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Places for Peace: Garden IV [Transforming the American Garden: 12 New Landscape Designs-Exhibitor]

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Having the luxury of choosing any client, program and site for this exhibition, we tackled the design of a place for peace. We posed the question: What environment would make people confront the danger of nuclear war—and help them act to stop it?

We found a model for the kind of action we envisioned in Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's "stages of grieving" experienced by terminally ill patients. Going through the four stages enables the patients to deal with the reality of their condition and take action to help themselves. The stages include shock and disbelief when learning of their condition; numbness and depression at its ramifications; expression of anger and fear; and, finally, action to alter the condition.

Are we not all terminally ill unless we take action to stop the threat of nuclear annihilation? Yet we numb ourselves to its possibility. Reconstructing the stages of grieving may be one way to move us from denial to action.

As designers, we hoped that by representing physically each stage within a continuum, we could simulate the psychological sequence experienced by the grieving individual. We regarded each stage as a

place along a path, creating a journey that would lead the individual to understanding and expression, and thus to action. We now had a program. The question then became: What physical form should such a program take?

Gardens I-III, not depicted here, were a set of early explorations of our purpose. Garden I was a literal stroll garden in which programmed exhibition spaces were set along a path. Not satisfied, we created Garden II, with symbolic architectural forms that resonated feelings about nuclear annihilation, set within a perfected natural landscape. Feeling that we needed a closer integration of form and content, we designed Garden III, placing the symbolic architectural elements within an urban context; the garden journey would take place within a solid block of concrete.

Garden IV, the latest variation, is composed of a system of voids and spaces created by carving away at found places: a park and an underground subway and shopping area. Our principle now was the integration of form, content and context. In fact, Garden IV became its own context: indistinguishable from and continuous with its ordinary, everyday

urban environment in a manner that we intended to be disturbing and unnerving.

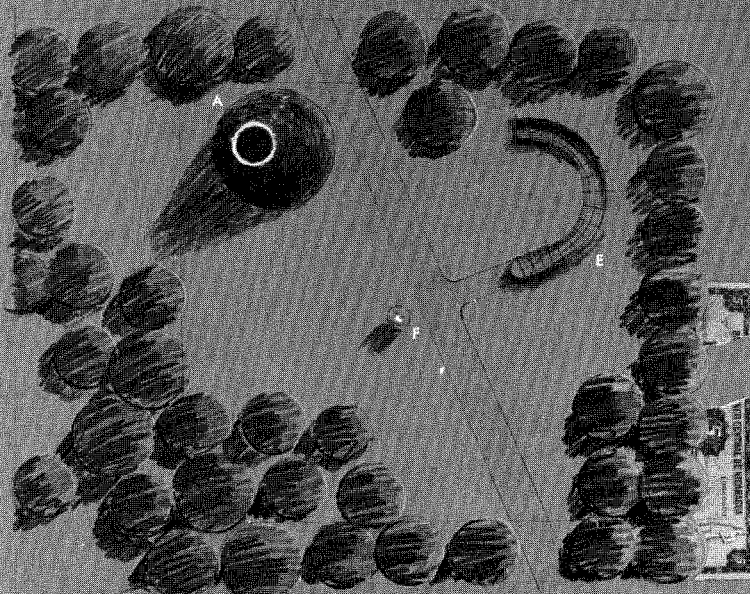
To make Garden IV, we assume that a benevolent developer has donated a 120-by-120-foot cube of underground shopping mall space and park land above it for a "place for peace." Located between two department stores and a parking garage, the area is accessible directly from the adjacent subway station. Long tunnels of raw concrete incline upward to a cone 60 feet in diameter; one is now at the midpoint of the cube. Fifty feet high with a 15-foot oculus skewed to the north and west, the interior walls of the cone, coated in gold, trigger associations with a temple, shelter, missile, infertile womb. Gas-fed flames are released through cracks in its walls and in the tunnels. After experiencing the constriction of the tunnels, one welcomes the grand scale of the cone, yet is shocked and awestruck by the flaming gold "inferno" it contains. Is this what it will be like. . . ?

Exiting the cone by another long tunnel, one has time to contemplate. Feeling numb, impotent and depressed, one emerges from the underground through a wrought-iron cage terminating at a

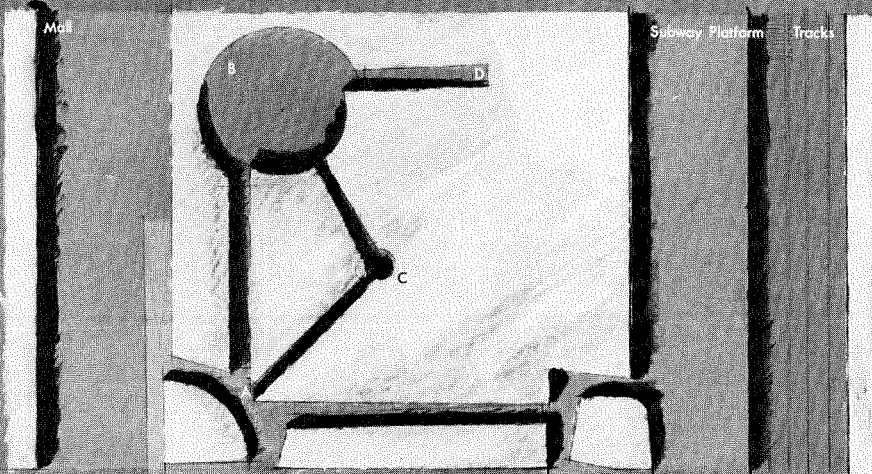
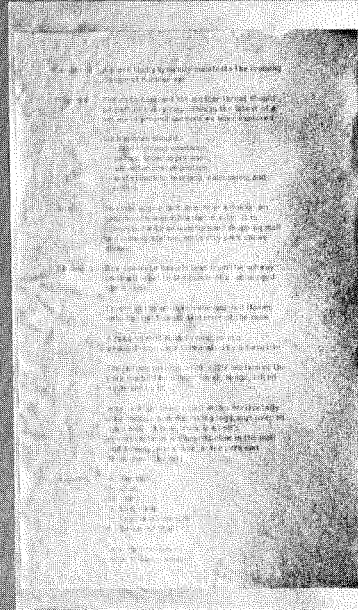
one-way turnstile in the city park above. One stops to regain one's bearings: the blackened exterior of the cone looms to the right, and is partially submerged in the grassy parkland at an ominous, strange angle. A path cuts past obliquely. This part of the park resembles the rest, with its open, grassy areas alternated with shady stands of trees. Yet one senses something unsettling here: the outline of the cube below ground is marked in the parkland above by a one percent tilt to the east. It is submerged six to eighteen inches below its surrounds, thereby set apart, made sacred, sunken.

Departing by the turnstile, one faces a large, cylindrical, bronze bell suspended above a shaft in the ground. Stepping up on a platform, one pulls the wooden striking log, horizontally suspended from a crossbar, and rams the bell. Effort is required; expression is achieved. When struck, the massive bell's reverberations are heard through the shaft in the mall and subway below and, above, in the park and throughout the city. Perhaps ultimately, through individual and collective actions, this audible beacon of distress and imploration will reverberate throughout the world.

Places for Peace: GARDEN IV



Garden Level



Subway Level

