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Compositional Interpretations of Space

Bachelor of Architecture Thesis

by

Jeffrey P. Thompson

Spring 1993

Nick Salmon...*Advisor*

Clark Llewellyn...*Committee*

Thomas R Wood

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I have always been influenced by art work that addresses more than just factual information about a place, person or things. What art work says about mood, character or hierarchy is much more inspiring because these are interpretations from an individual. When art work does carry these messages it is successful since it displays experiential qualities of the place. The most recent influences I have had, of this nature, I will explain here and discuss the directions they have guided me throughout this project.

Douglas Cooper's book Drawing and Perceiving encourages a "Transactionalist" view of perception as a fundamental part of drawing to represent a place. The Transactionalist Theory emphasizes the role of interaction with the environment as a basis for perception. This theory is the heart of my project's studies, each of my compositions relay information about my experiences with a particular location. It is after these studies that I am sure of Cooper's statements: "You must maintain a wary suspicion of any approach to drawing that is built solely on sensibilities that are purely visual."

Even the most visually dominated compositions such as drawing and photography carry messages to our other senses. Because our senses are so intertwined with each other, it makes little sense to concentrate on just one in the process of making a composition, no matter what the media you're working with. Think of how color is so strongly related with temperature, Texture with comfort or shape and size with movement. These are just three visual symbols that connect with experiential qualities. The more one understands about these symbols and the more consciously one manipulates them, the truer a composition will be to an actual experience.

"Perception is not acquired by formal education, nor is it necessarily vouchsafed to those who are learned in the arts or sciences. Perception is merely a recognition of ethical and aesthetical values to be found in natural things. It is clear, therefore, that perception is something that grows through various stages of development." This is a quote from the journals of Aldo Leopold which influenced me to document as many experiences as possible into compositions, so that the development of my perception could be examined and critiqued. Since it is the growth of my perception that I want to emphasize, it became apparent that each place I wished to represent in a composition must be visited again and again. I collected these different experiences, witnessing changing light, temperature, weather, traffic, people,...etc., and I also selectively gathered materials of potential aesthetic value for use in these compositions. Materials otherwise considered litter, I found and used from the streets of Bozeman: cardboard (slides 5,8,11-17), paper bags (slides 2,5,7-9,13,14), magazines (slides 3,4,10,12,13-16), various colored papers (slides 3,5,8,12-17), fabric (slide 3), screen, and metal ribbon (slide 15).

The photographic work of two artists, David Hockney and Jerry Uelsmann, has also inspired my direction in this project. Their richly uninhibited manipulations of photography for the purpose of conveying a message, a message otherwise uncommunicative in "traditional" photographic work. Their work encourages new ways of approaching photography as a representational art. Art that is not only visually composed but talks to our other senses, especially mood. David Hockney's work provided a stimulus in my work of multi-media collage, "joiner" photographic collage (slide 6) and furthered my understanding of figure-ground importance in composition.

At this point it was clear that my studies were to focus upon creating compositions based upon my interaction with the environment (Transactionalist), to display a progression or growth in these studies, and by using multi-media collage (in colors and materials) stimulate more than just visual sensations to the viewer. It was essential to define an environment to do my studies in which I could visit at different times and in all types of weather.

Bozeman was the obvious choice for this kind of project. So, I somewhat arbitrarily chose to delineate a straight line which bisects town, with the use of aerial photographs (1"= 200' scale). This line, or "pathway" (as I will refer to it, even though it does not exist as an unobstructed walkable path), as defined is the line generated when my desk in Cheever Hall (1200 block south 11th) is connected with the telephone pole on the corner of East Tamarack and North Wallace Streets (800 block, see slide 1). Throughout spring, January-April 1993, I produced commentary on subjects located on this pathway in a number of media, most media (materials) used was found or collected from households (with consent of the inhabitant) along this pathway. The types of commentary I produced included: color drawing (slides 1,3,7,10), paper collage (slides 2-4,8-10,12-16), shallow relief (slide 4), photography (slide 6), three-dimensional model forms (slides 5,8,9,11-17), as well as video camera recording and audio tape recordings, all of which were generated from a walking person's perspective.

Since this pathway cuts diagonally to the street grid, it bisected many different realms of Bozeman's social atmosphere. Institutional (slides 9,10), commercial (slides 4,6,12), public (slides 4,6,7,9,10,12,13,16), private (slides 3,5,8,14,15), and industrial (slides 1,2,14,17). Many different

relationships between building form and open space were also depicted. With each new composition I tried to further my interpretive involvement in the environment and thus into the composition itself by progressing from drawing to collage to relief to full three-dimensional modeling (the slides are chronologically ordered).

After completing twelve compositions (slides 1-12) I began to create a model and site that possessed many qualities parallel to what I had been experiencing on the pathway. This model (slides 13,14) would seem to be two building structures sitting within the streets of Bozeman, but it actually does not imitate or depict an existing place in Bozeman, rather, it tries to model many places through one condensed environment. The focus of this 1/4 scale model was to construe relationships of ground surface, built forms and artifacts of human presence. From this model I attempted to interpret these relationships into compositions (slide 15-17), much like the compositions I created from the pathway itself. Again the focus is to stimulate moods about this non-existing place, thus stirring personal involvement with it and rendering it closer to an actual experience.

The nature of my project studies truly lends itself to a lifetime of involvement, which it will, but I have tried to create an understandable and definable beginning, body and conclusion. The beginnings of this project were inspired by artists pushing our conventional understanding of places, encouraging us to witness environments in many different ways. The body of this project was the compositional studies of existing environments in a variety of media and techniques, to advocate seeing everyday environments in inspiring ways. The conclusion of this project was the most involved study, including the creation of an environment (in

model form) and the interpretations of its multiple experiential and detailed characteristics. The validity of such a project lies in the constant need of architects and designers to be able to experience, live in, walk through and understand places that do not yet exist.

This composition is submitted in partial fulfillment of the Degree
Bachelor of Architecture

by
Jeffrey P. Thompson

Approved:

Advisor

Committee Member

Director, School of Architecture

May 1993

Montana State University
College of Arts and Architecture
Bozeman, Montana

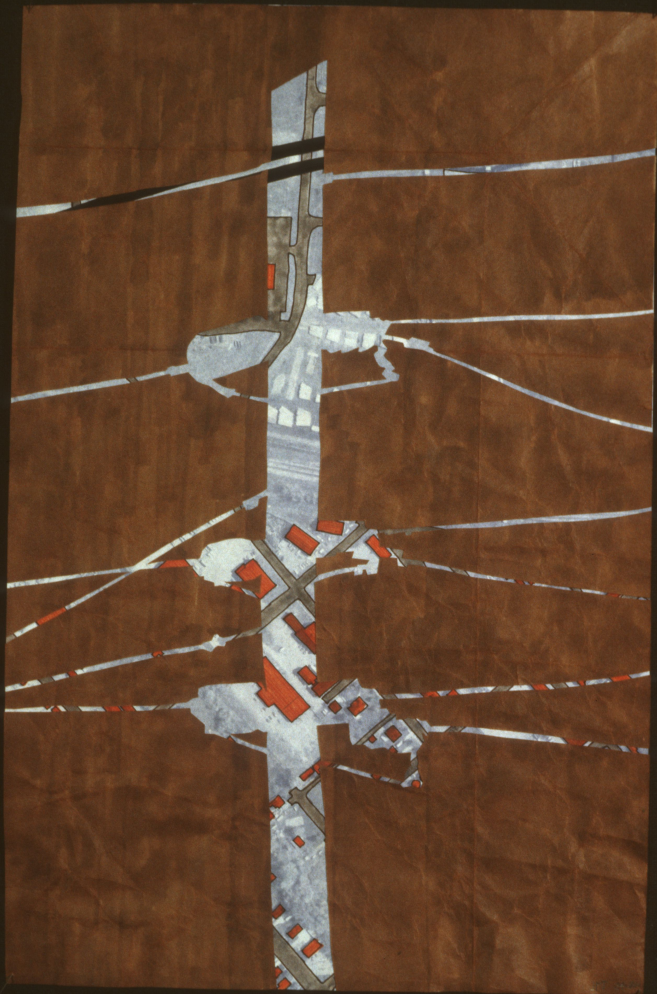
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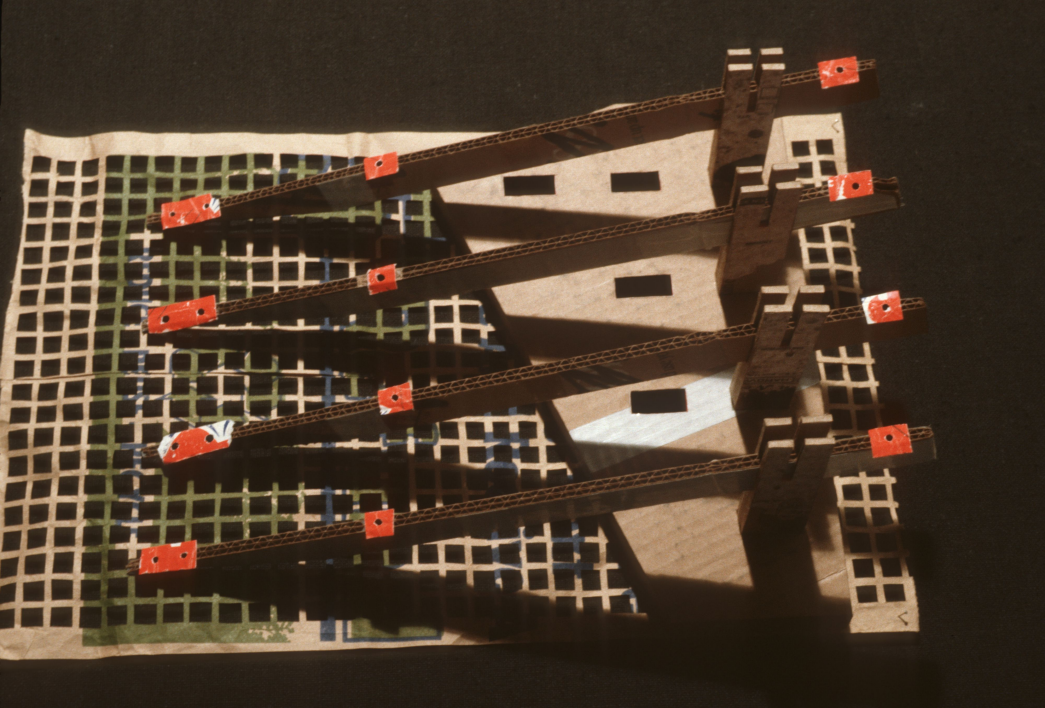
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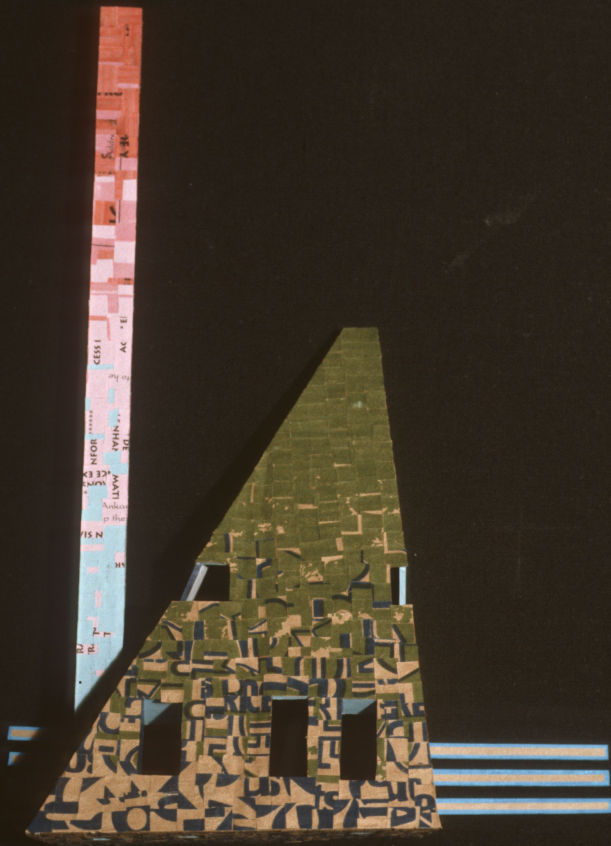






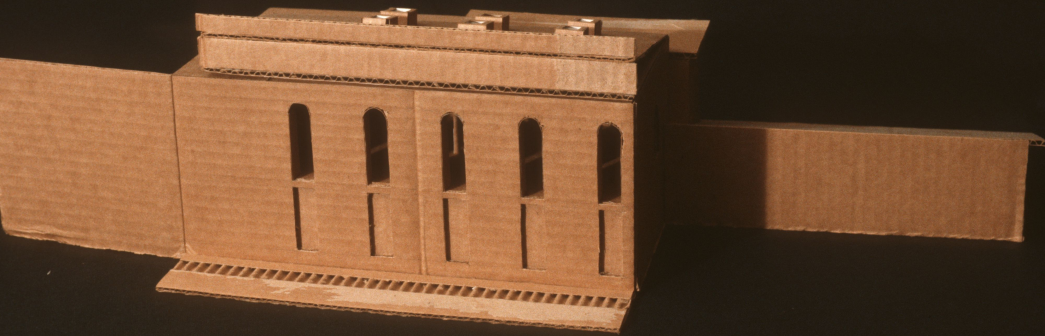




















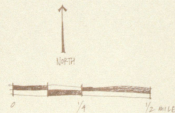






BOZEMAN

Gallatin County, Montana
STREET MAP 1"=880'



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