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ARCH 4000

From:

Gordon Cullen

The Concise Townscape

Van Nostrand: New York, 1961

pp. 17 – 18 – 19 “Serial Vision”

pp. 25 “Enclosure”

pp. 43 “Deflection”

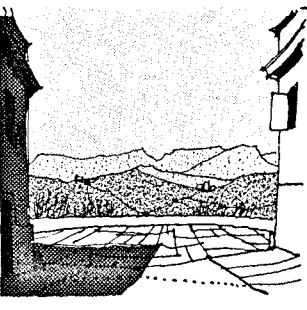
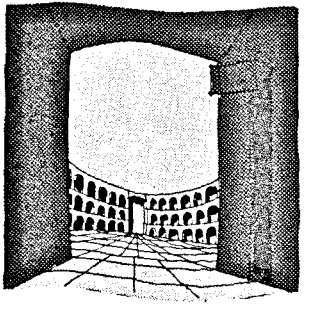
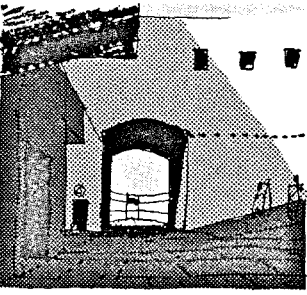
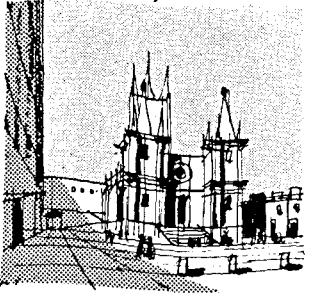
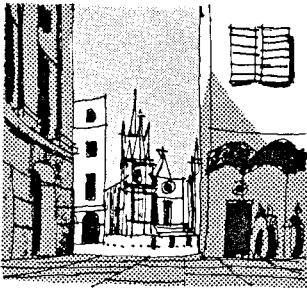
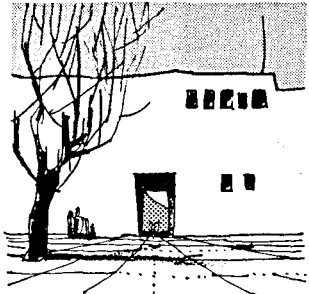
pp. 45 “Punctuation”

pp. 47 “Closure”

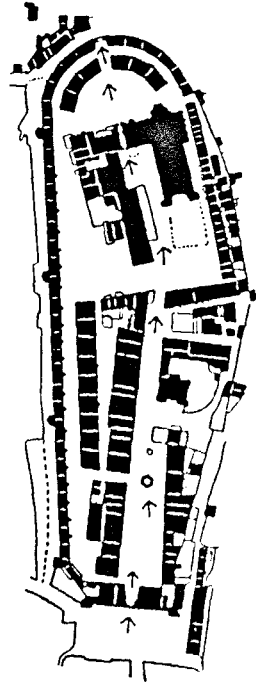
pp. 102 “The Square as Quadrangle”

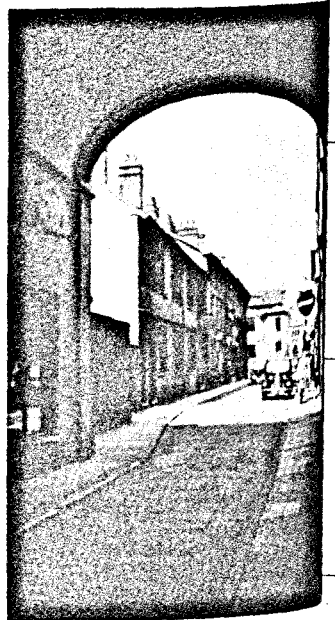
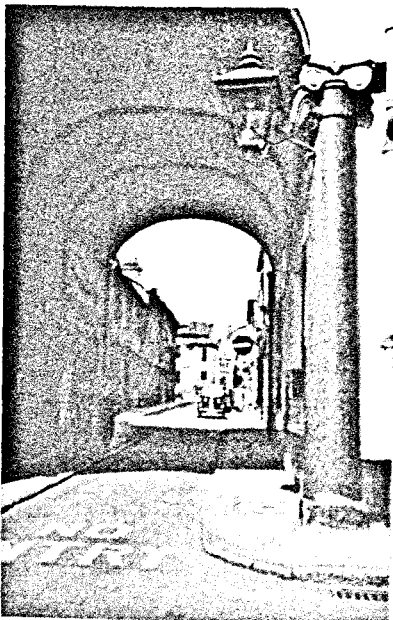
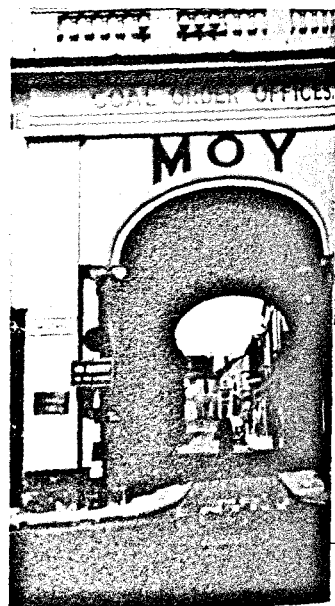
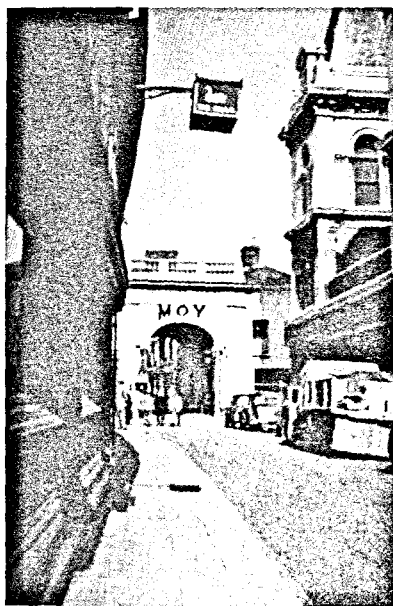
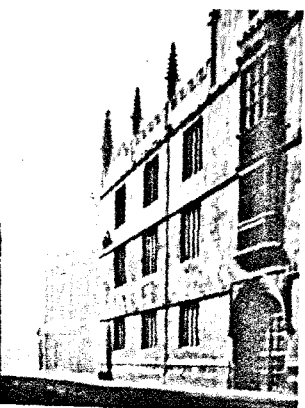
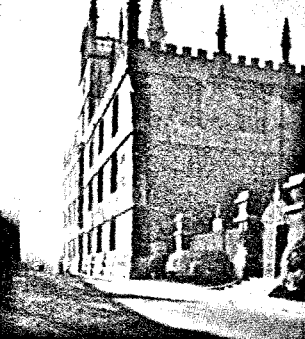
pp. 138 “Quick, Loose Drawings of Urban Space”

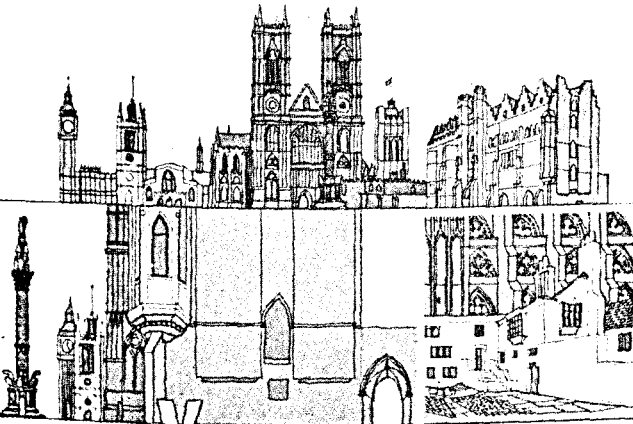
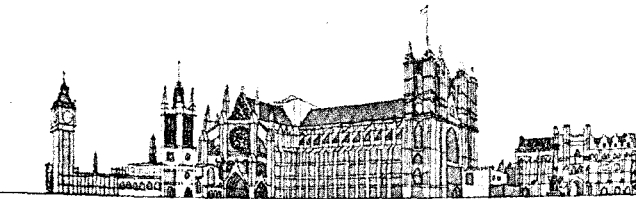
## CASEBOOK: SERIAL VISION



To walk from one end of the plan to another, at a uniform pace, will provide a sequence of revelations which are suggested in the serial drawings opposite, reading from left to right. Each arrow on the plan represents a drawing. The even progress of travel is illuminated by a series of sudden contrasts and so an impact is made on the eye, bringing the plan to life (like nudging a man who is going to sleep in church). My drawings bear no relation to the place itself; I chose it because it seemed an evocative plan. Note that the slightest deviation in alignment and quite small variations in projections or setbacks on plan have a disproportionately powerful effect in the third dimension.







These three sequences, Oxford, Ipswich and Westminster, try to recapture in the limited and static medium of the printed page a little of the sense of discovery and drama that we experience in moving through towns. Oxford; the cube, 1, the drum, 3, and the cone, 4, create an unfolding drama of solid geometry. This is the unfolding of a mystery, the sense that as you press on more is revealed. Ipswich; a modest archway performs the office of dividing the prospect into two things, the street you are in and the place beyond, into which you emerge so that you move out of one ambience into another. Westminster; the shifting interplay of towers, spires and masts, all the intricacy of fresh alignments and grouping, the shafts of penetration and the sudden bunching of emphatic verticals into a dramatic knot, these are the rewards of the moving eye, but an eye which is open and not lazy.

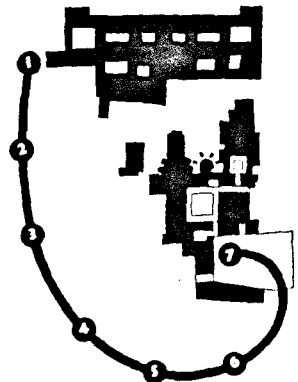
1

2

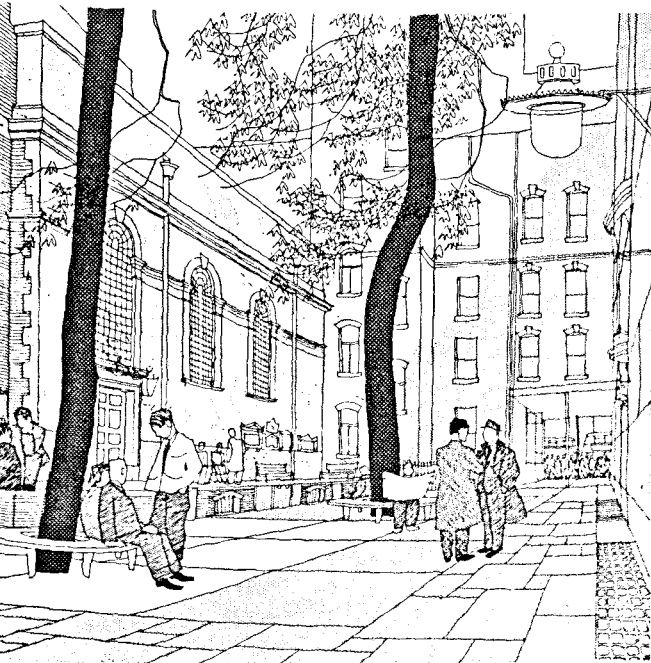
3

4

5



Plan of Westminster, showing  
6, 7 viewpoints



### enclaves

The enclave or interior open to the exterior and having free and direct access from one to the other is seen here as an accessible place or room out of the main directional stream, an eddy in which footsteps echo and the light is lessened in intensity. Set apart from the hurly-burly of traffic, it yet has the advantage of commanding the scene from a position of safety and strength.

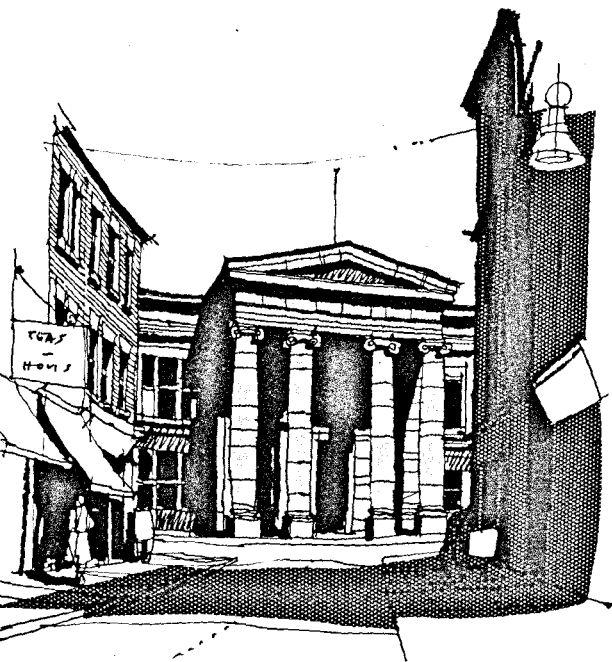
### enclosure

Enclosure sums up the polarity of legs and wheels. It is the basic unit of the precinctual pattern; outside, the noise and speed of impersonal communication which comes and goes but is not of any place. Inside, the quietness and human scale of the square, quad or courtyard. This is the end product of traffic, this is the place to which traffic brings you. Without enclosure traffic becomes nonsense.



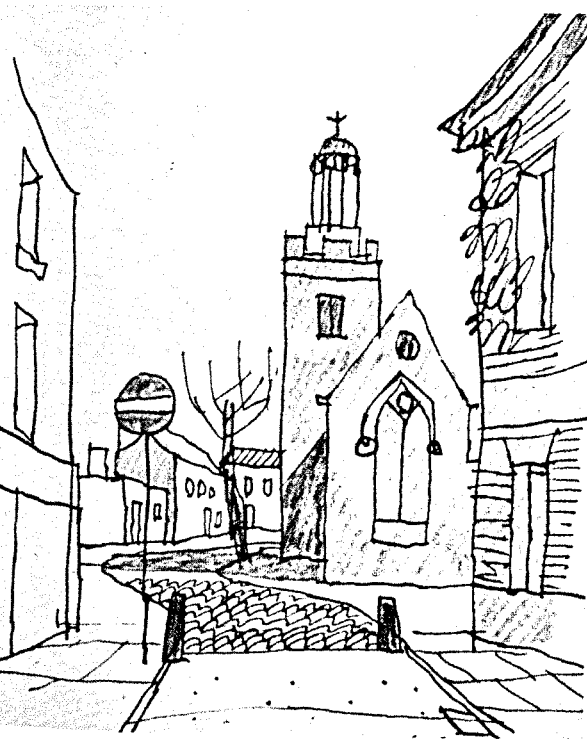
### closed vista

Probably the most banal of all the Beaux Arts gambits is the closed vista, which puts a building down and then invites you to step back and admire it. This is a somewhat inorganic and purely architectural attitude, but the closed vista is yet capable of infinite adaptation. The particular instance here shows the author's sketch for the development of the precinct of Liverpool cathedral, in which the vista is closed by the mass of the tower—but the scene is really given life by the great arch of the transept which is in black shade and swallows up the pedestrian's glance in mystery.



### deflection

A variation on the closed vista is deflection, in which the object building is deflected away from the right angle, thus arousing the expectation that it is doing this to some purpose, i.e. that there is a place at the end of the street as yet unseen and of which this building forms a coherent part. This is invariably not so, but deflection arouses the thought.



### punctuation

If the vista seems like a complete sentence containing subject and predicate, the use of the word punctuation may clarify those demarcations of the enclosed phrase which this picture illustrates. In the continuing narrative of the street, function and pattern change from place to place; this should be acknowledged by some physical signal. The church, for instance, being a particular building, interrupts the alignment of the street and so closes one phrase and conceals the next, so that a pause is created.



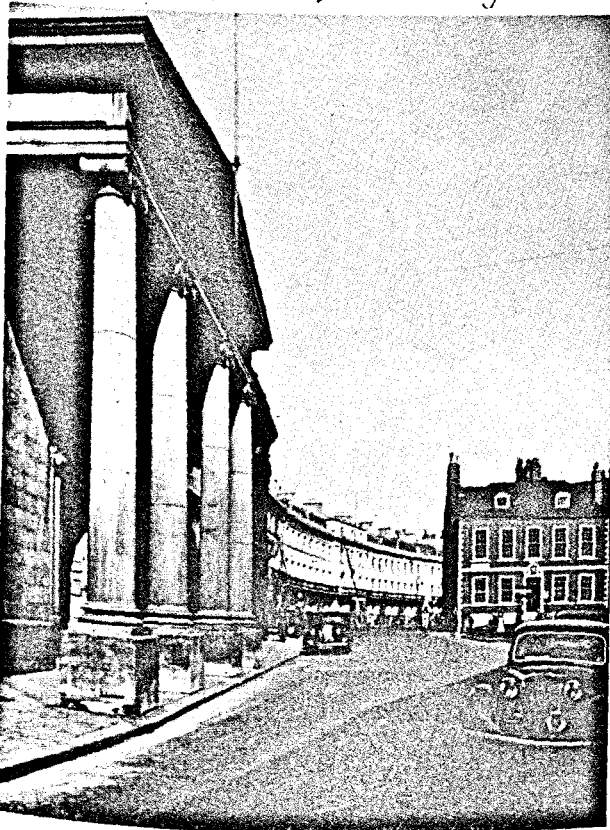
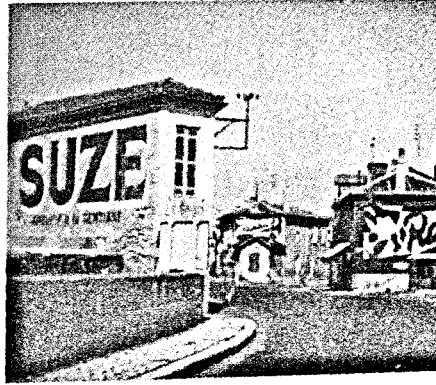
### narrows

The crowding together of buildings forms a pressure, an unavoidable nearness of detail, which is in direct contrast to the wide piazza, square or promenade, and by the use of such narrows it is possible to maintain enclosure without forbidding the passage of vehicles and pedestrians. In this way the articulation of the city into clear and well-defined parts is made more possible. In its own right narrowness has a definite effect on the pedestrian, inducing a sense of unaccustomed constriction and pressure.



## closure

In enclosure the eye reacts to the fact of being completely surrounded. The reaction is static: once an enclosure is entered, the scene remains the same as you walk across it and out of it, where a new scene is suddenly revealed. Closure, on the other hand, is the creation of a break in the street which, whilst containing the eye, does not block out the sense of progression beyond as in the example at Buckingham. You'll probably get the hang of it by studying the siting of advertisements in the French village.





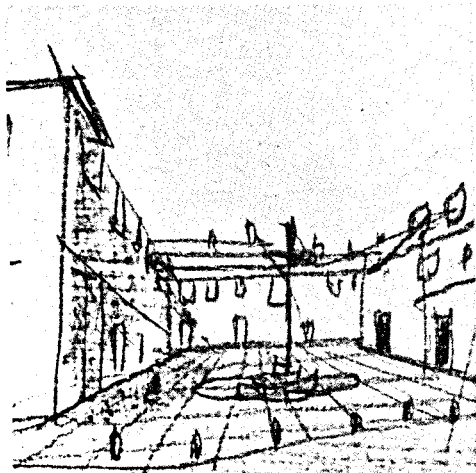
the square as quadrangle: the collegiate square

With the reorganization of traffic and the formation of precincts the flow of vehicles will be reduced to those which have business in the area. Even so in certain squares there should be pedestrian priority—that is to say, if there is a pedestrian and a taxi, the taxi gets out of the way of the pedestrian. The attempt to preserve a few square feet of cat-ridden, sooty turf in the smaller public squares is surely hardly worth the trouble. Rather pave the whole area

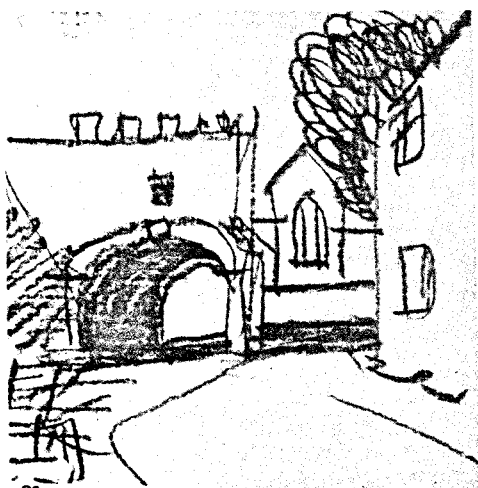
as in the Temple Courts, which will emphasize the collegiate atmosphere and the pedestrian priority; it will also emphasize the fact that these squares have become the property of all. The quadrangle is the basis or neutral pattern which will vary as local conditions change. It may be municipal as in the example of Russell Square, exclusive as in Grosvenor Square, popular as in Leicester Square, or quietly collegiate as in this example of Manchester Square.



19



20



21

19, in this enclosure we find one side busy with shops and the wide pavement filled with stalls on market day.

20, whilst, turning back, the domestic enclave is revealed.

21, the exit. Again, we are not presented with an interminable vista but by one blocked by buildings.

Compare the two air views on the right, the one of Blanchland, 22, and the other of the proposed town centre of Crawley, 23. The approaches to planning seem to be diametrically opposed. In the first the village centre is treated as an urban space in contrast to the surrounding countryside; it has no trees and it is paved. It establishes itself as man-made and orderly. Furthermore the buildings have been arranged to create a sense of enclosure, of cosiness, and of drama in the progressive revealing of space and use. These things are the stuff of towns. For a more recent example the reader is referred to Well Hall Estate, Eltham, built in 1915, p. 164. The approach at Crawley appears to be a pure recoil from the physical conditions of traffic jams and overcrowding in the metropolis. In this it probably succeeds. And yet of tension, drama, enclosure, surprise, there appears to be none. All the elements are there but the insistence on isolation is such that we are left with what we started with: a collection of roads, trees and buildings. Instead of townscape we have tree worship; instead of punctuated streets, AAAAA, OOOO, instead of a conception of the town as a homely, folksy living place where citizens can get together to drink, play, talk, and grow old as partakers in the greatest of all the privileges of civilization, social intercourse, we have ebbiness; the theory that everybody else stinks and so you must have as much room as possible between.

Translated into town planning jargon this quality of ebbiness becomes low-density housing—the results are deplorable—foot-sore housewives, cycle-weary workers, never-ending characterless streets, the depressing feeling of being a provincial or suburbanite in an environment that doesn't belong to town or country, and the impossibility of ever getting into the real country which this suburban sprawl has banished. End result—travelling shops and high rates to pay for acres of unnecessary pavements at twenty-five shillings a square yard. To sum up, the New Towns, except for rather better house plans, have advanced but little on the old housing estates. In the sense that they tend to occupy more valuable land they are actually a step back. Regarded as what their name claims for them, new towns, in spite of all the administrative energy, publicity and cash expended on them, what should have been a great adventure has come to nothing and less than nothing—and so far with hardly a word spoken in protest.