

Norman Finkelstein / from A PATTERN LANGUAGE

CHILDREN IN THE CITY

and beyond
a network of safe paths
the city as school or playground
changing at a whim

an open city
with great swatches of common land,
markets, promenades, public squares, cafes,
ribbons of industry and scattered work,
bike paths, green streets, local
town halls and services,
still water, birth places,
graves and sacred sites

and to deal with this

vagueness and unboundedness
as the poem like the
"adventurous young"
goes forth to teach
to learn and play

Ruptures
appear in the text
constitute
the house of the life being lived
In town "There is a small
but ominous danger . . ."

Yet "the path goes past
and through interesting parts
of the city;
and it is relatively safe"

That it enters the contours
of the larger patterns;
accommodates smaller needs
and minor desires along
its sinuous way

"down pedestrian streets,
through workshops, assembly plants,
warehouses, interchanges,
print houses, bakeries,
all the interesting
'invisible' life of a town"

Perhaps
(he could write in the next letter)
we must take the risk
The poem resists closure
courts formlessness for the sake of growth
as this unlikely
private soul
risks civic utterance

"Line the children's path with windows,
especially from rooms that are in frequent use,
so that the eyes upon the street
make it safe for the children."

QUIET BACKS

Hurried along . . .

Went through . . .

Came out behind . . .

“a long ribbon
of quiet alleyways
which converge on the local
pools and streams
and the local greens”

So that the buildings,
the sites of noisy life,
shield us,
offer a temporary
respite

Couples, small groups,
solitary walkers,
thoughtful souls
seated beneath trees
“where the mood is slow
and reflective”

And I know
why you have come here
I know
how long you’ve been gone
how brief will be your stay

sound of bees
among the columbines
sound of water
falling over the wall falling
from pool to pool.

GRAVE SITES

... Nearby, just off the path, we came upon a little grave site, roughly triangular in shape, enclosed by a low stone wall and shaded by a willow. The gate was open; we entered and stood about, or sat upon an iron bench which faced the graves—some two or three of them, it being difficult to determine the precise number. There had been some settling; the stones had tilted, and one had actually cracked in half; though on closer examination, the graves seemed of no great age. The inscriptions on the stones were indecipherable: among our group, some recognized the alphabet but did not know the language, while others had never seen such writing before. Our guide was at a loss to explain the site; he knew no stories connected with it, nor had any previous sightseers enquired of him about it. It was, however, a pleasant spot in its own melancholy way; and certain members of our party remained there for some time, in quiet reflection or simply enjoying the cool breeze.