

LAWRENCE HALPRIN  
A Colloquium  
Garden & Landscape Studies, Dumbarton Oaks  
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**Session I: Early Work and Preservation**

**Marc Treib**

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**From the Garden: Lawrence Halprin and the Modern Landscape**

The paper traces some of the ideas that propelled the evolution of the modern landscape in America from the 1930s through the years just after the Second World War. These include the relations between indoors and out, a selective plant palette, the swimming pool, use and activity, and modern art as a source for a formal vocabulary. California landscape design is the focus given Halprin's work there, first with Thomas Church and thereafter in independent practice. Early efforts in garden design provided the basis for much of his later suburban housing, urban plazas, and rural planning. The latter part of the paper singles out two typologies to which Halprin made substantial contributions: the conflating of the fountain and the plaza, and the early use of ecological inventory and design at The Sea Ranch.

**Kate John-Alder**

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

**Sea Ranch: A Wonderful Experiment in Ecological Planning**

Lawrence Halprin loved Sea Ranch -- the appearance of the place, the activities it promoted, and the flora and fauna it sheltered. He not only designed the original master plan for the community, but he also owned land and maintained a home there. Over the years, he created numerous drawings that recorded his perceptions of the landscape and his relationship to it. Many of these sketches illustrate the deep connections between the forms of nature, and the organisms that inhabit these forms -- whether presented as a rugged off shore roosting colony of cormorants, or a wood frame building huddled in the lee of a cedar hedgerow. These sketches are clearly a record of a personal environmental investigation

grounded in a thorough knowledge of ecology, but they also illustrate how a community of diverse inhabitants can live together and mutually enjoy the environment.

In *The Sea Ranch . . . Diary of an Idea* (2002), Halprin refers to his 1963-64 master plan as a “wonderful experiment in ecological planning” -- an integration of the natural and the man-made into a way of life. As this passage indicates, Halprin considered himself an ecological designer, with ecology defined as the relationship of an organism to its environment, including all the other organisms in that environment. But ecology was much more than a quantitative science for Halprin. In *The RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment* (1969) ecology determines the essential characteristics of a living, growing and productive community. And it is here that Halprin presents Sea Ranch as paradigmatic example of this biophysical and sociocultural union. In this community, “architecture and the land enhance each other,” and “with mutual respect, look after each other in a biologically ordered way.”

This essay examines Halprin’s ecological relationship with Sea Ranch. It does so by cross-referencing published information with new archival research. What it attempts to illustrate is the way Halprin transforms an ecological way of perceiving the environment into an operational framework for human habitation. As will be seen, the experimental nature of this approach operates through a number of formal registers, and across a range of spatial and temporal scales, including an experimental exercise, an ecoscore investigation of historical process, environmental data collection, and a bioclimatic design approach that follows the precepts of Victor Olgyay.

### **Charles Birnbaum**

The Cultural Landscape Foundation, Washington, DC

#### **Personal Reflections on Larry’s Legacy and its Stewardship**

*“Like anything I treasure them all just like you treasure children. Some of your children are more problems than others. But even so, you love them. I don’t think from my point of view that there’s much difference in my attitude about my children and my works of art.”*

Selection from Oral History Project with Halprin, 2003-2009

Larry Halprin passed away on October 25<sup>th</sup> 2009 at the age of 93. Just one month earlier his office would celebrate sixty years of practice in the Bay Area. With his archives and his autobiography safely in the hands of the University of Pennsylvania, and a number of his celebrated designs such as the Portland Chain of Open Spaces (which now has its own Conservancy) experiencing a newfound renaissance, Larry, with considerable reservations, would retire to his home with frequent visits to Sea Ranch to once again be a Sunday painter, to enjoy nature and his grandchildren.

I first visited Larry at his Battery Street office in San Francisco a little more than a decade ago – a time when his three career capstone projects -- Lucas Studios at the Presidio, Stern Grove, and Yosemite Falls were all on the boards. Ironically, it was because these projects were still to be built that scholars were late to evaluate Larry's work, and unlike Dan Kiley or Philip Johnson who both would live to see successful National Historic Landmark designations of their work during their lifetime, Larry was not as lucky and instead would witness the demolition and redesign of a number of his municipal projects from the 1960s and 1970s. This diverse collection included Nicollet Mall in Minneapolis, Skyline Park in Denver and the sculpture garden at the Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond. In addition, two of his revolutionary Bicentennial Commission projects – Seattle's Freeway Park and Fort Worth's Heritage Plaza would also be targets for less than sensitive renovations that would threaten their design integrity.

It was this shared concern to sympathetically guide these landscapes into the future that served as a personal bond for the two of us. Over the following decade, during my frequent visits to the Bay Area, what initially began as an interview to understand Larry's role at the Donnell Garden in Sonoma, grew to encompass advocacy work on myriad projects and a six year oral history initiative to document his life and work. This paper will explore that bond and how Larry's attitude about his own built legacy shifted during this last decade of his professional practice.



## **Session II: Planning**

**Randy Hester**

University of California at Berkeley

**Interview with Lawrence Halprin, Places Magazine**  
*(see enclosed article)*

**Alison Bick Hirsch**

University of Pennsylvania

**Lawrence and (Anna) Halprin's Invitation to Take Part --- (RSVP Required)**

In response to public alienation from environmental decision-making and the subjugation of communities to urban renewal schemes, landscape architect Lawrence Halprin, with his firm Lawrence Halprin and Associates, developed a participatory design process called Taking Part. The origins and structures of the process was largely impacted by the work of his wife, avant-garde dancer and choreographer Anna Halprin. The following paper will introduce the stimulus and development of the Take Part Process during the 1960's and then focus on its application in downtown Cleveland, Ohio (1973-1975) to demonstrate its strengths, shortcomings and potentials for adaptation in current practice.



### **Session III. Lifelong Influences and working relationships**

**Judith Wasserman**

University of Georgia

#### **Larry and Ann Halprin: Creative Synergy in a Transformative Age**

How do you analyze the influential trails of two lives interwoven in marriage? Not only did the creative geniuses of Larry and Ann offer up to each a continual stimulating cross-pollination of ideas as well as cutting edge creative explorations from their respective fields of landscape architecture and dance, but through their integrated life journeys, they were both exposed to some of the most preeminent designers, dancers, artists, musicians and theatrical personalities. The list is long and impressive: Frank Lloyd Wright in their Wisconsin years, Walter Gropius and Martha Graham in the couple's Cambridge and New York era, and a spectacular list of modern and post-modern artists and designers who they entertained in their California home.

Larry and Anna Halprin's forward-thinking ideas were engaged fully by the explosion of experimentation and radical politics in the San Francisco Bay Area. Not only were they situated in the epicenter of the human potential movement, the free speech movement, and social experimentation – they were at the forefront. Between Larry's experience with living in a collective socialist society in Israel and Ann's openness and promotion of physicality, body engagement in place, and psychologically driven movement exploration, this transformative time and place was one they embraced.

While achieving pre-eminence in their respective disciplines, each also assisted the other in solving creative dilemmas. One person's artistic production inspired the other to frame his or her work in a newly inspired way. Larry's codification and graphic organization of Anna's theatrical dance scores forwarded his ideas of using scoring notation in the design process to embed spaces that invite physical motion. The RSVP Cycles emerged collaboratively as an

approach to directing dancers in Anna's post-modern improvisational dance directives and found easy translation to community participatory engagement in the design and planning process. Anna's challenging works transposed the spectator with the performer. The same period her dancers climbed down from the proscenium arch in a San Francisco theater, his design for the Auditorium Forecourt fountain (now the Ira Keller fountain) exploded as a space ambiguously inviting both spectatorship and performance. Just as Anna Halprin had her dancers engaged with outdoor urban environments, Larry Halprin's research and work on space and place for the City of New York in 1968 – leading to the publication of New York, New York – was based on site specific studies of movement in public places. In this work Larry Halprin insisted on including low-income African-American communities in New York City in the planning process. Larry's then radical ideas of inclusion led Anna Halprin to reevaluate her work. As a result she stepped out of the comfort zone of middle class white San Francisco counter-culture and pro-actively integrated her dance company with members of the impoverished Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles.

From choreography to human potential and growth, to seeking the essence of form and meaning in essential landscape and body movement structure, the remarkable highly charged creative relationship between Anna and Larry Halprin informed generations of designers and performers in engaging with place and communities in new and vital ways.

### **Kenneth Helphand**

University of Oregon

### **Halprin in Israel**

Larry Halprin had a personal and professional relationship with the land and state of Israel that lasted for almost eighty years. Halprin was born into a family of ardent Zionists. After high school Halprin spent two years (1933-35) participating in the founding of Kibbutz Ein Hashofeth near Haifa. This experience had a lasting influence on his design and personal philosophy. His work in Israel was both in an advisory capacity and as a designer. He had a key role in the planning of the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot, Hebrew University's Givat Ram Campus, national park planning, a national landscape plan, and as a member of the international Jerusalem Committee that Mayor Teddy Kollak created to advise on planning and designs for the city after 1967.

Halprin had an abiding interest and palpable affection for the Jerusalem landscape. He did designs for the Hadassah Medical Center Master at Ein Karem, the entrance to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem and the downtown Ben Yehuda Pedestrian Mall. His signature project is the design of a promenade (tayelet) at Armon Hanatziv, a belvedere site that addresses one of the great views of the world, undertaken in different phases with Israeli landscape architects Shlomo Aaronson and Bruce Levin.

This paper addresses Halprin's work in Israel but emphasizes this last project paying particular attention to his remarkable drawings and how they demonstrate his ability to conceptualize landscape design at multiple scales and how he drew to think.

**Steve Koch**

Koch Landscape Architecture, Portland, OR

### **Working in the Office of Lawrence Halprin: a personal perspective**

There was a distinct discipline, albeit occasionally and seemingly chaotic, but nonetheless, a cycle of process that permeated project development at the Office of Lawrence Halprin. It was a process that made the experience of designing with Lawrence Halprin unforgettably rich. The publication of *RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment* in 1969 by Brazillier Publishers and the subsequent publication of *Taking Part: A Collective Approach to Creativity* in 1975, both by Lawrence Halprin with the addition of James Burns to the later, made it clear that Lawrence Halprin felt that the influence of design process significantly impacts the success and viability of projects; that the Bauhaus approach to design exploration needed to extend into the realm of real human and group experience and the resultant psychology of place making. The inquisitive and questioning nature of the culture of the late 1960s and early 1970s unmistakably spilled into the fields of public space design and social awareness. Contemporary human behavioral and experiential assumptions needed to be repeatedly tested in concept, form, execution and reality throughout the process led by Halprin. Lawrence Halprin's professional development in tandem with his wife's professional and explorative dance career also helped substantiate and validate a new approach to design process.

While working with Lawrence Halprin there were moments of emphatic and calculated distraction, perhaps to test ideas in alternate modes of communication and exploration. The RSVP Cycle with its inherent and uniquely prescribed allowance for process redirection helped maximum the degree of design flexibility available to him. Staff explorations were considered, validated, reasoned, dismissed or accepted. The filtration of ideas through what would now amount to 64 years of professional practice could not be easily disputed.



## Session IV. Projects - working on/writing about

**Ann Komara**

University of Colorado, Denver

### **Water Events - Flow and Focal Point in Skyline Park**

Skyline Park was conceived as the catalyst intended to transform central downtown Denver's character and render it desirable for commerce, development, and people. The park as articulated in the DURA urban renewal Master Plan was the lynchpin needed to create the proper ambience and focus for a renascent redevelopment. A great deal was thus leveraged on this thin slip of land lining three blocks that the Office of Lawrence Halprin and Associates was hired in 1972 to design. Produced during a period when Halprin was stepping back slightly from his dominance in the office to allow a more open participatory design process, the park nevertheless effectively expresses his design ideals for systems and functions. Unique within Halprin's oeuvre (*? is it ?*), Skyline Park is simultaneously an urban drainage catchment for flood events and a setting for human events, celebrated on each block with a distinctive, expressive fountain. Water is thus operating in two distinct, layered systems: hydrological and experiential. The collaborations involved in articulating these two aspects of water through flow and event highlight the design process within Halprin's office; the results offer a lens to critique the success of Skyline Park as a integral component of a dynamic urban environment.

**Water – Flows:** an urban drainage system mitigates damage from Cherry Creek flood events

- Engineering collaboration; storm water retention basin calculations
- The “concealment” of this within the design, in a system hidden to everyday users
- The celebration of this in journals other than LA – water engineering, urban planning

**Water – Events:** the fountains. “When water falls, its surface is broken and aerated and it becomes luminous and alive.”<sup>1</sup>

- Served as focal points on each block, each unique in character – artist collaboration.<sup>2</sup>
- Programming water: water character, water action, pool surface (see Cities, etc.)
- Design role linking the park's blocks to create perception of unity
- As catalyst for human interactions, leading and inflecting flow of visitors:

“Participation and activity are essential factors in a city. ... A city is a complex, many-dimensional elaboration of structured spaces organized into rhythmical juxtaposition where events happen. And a city must be experienced through movement to come alive in its most unique sense.” [193 Cities]

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<sup>1</sup>Lawrence Halprin. Cities (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1972, revised edition, originally published 1963) 146. This revised edition is published just as they are starting work on Skyline Park.

<sup>2</sup> Work on Fountain in Block 1 was with Herb Goldstein, an artist from Los Angeles. A fascinating exchange.

**Elizabeth Meyer**

University of Virginia

**Collective Creativity. The Planning and Design of the Charlottesville Downtown Mall**

Designed by Lawrence Halprin & Associates in the mid 1970s, the Charlottesville Downtown Mall is one of the most successful pedestrian streets in the United States. This eight block long, canopied, pedestrian street is memorable in form and social life. From April through October, its cafes and benches are full, and year round it is home for a number of downtown residents and a magnet for those who want to stroll in public as well as to shop or eat. It has taken three decades of City stewardship and community commitment to ensure its success, but now it is a vital, mixed-use precinct with offices and locally owned shops within its storefronts and apartments in its upper stories. The Mall is the City's cultural center and one of its key economic engines; it is the downtown space that differentiates Charlottesville from other small cities that have evolved from 18<sup>th</sup> century courthouse towns. The 1970s minimalist brick promenade punctuated with 60 feet tall willow oak bosques and small granite fountains is Charlottesville's most active public space.

Little has been written about Halprin's involvement in the design of this pedestrian street. Even less is known about the ambitious urban design plan that preceded the construction of the pedestrian street. This urban design plan included a "Take Part" workshop, Halprin's innovative community engagement process, that he codified in the 1974 book, *Taking Part. A Workshop Approach to Collective Creativity*. In 1973, a diverse group of the city's citizens came together through this pioneering community workshop. The project is, therefore, significant not only for its subtle and innovative design solutions, but also for its incorporation of community process. It is the only Halprin & Associates project that included the expanded scope of workshop, urban design plan, design and construction. For this reason alone, the Charlottesville Mall is an interesting addition to the Halprin canon.

But there are two additional aspects of the project that cast new light on Halprin's canon and reputation. First, the history of Halprin's Downtown Mall is closely tied to the history of urban renewal in Charlottesville and the story of many other mid-century American cities nation-wide. The Mall was planned after a long period of city-sanctioned demolition that displaced hundreds of African American homes, businesses, and community spaces. This correlation with erasure through urban renewal is common to many of Halprin's urban works (Portland, Seattle, San Francisco) and opens up new interpretations of the firm's design vocabulary as well as its social understanding of cities. Second, the specific history of the Charlottesville Mall, and the significant roles of City Manager Cole Hendrix, City Planner Satyendra Huja, and Halprin's associates Dean Abbott and Norm Kondy in the planning, design and preservation of the project, promise to re-frame received narratives about collective creativity in the Halprin & Associates office.

This article summarizes and synthesizes the findings of a two-year preservation advocacy, research and public education project about the Downtown Mall (funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and the UVA School of Architecture). I rely on primary source material located in the Halprin Papers at the University of Pennsylvania Architectural Archives, as well two dozen oral history interviews with city clients such as Charles Barbour, the first African American Mayor, and first Jill Rinehart, the first woman City Councilor of Charlottesville respectively, City manager Cole Hendrix as well as Halprin staff Norm Kondy and Dean Abbott. I build upon the ground work of several research assistants, including Nathan Foley and Sarita Herman, as well as the recent dissertation written by Alison Hirsch, "Lawrence Halprin: Choreographing urban experience" (University of Pennsylvania 2008).

**Laurie Olin**

The Olin Studio & University of Pennsylvania

### **The Wheelchair controversy at the FDR Memorial**

At the long awaited dedication of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial several prominent individuals who had championed the needs and rights of disabled people cornered President Clinton – some say nearly pinned him to one of Halprin’s monumental stone walls – and demanded that he see to it that the fact that President Roosevelt was paralyzed and could not walk be publicly acknowledged and celebrated as part of his extraordinary life and achievement. For them, what they perceived as an ongoing silence on this topic was tantamount to a deception, and unforgivable in this era. Clinton, a conciliatory and genuinely empathetic personality acceded to their request on the spot. Shortly thereafter the Secretary of State was instructed to have the National Park Service correct what was seen as an oversight (whether egregious or not) to implement whatever necessary addition or correction was appropriate to make explicit Roosevelt’s handicap.

This paper describes the workings of the Secretary of the Interior’s Ad Hoc committee to solve the problem, describing the composition of the ‘Blue Ribbon’ committee and its workings, which included a working field trip to Warm Springs, Georgia, the site of FDR’s summer White House and recurring rest and therapy sessions, and a workshop session with the designer, Lawrence Halprin at the memorial site. The question to be answered was, what would be an adequate response to the request for acknowledgement and commemoration of FDR’s disability, and where and how should it be located? How could one add anything to Halprin’s magnum opus, a landscape work that he and others considered complete, and which some in the profession considered already over large and extended, nearly an outdoor museum with its pronounced sequence and narrative devices? (Rueben Rainey elsewhere describes the history and nature of the memorial, its parts and its art.)

Halprin and longtime assistant Dee Mullin developed workbooks and exercises specific to the problem for the committee. A fog of equal parts worship and skepticism has formed around Halprin's development and use of participatory public workshops in the planning and design of his work. Just how manipulative and to which particular ends did Larry use this process? If how one frames questions in large part sets parameters for what the answers will or can be, how did he approach the committee and his own work for this particular problem? The author gives his memory and answer to these recurring questions.

Deliberations and decision on location and the commissioning of an artist are discussed. Subsequent meetings with Halprin and sculptor Robert Graham at Halprin's studio in San Francisco are described, as well as additional management and logistical issues, largely to do with an existing pavilion and its contents that the National Park Service wished to use this project to resolve. The committee delivered its recommendations, which after making the rounds of approvals within the NPS and Washington DC, was approved, funded, and is in place today.

