious that a place that looks like a jail yard will neither attract users nor reciprocate with its surroundings in the same fashion as a place that looks like an oasis. But there are all kinds of cases too, and some of their salient characteristics for success are not so obvious.

Outstandingly successful neighborhood parks seldom have much competition from other open spaces. This is understandable, because people in cities, with all their other interests and duties, can hardly enliven unlimited amounts of local, generalized park. City people would have to devote themselves to park use as if it were a business (or as the leisured indigent do) to justify, for example, the plethora of malls, promenades, playgrounds, parks and indeterminate land oozes afforded in typical Radiant Garden City schemes, and enforced in official urban rebuilding by stringent requirements that high percentages of land be left open.

We can already see that city districts with relatively large amounts of generalized park, like Morningside Heights or Harlem in New York, seldom develop intense community focus on a park and intense love for it, such as the people of Boston's North End have for their little Prado or the people of Greenwich Village have for Washington Square, or the people of the Rittenhouse Square district have for their park. Greatly loved neighborhood parks benefit from a certain rarity value.

The ability of a neighborhood park to stimulate passionate attachment or, conversely, only apathy, seems to have little or nothing to do with the incomes or occupations of a population in a district. This is an inference which can be drawn from the widely differing income, occupational and cultural groups who are simultaneously deeply attached to a park like New York's Washington Square. The relationship of differing income classes to given parks can also sometimes be observed in sequence over time, either positively or negatively. Over the years, the economic condition of people in Boston's North End has risen appreciably. Both in time of poverty and in time of prosperity, the Prado, a minute but central park, has been the heart of the neighborhood.

Harlem in New York affords an illustration of consistent reverse behavior. Over the course of years Harlem has changed from a fashionable upper-middle-class residential district, to a lower-middle-class district, to a district predominantly of the poor and the discriminated against. During all this sequence of different populations, Harlem, with a wealth of local parks as compared to Greenwich Village, for example, has never seen a period in which one of its parks was a vital focus of community life and identity. The same sad observation can be made of Morningside Heights. And it is also true typically of project grounds, even including those carefully designed.

This inability of a neighborhood or district to attach itself with affection—and with the immense resulting power of symbolism—to a neighborhood park is due, I think, to a combination of negative factors: first, parks that are possible candidates are handicapped because of insufficient diversity in their immediate surroundings, and consequent dullness; and second, what diversity and life are available are dispersed and dissipated among too many different parks, too similar in purpose to each other.

Certain qualities in design can apparently make a difference too. For if the object of a generalized bread-and-butter neighborhood park is to attract as many different kinds of people, with as many different schedules, interests, and purposes as possible, it is clear that the design of the park should abet this generalization of patronage rather than work at cross-purposes to it. Parks intensely used in generalized public-yard fashion tend to have four elements in their design which I shall call intricacy, centering, sun and enclosure.

Intricity is related to the variety of reasons for which people come to neighborhood parks. Even the same person comes for different reasons at different times; sometimes to sit tiredly, sometimes to play or to watch a game, sometimes to read or work, sometimes to show off, sometimes to fall in love, sometimes to keep an appointment, sometimes to savor the hustle of the city from a retreat, sometimes in the hope of finding acquaintances, sometimes to get closer to a bit of nature, sometimes to keep a child occupied, sometimes simply to see what officers, and almost always to be entertained by the sight of other people.



If the whole thing can be absorbed in a glance, like a good poster, and if every place looks like every other place in the park and also feels like every other place when you try it, the park affords little stimulation to all these differing uses and moods. Nor is there much reason to return to it again and again.

An intelligent and able woman who lives beside Rittenhouse Square remarks, "I've used it almost every day for fifteen years, but the other night I tried to draw a plan of it from memory and couldn't. It was too complicated for me." The same phenomenon is true of Washington Square in New York. In the course of a community battle to protect it from a highway, the strategists frequently tried to sketch the park roughly during meetings, to illustrate a point. Very difficult.

Yet neither of these parks is so complex in plan as all that. Intricacy that counts is mainly intricacy at eye level, change in the rise of ground, groupings of trees, openings leading to various focal points—in short, subtle expressions of difference. The subtle differences in setting are then exaggerated by the differences in use that grow up among them. Successful parks always look much more intricate in use than when they are empty.

Even very small squares that are successful often get ingenious variation into the stage sets they provide for their users. Rockefeller Center does it by making drama out of four changes in level. Union Square in downtown San Francisco has a plan that looks deadily dull on paper or from a high building; but it is bent onto such changes in ground level, like Dalí's painting of the wet watches, that it appears remarkably various. (This is, of course, exactly the transformation that happens, on a larger scale, to San Francisco's straight, regular gridiron street patterns as they tumble up and down the hills.) Paper plans of squares and parks are deceptive—sometimes they are crammed full of apparent differences that mean almost nothing because they are all below eye level, or are discounted by the eye because they are too often repeated.

Probably the most important element in intricacy is centering. Good small parks typically have a place somewhere within them commonly understood to be the center—at the very least a main crossroads and pausing point, a climax. Some small parks or

squares are virtually all center, and get their intricacy from minor differences at their peripheries.

People try hard to create centers and climaxes to a park, even against odds. Sometimes it is impossible. Long strip parks, like the dismally unsuccessful Sara Delano Roosevelt park in New York and many riverside parks, are frequently designed as if they were rolled out from a die stamper. Sara Delano Roosevelt park has four identical brick "recreation" barracks stamped along it at intervals. What can users make of this? The more they move back and forth, the more they are in the same place. It is like a trudge on a treadmill. This too is a common failing in project design, and almost unavoidable there, because most projects are essentially die-stamped design for die-stamped functions.

People can be inventive in their use of park centers. The fountain basin in New York's Washington Square is used inventively and exuberantly. Once, beyond memory, the basin possessed an ornamental iron centerpiece with a fountain. What remains is the sunken concrete circular basin, dry most of the year, bordered with four steps ascending to a stone coping that forms an outer rim a few feet above ground level. In effect, this is a circular arena, a theater in the round, and that is how it is used, with complete confusion as to who are spectators and who are the show. Everybody is both, although some are more so: guitar players, singers, crowds of daring children, impromptu dancers, sunbathers, conversers, show-offs, photographers, tourists, and mixed in with them all a bewildering sprinkling of absorbed readers—not there for lack of choice, because quiet benches to the east are half-deserted.

The city officials regularly concoct improvement schemes by which this center within the park would be sown to grass and flowers and surrounded by a fence. The invariable phrase used to describe this is, "restoring the land to park use."

That is a different form of park use, legitimate in places. But for neighborhood parks, the finest centers are stage settings for people.

Sun is part of a park's setting for people, shaded, to be sure, in summer. A high building effectively cutting the sun angle across the south side of a park can kill off a lot of it. Rittenhouse Square,

for all its virtues, has this misfortune. On a good October afternoon, for example, almost a third of the square lies completely empty; the great building shadow across it from a new apartment house is a great eraser of human beings within its pall.

Although buildings should not cut sun from a park—if the object is to encourage full use—the presence of buildings around a park is important in design. They enclose it. They make a definite shape out of the space, so that it appears as an important event in the city scene, a positive feature, rather than a no-account leftover. Far from being attracted by indefinite leftovers of land oozing around buildings, people behave as if repelled by them. They even cross streets as they meet up with them, a phenomenon that can be watched wherever a housing project, for example, breaks into a busy street. Richard Nelson, a Chicago real estate analyst who watches the behavior of people in cities as a clue to economic values, reports, "On a warm September afternoon, Mellon Square in downtown Pittsburgh contained too many users to count. But that same afternoon, during a period of two hours, only three people—one old lady knitting, one bum, one unidentified character asleep with a newspaper over his face—used the park of the downtown Gateway Center."

Gateway Center is a Radiant City office and hotel project with the buildings set here and there in empty land. It lacks the degree of diversity of Mellon Square's surroundings, but its diversity is not low enough to account for only four users (counting Nelson himself) during the heart of a good afternoon. City park users simply do not seek settings for buildings; they seek settings for themselves. To them, parks are foreground, buildings background, rather than the reverse.

Cities are full of generalized parks that can hardly be expected to justify themselves, even if their districts are successfully enlivened. This is because some parks are basically unfitted, whether by location, size or shape, to serve successfully in the public-yard fashion I have been discussing. Nor are they fitted by size or inherent variety of scene to become major metropolitan parks. What can be done with them?

Some of these, if sufficiently small, can do another job well:

simply pleasing the eye. San Francisco is good at this. A tiny triangular street intersection leftover, which in most cities would either be flattened into asphalt or else have a hedge, a few benches and be a dusty nonentity, in San Francisco is a fenced miniature world of its own, a deep, cool world of water and exotic forest, populated by the birds that have been attracted. You cannot go in yourself. You do not need to, because your eyes go in and take you farther into this world than feet could ever go. San Francisco gives an impression of much verdure and relief from city stoniness. Yet San Francisco is a crowded city and little ground is used to convey this impression. The effect arises mainly from small bits of intensive cultivation, and it is multiplied because so much of San Francisco's greenery is vertical—window boxes, trees, vines, thick ground cover on little patches of "waste" slopes.

Gramercy Park in New York overcomes an awkward situation by pleasing the eye. This park happens to be a fenced private yard in a public place; the property goes with the residential buildings across the surrounding streets. It must be entered with a key. Since it is blessed with splendid trees, excellent maintenance and an air of glamor, it successfully provides for the passing public a place to please the eye, and so far as the public is concerned this is its justification.

But parks primarily to please the eye, uncombined with other uses, are by definition where eyes will see them; and again by definition they are best small because to do their job well they must do it beautifully and intensively, not perfunctorily.

The worst problem parks are located precisely where people do not pass by and likely never will. A city park in this fix, afflicted (for in such cases it is an affliction) with a good-sized terrain, is figuratively in the same position as a large store in a bad economic location. If such a store can be rescued and justified, it will be by dint of heavy concentration on what merchants call "demand goods" instead of reliance on "impulse sales." If the demand goods do bring enough customers, a certain gravity from impulse sales may follow.

From the standpoint of a park, what is demand goods?

We can get some hints by looking at a few such problem parks. Jefferson Park in East Harlem is an example. It consists of

a number of parts, the ostensibly principal one intended for general neighborhood use—equivalent to impulse sales in merchandising vocabulary. But everything about it thwarts this purpose. Its location is at the far edge of its community, bounded on one side by the river. It is further isolated by a wide, heavy traffic street. Its internal planning runs largely to long, isolated walks without effective centers. To an outsider it looks weirdly deserted; to insiders, it is a focus of neighborhood conflict, violence and fear. Since a brutal evening murder of a visitor by teen-agers in 1938, it has been more than ever shunned and avoided.

However, among Jefferson Park's several separate sections, one does redeem itself handsomely. This is a big outdoor swimming pool, obviously not big enough. Sometimes it contains more people than water.

Consider Corlears Hook, the portion of the East River parklands where I could find only eighteen people amid the lawns and benches on a good day. Corlears Hook possesses, off to a side, a ball field, nothing special, and yet on that same day most of the park's life, such as it was, was in the ball field. Corlears Hook also contains, among its meaningless acres of lawns, a band shell. Six times a year, on summer evenings, thousands of people from the Lower East Side pour into the park to hear a concert series. For a total of some eighteen hours in the year, Corlears Hook park comes alive and is vastly enjoyed.

Here we see demand goods operating, although obviously too limited in quantity and too desultory in time. It is clear, however, that people do come to these parks for certain special demand goods, although they simply do not come for generalized or impulse park use. In short, if a generalized city park cannot be supported by uses arising from natural, nearby intense diversity, it must convert from a generalized park to a specialized park. Effective diversity of use, drawing deliberately a sequence of diversified users, must be deliberately introduced into the park itself.

Only experience and trial and error can indicate what diverse combinations of activities can operate effectively as demand goods for any specific problem park. But we can make some useful generalized guesses about components. First, a negative generalization: Magnificent views and handsome landscaping fail to oper-

ate as demand goods, maybe these "should," but demonstrably they do not. They can work as adjuncts only.

On the other hand, swimming operates as demand goods. So does fishing, especially if there is bait buying and boating along with it. Sports fields do. So do carnivals, or carnival-like activities.\*

Music (including recorded music) and plays also serve as demand goods. It is curious that relatively little is done with these in parks, because the casual introduction of cultural life is part of the historic mission of cities. It is a mission that can still operate full force, as the *New Yorker* indicated in this comment on the free Shakespeare season of 1938 in Central Park:

The ambience, the weather, the color and lights, and simple curiosity brought them out; some had never seen any sort of play in the flesh. Hundreds came back again and again; a fellow we know says he met a group of Negro children who told him they had been to *Romeo and Juliet* five times. The lives of a lot of these converts have been enlarged and enriched; so has the audience for the American theater of the future. But spectators like them, new to the theater, are the very ones who won't show up, a dollar or two dollars in hand, to pay for an experience that they do not even know to be pleasant.

This suggests, for one thing, that universities with drama departments (and, so often, with dead, problem parks in their vicinities) might try putting two and two together, rather than cultivating hostile policies of defended Turf. Columbia University in New York is taking a constructive step by planning sports facilities—for both the university and the neighborhood—in Morningside Park, which has been shunned and feared for decades.

\*Dr. Karl Menninger, director of the Menninger Psychiatric Clinic of Topeka, addressing a meeting devoted to city problems, in 1938, discussed the types of activities that appear to combat the will to destruction. He listed these as (1) plentiful contacts with plenty of other people; (2) work, including even drudgery; and (3) violent play. It is Menninger's belief that cities afford disastrously little opportunity for violent play. The types he singled out as having proved useful were active outdoor sports, bowling, and shooting galleries like those found in carnivals and amusement parks but only occasionally (Times Square, for instance) in cities.

ades. Adding a few other activities too, like music or shows, could convert a dreadful neighborhood liability into an outstanding neighborhood asset.

Cities lack minor park activities that could serve as minor "demand goods." Some are discoverable by observation of what people try to do if they can get away with it. For instance, the manager of a shopping center near Montreal found his ornamental pool mysteriously filthy every morning. Spying after closing hours he found that children were sneaking in and washing and polishing their bikes there. Places to wash bikes (where people have bikes), places to hire and to ride bikes, places to dig in the ground, places to build ramshackle wigwams and huts out of old lumber, are activities usually crowded out of cities. The Puerto Ricans who come to our cities today have no place to roast pigs outdoors unless they can find a private yard for the purpose, but outdoor pig roasts and the parties that follow can be as much fun as the Italian street festivals many city dwellers have learned to love. Kite flying is a minor activity but there are those who love it, and it suggests kite-flying places where materials for making kites are sold too, and where there are terraces on which to work at them. Ice skating used to be enjoyed on many ponds within northern cities until it was crowded out. Fifth Avenue in New York used to have five fashionable skating ponds between Thirty-first and Ninety-eighth streets, one only four blocks from the present rink at Rockefeller Plaza. Artificial rinks have permitted the rediscovery of city ice skating in our time, and in cities at the latitudes of New York, Cleveland, Detroit and Chicago artificial rinks extend the skating season to include almost half the year. Every city district could probably enjoy and use an outdoor park ice rink if it had one, and provide a population of entranced watchers too. Indeed, relatively small rinks placed at more numerous locations are much more civilized and pleasant than huge centralized rinks.

All this takes money. But American cities today, under the illusions that open land is an automatic good and that quantity is equivalent to quality, are instead frittering away money on parks, playgrounds and project land—oozes too large, too frequent, too

perfunctory, too ill-located, and hence too dull or too inconvenient to be used.

City parks are not abstractions, or automatic repositories of virtue or uplift, any more than sidewalks are abstractions. They mean nothing divorced from their practical, tangible uses, and hence they mean nothing divorced from the tangible effects on them—for good or for ill—of the city districts and uses touching them.

Generalized parks can and do add great attraction to neighborhoods that people find attractive for a great variety of other uses. They further depress neighborhoods that people find unattractive for a wide variety of other uses, for they exaggerate the dullness, the danger, the emptiness. The more successfully a city mingles everyday diversity of uses and users in its everyday streets, the more successfully, casually (and economically) its people thereby enliven and support well-located parks that can thus give back grace and delight to their neighborhoods instead of vacuity.