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learning how to orchestrate and be a participant in a group activity, and of learning the importance of flexibility and vulnerability. The making of the Piazza both as product and process, was at times exhilarating, scary, confusing, and, most of all, educational. The exhilaration stemmed from the sheer fun of making an unconventional space with an unconventional set of rules and design parameters. The scary side came from working for the first time with a fancy guy like Charles W. Moore. This confusion always prevailed, because confusion is so much a part of Moore’s existence. He thrives on the edge of disaster yet can always turn the most confusing of signals into the most clever of solutions. It takes (which I was later to learn) a great amount of courage to hang on until the very last moment when, unknown to most of us, Charles would snatch order and meaning out of ever growing clouds of confusion. He thrilled on this dance with disorder and, by his example, taught us all how to dance. Making the Piazza was educational because amid the searching, confusion, and “scarcity” we were always learning and exploring—never content with the directions established yesterday. Each day’s work was a jumping-off point for tomorrow’s explorations. Because design work was always done in a group situation, the techniques for brainstorming and playing off each other’s ideas became central to working together. The pooling of good thoughts and the sharing of bad ideas was a very liberating experience. Charles’ self-confidence and his ever present ability to rescue and make wonderful out of the most awkward of ideas helped everyone remain open and vulnerable. I hope that such openness and vulnerability extends into the planning of the Fair. The ability to think and explore unconventional ideas and recognize the emergence of unconventional solutions has been invaluable. Whereas the Piazza process usually involved four or five individuals, the World’s Fair planning involves the orchestration of 35 separate design and engineering firms. With so many people involved in design and with myriad philosophies available, carving out common ground for master planning and also allowing individual expression is crucial. The ability to orchestrate individuals, to allow them free reign to pursue their own intentions, requires a high-wire balancing. While the potential for success is great, the risk of mediocrity is even greater.

Donlyn Lyndon

It remains a little bit disconcerting, a surprisingly untried place in an unlikely position. But is part of the price to be paid for a public space that was built first to attract investment later.

Much has been made of, and much disputed about, the “Italianness” of the Piazza d’Italia. It was sponsored by members of the Italian community, its plan shape is based on the map of Italy, its walls are embellished with various frescoing versions of the classical orders, its colors hover around tones named for Italian regions, and, surely, its most important predecessor is the Trevi Fountain.

But the back-biting professional arguments that this place has spawned (mostly among critics who have never visited the Piazzas) are curious. The use of the map of Italy is a ploy, perhaps, to keep the Italian connection alive, yet the use of the orders is derived in part from the Piazza itself. The Piazza contains full-blown, giant-odor, classical details, which offers some unreconstructed modernities—but because these details are “incorrect” (if not outrageous) varications on the classical forms, which offend those recently reconstituted classicists who consider themselves guardians of the sacred trust. In either case the good-natured willful inventiveness of it seems to cause the most

offense. “Whimsy,” we are told since since then, we could possibly need to be, “has no place in civic art”—a point that was lost, apparently, on several generations of baroque sculptors.

Being there, all that seems beside the point. The place itself is extraordinary, an evocative interweaving of form, color, and light that escapes categorization. It is, more than anything else, robustly present and paradoxically soothing. The layered curving screens offer an array of shifting views streaked with modulated sunlight; the terraced forms of the fountain mass invoke clambering around and in the water; the water itself leaks, surges, splashes, sprays, and drips around and among sparkling black and white land forms, reflective sheets of stainless steel, and glowing stucco colors. It asks those who are there. Its significance lies in the experience—the opportunities for engagement that it affords—engagement of the eye, of the body, and of the mind. It offers opportunities to know one’s own human capabilities by seeing them reflected in a place intensely invested with imagination.

The surroundings will come later—those that are not already there. For the Piazza d’Italia is only a part of a
larger complex that includes a singularly dreary, recent office tower that was already on the site, as well as remnants of earlier nineteenth-century buildings that have been kept intact as street frontage for the block. A large urban gateway has already been built, as has a passageway through one of the adjoining, early brick commercial buildings. The rest of the project has floundered with the economy, so that as yet there is little activity in the Piazza except on festa days. But the adjoining properties are now being designed as a hotel, which should bring life and dollars to the area, albeit not for the community-based passagio that may originally have been intended. The hotel will take responsibility for managing and maintaining the area, which will please the city hall budget-makers, but which also raises the worrisome possibility that the space will read more as a feature of the hotel than as a truly public place.