

## Opinions

*Dans cette rubrique nous accueillons des textes qui expriment un point de vue personnel sur l'homme et l'architecture.*

*In this column, we present texts that express a personal point of view on man and architecture.*

### I.

#### Structures of Containment

*Leanne Rivlin and Maxine Wolfe's excellent book, 'Institutional Settings in Children's Lives' (New York, Wiley, 1985), sets a new framework for the field of environmental social science. It is, I think, this field's first book to bear down with critical force on the structures of containment that we have come to accept in children's lives, and that, by accepting, we have come to accept in all our lives.*

*"What this book will consider, through an analysis of children's environments, are the ways in which the physical aspects of these places are part of the socialization to the normative social order." (p. 10).*

*"In effect, children are taught to be passive rather than active in the creation of life and experience." (p. 210).*

### II.

#### A Mature Book

*There is fifteen years worth of work behind 'Institutional Settings in Children's Lives' by two people who have immersed themselves in schools, children's psychiatric facilities, and day-care centres. Along with personal investment, Leanne Rivlin and Maxine Wolfe are at the same time capable of perspective beyond the limits of the work itself. They have both been involved in the field of environmental psychology since it first became defined as a field of study and have both participated in its development. They speak with great depth, in the tradition of action research, as to how social science ought to bring human places into focus. They have created a fresh experience and achieved a maturity in the writing of their book; a maturity which contrasts with what we have come to know as the literature of this field. Can you find writing potent enough to convince an architect that designing space means also doing an act of social consequence: that formalism, post modern or otherwise, no matter how clever, is hollow and inadequate? Where is there a piece*

*of research that stirs longings for human environments or anger at our deprivation, even in the heart of professionals?. What is there that is not boring, without gibberish or argot, that might be called strong or effective or literate? What is there, for that matter, to simply sit down with, for the pleasure?*

*There are those designers who want to use the literature of environmental social science as a source of 'proven' facts: to provide how-to guidelines to better design (or, at a more cynical level, to rationalize their designs to their clients). While the instrumental use of any research is problematic, environmental social science research is particularly susceptible to abuse since its originators - environmental psychologists, for example - are a world apart from potential users such as designers and planners. Does anyone assume that the questions asked in research are unaffected by who pays for it or assume that the interests of a corporation that pays for research are the same as the interests of office workers? Does a researcher's definition of privacy correspond to a designer's? Is there not a deep question of context with any research so rife with variables? And if these are important questions, how do their answers get transmitted along with the 'facts' across the boundaries of disciplines? None of this is news, but these issues remain unresolved.*

*Designers who want a how-to guide will not like Leanne Rivlin and Maxine Wolfe's book because there are no recipes for design; the concern is with 'why' and not with telling designers 'how'. Further, the term 'institutional settings' does not refer just to buildings; it includes messy ideas about social control, norms, diversity, historic traditions, and roles. Beyond not liking the book, designers may deny the very idea that in their work they may be held responsible for their contributions to the creation of yet another structure of containment.*

*Because it does look at 'why', 'Institutional Settings in Children's Lives' is a good book for designers to know. The destructive institutional settings analyzed in the book were very likely infused with plenty of 'how' in their design by their designers; the 'why' question appears never to have been asked. Instead of architect Philip Johnson's "We cannot not know history", we should say, "We cannot not know why".*

*The implicit message to design professionals from too many environmental social science researches is that their technological product - the objective 'facts' found in research results - can replace the need for a designer's process of immersion in a setting, direct experience and intelligent analysis. Whether the subject is institutions, mega-offices, or even playgrounds, this is a message dangerous to the human spirit. Better that this research not be done at all if, in fact, it serves merely to intervene between designers and the everyday users of design. That Maxine and Leanne's book is not dangerous in this way is one of its virtues: it may reduce gullibility rather than reinforce it.*

*Only certain books make a forthright demand. Upton Sinclair did this with 'The Jungle' and earned Theodore Roosevelt's contemptuous word, "muckcracker". With 'Asylums', Erving Goffman changed a world*

of perceptions. Because it forces us to confront issues of civilization to the normative order - whose normative order? - 'Institutional Settings in Children's Lives' is a book that also demands response. That it demands response is a way of saying that it is also an unsettling book. This, in turn, places demands on the books yet to come in environmental psychology.

### III.

#### Words from 'Institutional Settings in Children's Lives'

*"Even if one accepts the notion of progressive, partially generically based cognitive development, the physical environment, its attendant social structure and symbolic meanings, allow or limit the kinds of activities in which children can engage and hence what they learn about the world. And since it is through learning about the world that children learn about themselves, it is important to understand that the physical environments in which children grow up give them a message about who they are and who they can be within this society. To have 'grown up on the wrong side of the tracks' implies, via a spatial/physical referent, a whole set of images about a particular person or set of persons and the continuing impact of the environment on their growth and development. But it also reflects an actual difference in the material reality of the daily lives of children depending on which side of the tracks they live" (p. 4).*

*"... early in life, in our society, the physical environment as well as the social, political, and economic environments cease to be conceived of as playing a role in the course of events. Events are explained in terms of people's qualities instead of environmental qualities or some combination of the two". "This enables people to be held responsible for their behaviour while giving them limited control over the mechanisms that would enable them to do as they see fit" (p. 10).*

*"If the conceptions of children and childhood have varied over the years, so have the definitions of deviance. Society's views of a normal member of a group have had an extraordinarily inconsistent history, and this is as true for its judgment of children as that of adults. Poverty, mental retardation, physical disabilities, emotional problems - each has been the subject of pity, contempt, ridicule, concern, scorn, awe, fear - often in succession. The persons involved have been ignored, punished, worshipped, assisted, or neglected. They have lived at home, in religious residences, in hospitals, in workhouses, in prisons, in almshouses, or on the street. They have been integrated into their social group or kept as far apart as possible. They have been segregated into separate kinds of facilities for different kinds of conditions, or lumped together and held in common places" (p. 21).*

*"Although many aspects of the hospitalization reified the control maintained over the children, the use of space and space policies were among the most powerful forces. In the first year, there was the increasing tendency... to lock doors both in unused spaces and in areas in which children could be found. A second mode... was confining children to their houses, the living unit areas, which eventually was accompanied by the wearing of pajamas. A few years*

after the opening of the facility, a yellow line was painted on the floor of the corridor area that connected the children's spaces to the front lobby and the administrative areas. This was a message to the children that they were not to pass into those sections of the building. Although this rule was supposed to be self-enforced - a type of behaviour modification technique - during breaks in program time the line was patrolled by staff who directed children to their proper location" (p. 91-92).

"The one conventional psychiatric hospital mechanism for control that was consciously excluded from the original physical design and therapeutic philosophy of this facility was the existence of a 'seclusion room'. In early discussions with the director the absence of such a space was described as extremely progressive and an indication of a newer philosophy. Yet, within one and one-half years of operation, an office in each of the house units, directly adjacent to the nurses' stations, had been turned into what was now called a 'quiet room'. This 10 by 6 foot room was totally empty except for a mattress on the floor" (p. 92).

"Earlier we described how that threat of isolation in the quiet room was a way of dealing with Marie when she argued about the quality of the food. Another incident, from observations of the same child, shows the latitude the staff had in defining what is 'unmanageable' and 'ungratifying', the supposed use of isolation as a last resort, and its arbitrary use with one child as opposed to another:

(Again, during mealtime in the dining room). Sarah and Marie have been consistently picking on each other during the meal, both being provocative: Sarah laughed and said something and Marie says something about beating 'the shit' out of Sarah and reprimanding her... Sarah laughs at Marie and says, 'Someone is going to beat the hell out of you'. Marie laughs. Sarah was teasing Marie. Finally a staff member tells them both to sit down and Sarah sits down. Sarah and Marie start arguing verbally again. Staff says, 'Keep on talking' angrily or half angrily, walks over to Marie and places her hands around the base of Marie's neck, resting on her shoulders, and shakes her a bit. Finally she says, 'Marie, you want to go into the quiet room?'. Marie ignores her. Staff says, 'Come on kids' (Apparently referring to both Sarah and Marie but really only to Marie). 'Let's go upstairs', touching Marie on the shoulder. Marie doesn't listen. She is really annoyed at Sarah. Staff again says, 'Let's go, let's go, Marie'. Apparently Marie was now talking about Sarah's mother who had died because staff says, 'We don't talk about anyone's mother that way'. Staff takes Marie out and Marie is still muttering. Staff leads Marie into the house and into the quiet room.

Following the child as she is placed in the quiet room and responses of both herself and the staff member leads one to question who is out of control and what value the isolation has other than to affirm authority:

The staff unlocks the quiet room door and Marie goes in, saying something about sleeping in there. She goes willingly and says, 'Thanks for the mat. I can go to sleep on that'. The staff says, 'No. I'll take them out'. She closes and locks the door. Marie drags some of the mats around and when the staff member returns she finds it difficult to open the door. The staff pulls the mat out and Marie says, 'Thanks. You're moving the mats. It's cooler for me. Want me to help you?'. She actually helps the staff to move the mats out. When the second mat is removed Marie cheerily says, 'Goodnight. Lock the door behind me please. Goodnight'.

*Marie stays inside. She talks to herself, counts to herself, sings, bangs against the door as other kids go by on their way back from dinner. Finally, after only six minutes, the staff member peeks in to see what Marie is doing but Marie ignores her. Then, just as arbitrarily as she was put in, she gets taken out, although her 'attitude' has not changed:*

*The staff member walks over to the quiet room and unlocks the door. Marie is just sitting inside. Staff member says, 'Up!' and Marie says, 'Thank you for letting me in the quiet room' and walks through the corridor toward her apartment. The staff member says, 'Marie! Did you hear what I said? You are not going to sleep now'. And Marie walks back into the corridor.*

*This example, in which Marie shows as much strength as the staff person though she definitely has less power, does not reflect the trauma associated with this experience for most children, or perhaps even for Marie on a less than obvious level. Often children were dragged kicking and screaming into this room, crying loudly and with great personal pain during large parts of their confinement" (p. 93-94).*

*Beginning with one room in each house unit, within six months a room in each public area was converted into a place for isolation. At this point, one of the top administrators, who one and one-half years earlier had talked about the lack of a seclusion room as being 'progressive' was heard describing to a group of visitors the 'foresight' of the programmers and designers in providing a seclusion room for every house.*

*The proliferation of seclusion rooms did not stop, even here. Eventually, one bedroom in each apartment was made into a seclusion room, that is, three per house area. Although the amount of aggressive behaviour we observed in the hospital did not change at all, over all of the years of our study, the number of seclusion rooms increased tenfold. By the end of our research, given the average census, there was one seclusion room for every six children" (p. 95).*

*"The experience of being spatially confined as a form of coercion and punishment is not a phenomenon unique to psychiatric institutions. Many parents 'ground' their children, restricting them to their home and within that to their rooms as a form of punishment. Yet if parents outside of an institution locked their children into a room we would consider them to be abusive. And there would be no doubt about this designation if they had a room specifically designed for this purpose" (p. 95-96).*

*"In our research we have, in fact, seen some behaviour that could be considered 'extreme' and which required skillful support. However, after many years in both adult's and children's psychiatric facilities, it is clear that to a large extent these behaviours are more of a response to the nature of the psychiatric environment than an indication of internal pathology" (p. 97-98).*

*"As we have suggested, the institutions described in the previous chapters provide back-up sanctions for the ones we will be describing in this chapter and the next - the schools. We will see that schools - their policies, programs, and physical forms - have been shaped by the political, social, and economic contexts in which they developed. Labeling the school as a partial institution obscures the less obvious power that it has had over the lives of children and their families. We will see that schools, both historically and today, share the qualities that are associated with total institutions" (p. 109-110).*

*"We support public education but we do not think that present-day schools are the answer to children's thirst for learning. We can envision places for learning that respect children as people and provide the support necessary for them to grow and change in ways that are positive for them. Similarly, we do not deny that there are troubled children who need places and people to go to for help. We can envision a world in which so many children would not need help. We can also envision a world where help giving and receiving is an integrating experience rather than an isolating one, building on children's strengths rather than stressing their weaknesses.*

*Over the years of our work in these settings we were changed more by our experiences that they were changed by our presence" (p. 235).*

#### IV.

### **Whose Children Are These?**

*One can be lulled into believing that in the United States the days of institutionalization are over and, therefore, that this is a book with an out-of-date subject which affects fewer and fewer people, probably outcasts anyway. An often cited statistic is that the greatest number of residents of U.S. state and county mental hospitals - 559'000 - occurred in 1955 and 'deinstitutionalization' has since changed all that <sup>1</sup>. This is just not so. In 1984 there were still 243'000 beds in mental hospitals of all types <sup>2</sup> (including private); an embarrassing enough fact in itself. Since the 'length of stay' has generally been reduced because of court orders and new drug therapies, the number of people who spend periods of their lives in these beds may actually have increased. But consider this: there are now about 750'000 inmates of nursing homes (about one-third of the more than 2'000'000 total) who are there for psychiatric reasons <sup>3</sup>. Reality is that despite court suits and despite a panoply of drug therapies that did not exist in 1955, the number of people living in institutions for periods of their lives for reasons related to mental health has increased. If other types of social institutions are considered - institutions for people labeled mentally retarded and developmentally disabled, people with the criminal justice system <sup>4</sup> (which, including U.S. federal, state and*

<sup>1</sup> *Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1984* (Washington DC, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984, p. 120).

<sup>2</sup> *Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1987* (Washington DC, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987, p. 100).

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Toward a National Plan for the Chronically Mentally Ill* (Washington DC, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> Historically, it is not a leap to include inmates of the criminal justice system. See: Foucault, Michel, *Madness and Civilization* (New York, Random House, 1967): "Confinement, that massive phenomenon, the signs of which are found all across eighteenth-century Europe, is a 'police' matter". "Before having the medical meaning we give it, or that at least we like to suppose it has, confinement was required by something quite different from

local detention, totaled 658'075 at a single count in 1983<sup>5</sup>) - the numbers are truly staggering. Apparently the only competition to the U.S. for the title of 'Most Institutionalized' are the Soviet Union and the Republic of South Africa. In addition, there are those who would include residents of welfare ('SRO') hotels, group homes, and halfway houses in the count. And then there are others - I for one - who would include staff people who work at roughly a one-to-one ratio in total institutions (who are shaped by and champion the same values and channeling as the institutions themselves), as well as those who have been institutionalized for periods of time in their lives and who must always thereafter live with the threat of reinstitutionalization as a control<sup>6</sup>. Further, military life shares significant aspects of institutional life. The values at work in institutional life have a direct effect on a huge proportion of the people we are liable to encounter, day by day. What Maxine and Leanne say about children's lives must be said about all of us.

## V.

### The Social Burden

Questions of deviance - of how to define it and from whose perspective it should be defined, of whether to blame society or individuals, of how to deal with it - are imbedded in any idea of socialization to the normative order. The biblical account of Saul's genuine madness and David's feigned madness (I Samuel, especially 21:10-15) speaks of ancient intolerance and reveals it as a two-edged sword. In the United States, the rabid right's homophobic attempts to keep AIDS identified as a disease of and for gay males - deviants, that is - has made it possible to propose internment camps in a fully public manner. I imagine that Nisei camps were publicly unimagable in 1941, but I know that internment is being contemplated for me, a gay male in 1988. I imagine that Jews, gay males, lesbians and Gypsies were less aware of proposals in Nazi Germany for what was to be their fate than I am in the U.S. today. While it may be obvious that intolerance of diversity was not new in the '30s, it may not be so obvious that it is not old now.

With U.S. city life shattered and neighbourhoods destroyed, with an urban society based more obviously on fear and privilege than on confidence and community, there is a 'debate' over deviance and crime. Boiled down, the underlying message is that problems and deviance are

any concern with curing the sick. What made it necessary was the imperative of labour. Our philanthropy prefers to recognize the signs of benevolence toward sickness where there is only a condemnation of idleness" (p. 48).

<sup>5</sup> *Jerico*, Newsletter of the National Moratorium on Prison Construction. 324 C Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20003: no. 32 (Summer, 1983), p. 12. The number imprisoned doubled between 1975 and 1985, the most recent year reported in *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1987*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office).

<sup>6</sup> See: Estroff, Sue E., *Making it Crazy: An Ethnography of Psychiatric Clients in an American Community* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1981). Also: Solomon, Phyllis, B. Gordon and Davies, J., *Community Services to Discharged Psychiatric Patients*, (Springfield, Illinois, Charles C. Thomas, 1984).

owned faults of individuals, not reflections of the structure of society. This 'debate' is now focused on the degree to which 'those' people are different from the rest of us - is it, after all, a biological difference? In 1969, for PR reasons, *The Eugenics Quarterly* was transmogrified into *The Journal of Social Biology*.

A particular ideology is served by this 'debate', but not the general welfare. This ideology wants to maintain the status quo and avoid the creation of a genuinely diverse, non-racist egalitarian society. It is important, therefore, to hold the structure of society as blameless while shifting responsibility onto flawed individuals as the cause of everything blameworthy: crime in the streets, lower IQ-test scores among poor people, relentlessly high unemployment rates, dropping-out of school, schizophrenia, homelessness (including homelessness among children), the low earning power of Black women, and the increasing numbers of single-parent households. It is because of this ideology that it is even momentarily possible, in the face of 38'000 U.S. AIDS deaths to date, to argue that yet more deaths are preferable to safe sex education (thereby condoning sex outside of heterosexual marriage) or that even more deaths are preferable to passing out clean needles to users (thereby condoning drug use).

This desire to see deviance as evidence of individual failures is fueled by the simple-mindedness of the solutions that would become acceptable. With this view as justification, it would be so easy to target the offending individuals and do a little excising here and preventive detention there; the unfavored tubes, sever the offending testicles; incapacitate, separate, incarcerate. Eliminate deviance and crime by eliminating the deviants and the criminals. No more deficient non-producers to put up with, no more threatening gangs roaming aggressively at will, no more faggots demanding public monies to cure disease, no more sloping foreheads, rapists, burglars, or welfare cheats. A WASP world at last.

As this ideology has been more aggressively advanced over the past several years, the response - where there has been any at all - seems to be restricted to uncomfortably fragile ethical issues<sup>7</sup>. For instance: "Do we really have enough predictive science to take on the responsibility of preventive detention for those with 'criminal tendencies'? ". It is bad enough that the essence of this response is that it is only a matter of time until we do have enough predictive science to justify preventive detention. But underlying this response is an unquestioned assumption: ours is an essentially benign society. We think of ourselves as highly tolerant of deviance and that if we were to treat deviants in this way we would be departing from our benign traditions.

<sup>7</sup> A dependable exception used to be *Augustus* (Formerly *Institutions*, etc.) *A Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 814 North Saint Asaph Street, Alexandria, Virginia, 22314: The National Center on Institutions and Alternatives. Unfortunately, the temporary demise of *Augustus* is additional evidence of the fragility of its ethical positions.

*'Institutional Settings in Children's Lives'* questions these assumptions of benignity by making it clear that our self-serving mythology does not stand the test of reality. Towards children, we use the environment as artillery. And, since we each come from our own childhood, we are all experienced in being crushed, unceasingly flattened, and crunched by environmental weaponry. That most of us would deny this in our own lives may simply be that we fish are the last to discover water. A more likely, though more repugnant explanation is that we follow the tradition of identifying with the dominant and powerful.

Reading *'Institutional Settings in Children's Lives'* makes it clear that the 'debate' over deviance is miscast. The question is not what it would be like if we were no longer benign, since already we are not. The debate must be expanded to confront other questions. What has been the effect of this intense effort to channel and, as a backup, to institutionalize children? Even the hours children spend in seemingly innocent day-care programs are made to become a part of this socialization to the normative social order. Who has benefited? Must it forever remain an axiom that schooling a child washes out the wonder and joy? By committing ourselves to it, what vision could we create for the future if we consciously shaped children's environments to support their diverse strengths and untrammelled potentials?

## VI.

In the 1955 edition of George Orwell's *'Homage to Catalonia'*<sup>8</sup> Lionel Trilling said, in his Introduction to Orwell's writings on the Spanish Civil War, just what I want to say about Leanne Rivlin and Maxine Wolfe's fine book. Here is some of that writing, paraphrased:

"Leanne and Maxine's book would make only a limited claim upon our attention if it were nothing more than a record of lives lived in children's institutions. But it is much more than this. It is a revelation of the nature of modern political life. It is also a demonstration on the part of its authors of one of the right ways of confronting that life".

"If we ask what it is that Leanne and Maxine stand for, the answer is: the virtue of not acting as geniuses, of fronting the world with nothing more than one's simple, direct, undeceived intelligence, and a respect for the powers one does have, and the work one undertakes to do. They are great concentrations of intellect and emotion, we feel that they have soaked up all the available power, monopolizing it and leaving none for us. We feel that if we cannot be as they, we can be nothing. How they glitter, and with what imperious way they seem to deal with

<sup>8</sup> Orwell, George, (1955), *Homage to Catalonia* (Boston, Beacon Press), pp. v, x-xi, xxiii.

*circumstances, even when they are wrong. Lacking their patents of nobility, we might as well quit".*

*"This book seems to become what it is chiefly by reason of the very plainness of Leanne and Maxine's minds, their simple ability to look at things in a downright undeceived way. They are not geniusses - what a relief! What an encouragement. For they communicate to us the sense that what they have done, any one of us could do. Or could do if we but made up our mind to do it, if we but surrendered a little of the cant that confronts us, if for a few weeks we paid no attention to the little group with which we habitually exchange opinions, if we took our chance of being wrong or inadequate, if we looked at things simply and directly, having only in mind our intention of finding out what they really are, not the prestige of our great intellectual act of looking at them. They liberate us. They tell us we can understand our political and social life merely by looking around us, they free us from the need for the inside dope. They imply that our job is not to be intellectual, certainly not to be intellectual in this fashion or that, but merely to be intelligent according to our lights - releasing us from the belief that the mind can work only in a technical, professional way, and that it must work competitively".*

*"Leanne and Maxine tell the truth, and they tell it in an exemplary way, quietly, simply, with due warning to the reader that it is their truth. They use no political jargon, and they make no recriminations. They make no effort to show that their hearts are in the right place, or the left place. They are not interested in where their hearts might be thought to be, since they know where theirs are. They are interested only in telling the truth".*

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