

Bodies and Buildings

An embodied exploration of Reston, Virginia

CONTENTS

Introduction	
Maps	3
Getting to Reston	9
“New Towns: 18 Miles from the Capital”	12
Reston Master Plan	14
How Suburbia Happened	21
Lake Anne	24
Reston Used Book Shop	26
Reston Museum	34
When a Town is like a Tree	37
“City Builder”	39
Bronze Bob	40
“When I think of Reston, I think of Community”	41
Cities, architecture, movement	43
Frozen Speed	49
Reston Paths	51
New Towns; Building the Ideal	54
“Gulf-Reston Chief: Something Old, New”	57
Meaningful Places; a three-part pattern	59
Lake Anne Coffee House	61
The Pyramid	65
The Chessboard	66
1644 Wainwright Drive	67
Basic Elements and Patterns	76
“watching the world go by”	78
The “D” Word	80
The Bodies of Buildings	81
Liminal Places and Borderlands	83
Brasilia	89
Reston Town Center	92
All Open Spaces are Not Created Equal	94
Water	96

Introduction

Often when we view a finished product, perhaps in the form of a painting, a book, or a performance, we may be less than likely to consider and wonder about the context in which it was created. In what kind of a room did the painter paint? Did the writer type at his desk at home or did he make a ritual of finding the same nook at the local library?

The relationship between structure and content have been the philosophical basis for my research in Reston and the creation of this book. Deciding whether to work in the comforts of my bedroom near where I sleep or in the living and on the couch where sunlight streams in strongly and reminds me of the time of day, or to leave home altogether and take the drive to school where I can sit in the extremely soundless and air-conditioned library - these seemingly-trivial decisions about context were important ones in my process. The content of this project is not independent from the context in which it was created and my productivity has been influenced by the places and environments that have been available for me in which to work.

I have always felt myself to be highly affected by and influenced by my environment. There is a sensitivity, and vulnerability in the boundary between my body and the outside world that has literally influenced my decisions - the content of my life. The consequence of such sensitivity and vulnerability is sometimes feeling like my inner world is at the mercy of what is happening outside. The very layout of a room, the types of seating and furniture available, or the quality and direction of light; these are all aspects of the environment that have never escaped me and their influences on my inner world have been strong enough to come to consciousness.

With the connection between structure and content in mind, I intended to collect information from a diverse variety of sources - my very personal, physical experiences in Reston, conversations with Restonians, readings in planning and architecture, and observations of people in a variety of public spaces. Similarly I hoped to present my findings and experience in the same multi-faceted way that I received the information. Some of the information I wished to share was most immediately communicated through my personal, writing voice. Others were captured most effectively through images or video. However, with the knowledge that I wanted the ultimate project to consist of a scrapbook, one major point of exploration for me was the way words and images, structured on a page, can most effectively communicate a message. As I began compiling the scrapbook, I noticed how slight deviations from standards page layouts had great potential for expressivity. If I cut the regular, 6 x 4 photo slightly to make it shorter and look wider, I was making a rather different statement than if I cut the side in and formed a longer image. Other variation and possibilities in color, shape, layers and layout provided exciting opportunities to connect structure and content.

Attention to the structure, the body, of my research reflects my interest in the structure of the human body and how it constructs individual experience. The body is the sole material structure through which our lives exist; through which we experience life and the world. Without the particular, moment-to-moment existence of these limited masses of muscle, tissue and bone, we could not say we are alive, as we know it. The body is not entirely free. It is bound by time, place, structural limits. And so our experience of the world through the limits of our bodies' physical existence are necessarily limited by context, time, place, memory, and physical structure. Perhaps my experiences as a dancer who has learned to be sensitive to the environment and respond to it physically is the reason for my interests. A continual desire to more fully understand and come to terms with the relationship between my mind, body and conscious awareness featured as a major impetus for this project. Things I have learned as a dancer have been realized in my life outside of the studio. I notice the way the built environment creates a stage for movement. Therefore, as I entered and explored Reston, I looked keenly for the ways in which Reston's architectural, and planned structure are affecting and creating the content of social relationship, public behavior and daily activities.

I would like to acknowledge a few people whose help and support during this process have given me the freedom to accomplish it. The undergraduate Maryland Summer Scholar research program generously offered the opportunity and financial support for this project, and I would like to thank them for their support of undergraduate research as mine. Thank you to Sharon Mansur for her incredible openness, and interest in any concept or idea that happens to strike my fancy and the vast amount of psychic support she offers by validating my ideas. Thank you as well to Ronit Eisenbach, Damian Sinclair of the Reston Community Center, Diane Thomas for welcoming me into her home, and Freya de Cola for sharing so much of Reston's past with me. Robert Simon is certainly a local celebrity and I would like to thank him for taking the time to talk to an undergraduate student and patiently answering questions that he has already answered for countless people over the years.

Raha Behnam
September 2011

A Brief Note on References and Citations

As I compiled this book, a major consideration and point of questioning for me was how to acknowledge the many sources I used in my background research. As a student of anthropology, I initially attempted to use the AAA style which would involve a “references cited” pages and in-text citations with the author’s last name as well as the year of publication. This immediately proved too cumbersome and the in-text citations interfered with the aesthetic qualities I was seeking in certain pages. I wanted to include many quotations from notable authors and reference them correctly without having to compromise the structure of my scrapbook and my aesthetic vision for it as a crafted work.

There are many imperfections and inconsistencies with the scrapbook but I have tried my best to make references as accessible as possible. There are footnote citations on essay pages that are more informative than purely aesthetic. For other pages where I wished to maintain the integrity of the structure I had created, I have included references that can be found in the back of the scrapbook, on a ‘References’ page. Additionally, please refer to the following list when a reference is not mentioned:

When a Town is like a Tree, pg 37	<i>The Timeless Way of Building</i> , Christopher Alexander
“Cities are thoroughly physical places” pg 43	<i>The Death and Life of Great American Cities</i> , Jane Jacobs
“All movement functions as a potential...” pg 44	<i>Body, Movement and Architecture</i> , Kent C. Bloomer
“We can identify...” pg 70 -75	<i>The Timeless Way of Building</i> , Christopher Alexander

In general, my the sources for this project include a few very important authors whose unique way of discussing architecture, cities, planning and the body are extremely profound and insightful for me. I hope that you will be inspired to read their extremely informative books as well.