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Spaces of Bonding and Separation

In one sense, the space between is at the margins, easily conceived as leftover; nevertheless, it is essential to life. For plants it provides the opportunity for growth; for animals it gives room to move. For humans it does both, and more: the spaces between people are the spaces of society. They provide us the opportunity to reach out to each other; they also give us room for separation. In the spaces between we build the structure of our relationships.

This is such an obvious point, yet we get it wrong so often, especially when we build. The world is full of buildings that leave spaces between which might allow for expansion or “breathing room” or provide in a rudimentary way for movement, but which ill suit the requirements of community.

Columbia Point, in Boston, was a textbook example of getting it wrong. The whole project was conceived, we must presume, with good intentions, but in a way that distanced what was considered to be a problem population from the rest of the city and, coincidentally, from access to jobs and services. The project started with a false premise and was designed in a way that did not account for the social histories of the people who lived there. The spaces between dwelling units were conceived only as breathing room, not as spaces that could support a plausible — or even workable, let alone amenable — structure of relationships between people.

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In this issue we hear a part, the most encouraging part, of the long and complex story involved in recovering a sense of community structure for this place, a story that has spread across most of the working life of a generation of residents, activists, planners, and architects. It is a story involving deprivation, social disorganization, community participation, courage, and heroism — things that happen in the space between.

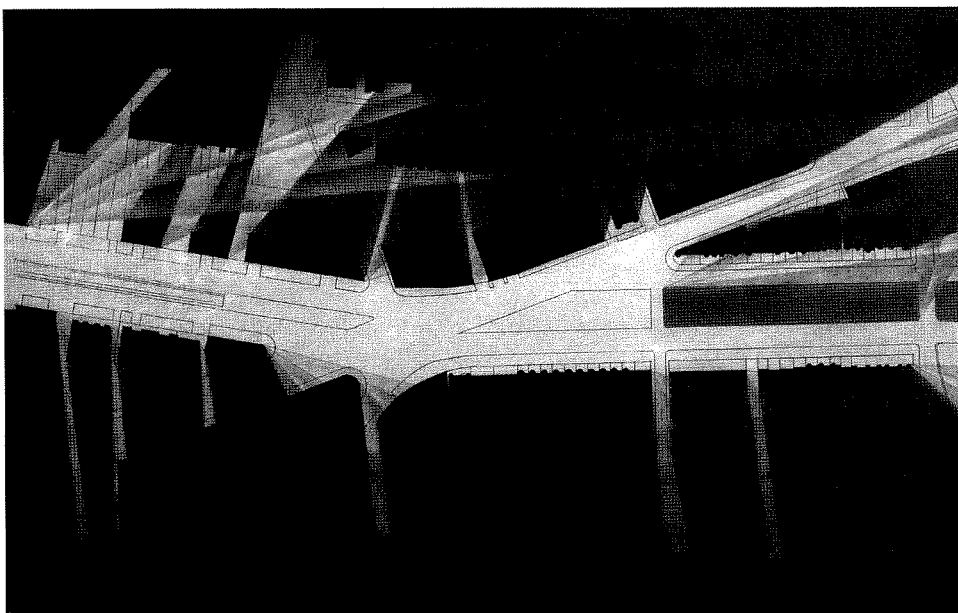
Human community is a construct, and a frail one at that. The structure of relationships into which we are born has a history and form. But as our history evolves, the form of our relationships must also, with consequence for the spaces and objects that serve them.

Park benches, bridges, paths, yards, decks, parks, abandoned sites, city squares, and cloisters all figure prominently in this issue as instruments of separation

and bonding. They demonstrate that while our relationships are continually shifting, places are valuable because their history is long and multiple. Places exist in the minds of many, gather within them the forces of nature, and hold the traces of their inhabitants' values. Places spin the tales of collective understanding or neglect.

In an expanded portfolio section, we present the work of architects who study the space between. Their drawings, models, and photographs evoke not only the physical form of space — the raw material with which designers work — but also the social nature of space, and the special ways in which it conditions our actions and experience.

— *Donlyn Lyndon*



Kenmore Square,
Boston.
Ink and charcoal.
Drawing by
David Cook.