

# Labor Heights Plaza: Place for an Emergent Public

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(ABSTRACT)

Day laborers are a visible indication of an increasingly problematic immigration policy in the U.S. Their presence in area parking lots agitates local residents, who demand action by municipalities. This thesis explores the issue of day labor waiting sites in the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. region and proposes a physical design solution to help integrate such sites into existing neighborhoods.

A literature review provides background in plaza form and history, as well as some theories on immigration and assimilation. The case study examines a publicly-funded day labor waiting center in Arlington, Virginia. Lessons learned from this case study, as well as site analysis and a review of user needs, are then applied to the final design. The design takes the resilient public space type of the plaza and adapts it to the day laborers' unique set of requirements, resulting in a multi-functional space that serves a diverse set of demands.

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were always timely and relevant.

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# Introduction

There are changes underway in the United States that challenge our notions of American identity. Immigration, particularly from the countries of Central and South America, is a source of both vitality and controversy. A specific issue in the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area is the visibility of Hispanic day laborers, who often congregate in parking lots to wait for employers to drive up. This growing phenomenon has fueled debate over immigration and citizenship. These visible and often voiceless workers need places where they can find work. To push them into convenience store parking lots only postpones a more cohesive effort to create a place for these workers to inhabit.

Landscape architecture can help create spaces for this new population, and in so doing, create the sense of attachment to a specific neighborhood that will eventually lead to public participation and political visibility. This is an important means of empowering this population, so that they don't become marginalized and isolated. Landscape architecture can also improve the political acceptability of such spaces by making them more aesthetically palatable to resistant neighborhood residents. This is a key factor in helping these new populations "find their place."

My thesis design aims to create a public plaza that can serve two disparate populations: the Hispanic day laborers as well as the existing neighborhood residents of an ethnically and socially diverse section of

Arlington, Virginia.

The needs of these two groups are very different: the day laborers, or *jornaleros*, need an open space that functions almost like a place of work. The rest of the users, however, want a recreational market plaza that identifies and announces their neighborhood. This set of requirements suggests a new type of plaza, a hybrid between a traditional square and a day labor waiting site. By successfully accommodating both needs and user groups, this type of public space will be made more politically acceptable to communities who are currently considering creating publicly-funded Day Labor centers.

The written component of the thesis explores several topics related to the design of such a place. The literature review begins with an examination of plaza types and history, then proceeds to a more specific look at the plaza in Latin America. The literature review then shifts to a brief discussion of some theories about immigration and public spaces.

A case study of a day labor center, the Shirlington Education and Employment Center (SEEC) in Arlington, Virginia follows. From this, issues are identified and applied to the final design.

The following chapter is a look at the specific site for the thesis design. Its physical, historical, and social character are examined, including current residents' needs.

Then comes the design: Labor Heights Plaza. This section elaborates the site program and concept,

and includes plan and section drawings to help convey the intent and outcome of the design process.

The paper ends with a reflection on the process of writing and designing.

# Literature Review

## The Plaza

Much has been written about plazas and their evolution throughout history. The scope of this thesis limits my research to relevant pieces from several sources to get a better idea of how the plaza fits into the overall range of public spaces. This section looks first at definitions of the word “plaza,” followed by an examination of their cultural significance. Next is a brief discussion of their perceptual qualities. Following that is an examination of plaza typology, compared to other types of spaces, as well as typologies based on spatial and contextual/functional categories. As a public space, my plaza design will be compared to other existing plazas and types. For this reason, it’s useful for me to get an idea of the typological range of plazas that exists.

From there, the paper shifts to a brief look at the plaza’s form and expression in Latin America. Since my project proposes a new type of plaza; that is, a combination of plaza and day labor center, I need to have an idea of how the plaza evolved in a way that is meaningful to my projected users. While ideas about its form traveled from Europe with Spanish and other European colonists, it also arose independently in Pre-Columbian American civilizations, such as the Mexica and Mayans. Its eventual preeminence as a symbol of Latin American urbanism is a product of this cultural mixing between European and American urbanism.

As such, the plaza represents a distinctly flexible and universal form, one that is well-suited to a thesis design that can accommodate different uses and cultures.

### *Definition*

What is a plaza? Webster’s Dictionary defines a plaza as

1. “A public square or open space in a city or town;
2. see “Shopping Plaza”;
3. an area along an expressway where public facilities, such as service stations and restrooms, are available.”

It lists several interesting etymological roots: from Latin, the word *platea* or street, and from the Greek there is *plateia*, or broad street. The definition concludes with a note to “see PLACE”. The definition for place has about fifty different meanings. Two stand out: “15. an open space, or square, as in a city or town,” and “16. a short street, a court, etc.” This looping back of definitions leads me to the conclusion that a plaza is one of the most fundamental types of public place.

Kevin Lynch defines plaza as “an activity focus, at the heart of some intensive urban area. Typically, it will be paved, enclosed by high-density structures, and surrounded by streets, or in contact with them. It contains features meant to attract groups of people and to facilitate meetings...” (Lynch, 1981). What is notable here is that he places the plaza at the center of the city. He also gets at the purpose of a plaza as “meant to attract groups of people.” The plaza is not just a by-

product, a void in the vertical mass of buildings, but is a place designed to bring people together.

In *People Places*, the authors define a plaza as a “mostly hard-surfaced, outdoor public space from which cars are excluded.” It is a place for strolling, sitting, eating, and watching; a destination, rather than merely a place to pass through. While there may be ground cover or trees, the surface is mostly hardscape, and they consider as parks those places with more grass than hardscape (Cooper 10). We will see that this definition varies from the Spanish American plaza, which may contain more grass and plantings than hardscape, depending on its general “stage of evolution” (Gade, 1976).

Plazas have often been compared and confused with courtyards, but there are several differences. Historically, courtyards had a residential dimension, being the center of the house in Roman and Islamic societies. Courtyards were typically enclosed on all sides by a private domain. A plaza usually had a secular connotation and function; it was often used as a marketplace or more general gathering place, not as an exclusively religious or residential space (Kostof, 1991).

### *Plazas and Culture*

Plazas have traditionally served to bring people together, whether in groups or individually (Gade, 1976). They are centers of urban civility, providing a forum for social and political exchange that is important for the functioning of democratic society (Low, 2000).

They are a basic element of town planning, historically acting as the heart of the city. They create a place to gather, and serve to “humanize” different peoples’ contact with each other (Zucker, 1959).

According to Spiro Kostof, there are two reasons for public spaces. First, they provide a place for chance encounters, which are increasingly rare in our meticulously structured environment. Second, they provide a stage for rituals, such as festivals, celebrations, protests, and even riots and revolutions (Kostof, 1991).

Plaza design is both an art and a commodity. While ostensibly designed as places for civic expression and recreation, they have become a tool for increasing real estate values of surrounding homes. A great plaza can help revitalize a flagging city center and attract new investment to neighborhoods and sectors. Much public space design is done more with the implicit motive of increasing the economic value of surrounding property than with increasing the comfort and mental health of users (Low, 2000).

Plazas that are designed to benefit “the public” or “the common good” are usually designed to facilitate activities that benefit some people while excluding others (Low, 2000). Wealthy lunch patrons are encouraged to sit for an hour during the week, while the homeless are discouraged from using the same plaza. The contemporary plaza, whether in the U.S. or in Latin American countries, has generally experienced a vast diminution in the range of activities they host (Cooper

Marcus and Francis, 1990). One way out of this diminution is to create plazas that can serve more uses and users. Traditional plaza activities such as eating, lingering, and people watching should be able to co-exist with the type of activities necessary for day laborers to find work. All of these activities expand the range of cultural needs which a good plaza satisfies.

### *Perceptual qualities of plazas*

Paul Zucker describes squares in terms of “space-confining elements.” These are three-dimensional confines that direct our movement and views within a space, and create a dynamic tension. He identifies three space-confining elements of plazas: walls of surrounding structures, floor, and imaginary sphere of the sky (Zucker, 1959). (See Fig. 1.1) The

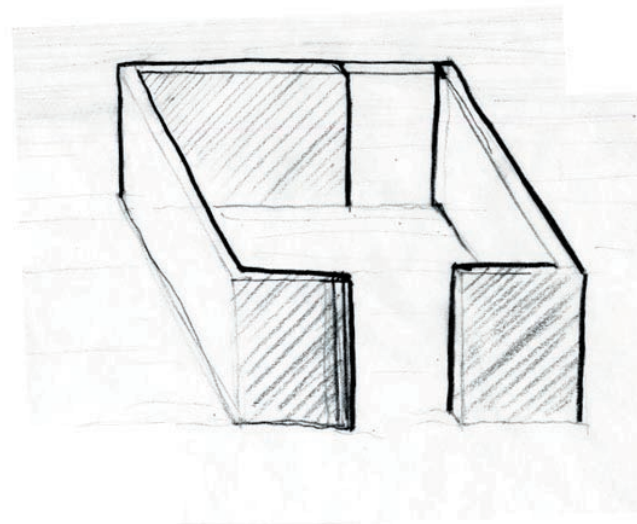


Fig. 1.1 - Space-confining elements of the plaza

height of the walls may vary, and they may be of different architectural character. The floor may be uniform in slope and material, or it may have level changes, steps, different paving materials, or vegetation. It can serve to unify the surrounding vertical structures. The sky is a constant, but its perception can be manipulated by the interplay of the wall heights and floor expansion (width and length). Sky is also influenced by contours and articulation of walls, such as gables, chimneys, or trees. The height of the sky is generally imagined as three to four times the height of the tallest surrounding structure. It is perceived as higher over plazas that are dominated by one prominent building (such as St. Marks in Venice), while it has less presence in plazas that are more wide-open in character (Zucker, 1959). These definitions should not be taken as strict guidelines, but they may be useful in subsequent analyses of existing plazas, as well as a guide to judge my subsequent design work.

While plazas are sometimes products of their time and place, general principles of space-volume relations are based on the human form, and as such are independent of historical style. Common characteristics can be seen in plazas that vary in their function or cultural setting. A plaza that is made for a market square, for example, does not automatically take one specific spatial form, because any particular function can be expressed in many different ways (Zucker, 1959).

The confines of this space can be real or imag-



ined; what is important is that the designer is able to influence the users' imagination in specific ways. Specific visual relations determine whether a plaza remains a void or becomes a work of art: the form of surrounding buildings and their uniformity or variety, their proportions in comparison with the footprint of the plaza, the angle of entering streets, and the location of furniture, sculpture, or other three-dimensional elements within the space (Zucker, 1959). These are the tools a designer has to shape a plaza into a memorable, functional place.

### *Typological analysis*

There is a reason I am focusing specifically on the plaza for my thesis project. As a type of public space, the plaza has a long history of human creation and use, and it is specific and flexible enough to accommodate a wide variety of users and roles. The following typological description of plazas serves to reveal the spectrum of public spaces in hopes of providing a context for my plaza design.

### *Plazas versus other places*

There are many types of public space. In *People Places*, the authors divide their analysis into seven types: neighborhood parks, miniparks, urban plazas, campus outdoor space, elderly housing outdoor space,

daycare open space, and hospital outdoor space. These are grouped on the basis of public accessibility as well as physical morphology (Cooper Marcus and Francis, 1990). My project is most concerned with how the plaza fits within the first three categories: neighborhood park, minipark, and urban plaza.

The neighborhood park as described in *People Places* is the prototypical park of grass, trees, and landscaped areas. It is usually in a residential neighborhood and contains areas for both active and passive recreation (Cooper Marcus and Francis, 1990). Examples include Golden Gate Heights Park in San Francisco and San Pablo Park in Berkeley (Cooper Marcus and Francis, 1990). Except for the passive recreation and landscaped aspects, my thesis is not concerned with this type of plaza.

The minipark, however, gets closer. It is described as a small, maybe one half acre sized park that is for the use of local pedestrians (Cooper Marcus and Francis, 1990). Examples include Berkely Way and Charlie Door Miniparks in Berkeley (Cooper Marcus and Francis, 1990). The plazas I'm interested in are similar to these size and use descriptions.

The urban plaza of *People Places* is a mostly hard-surfaced space in a downtown area, often created as part of a new high-rise building. They are often privately owned or managed, but largely open to the general public (Cooper Marcus and Francis, 1990). This is closer to the form of my thesis project. Examples include Union Square and Crocker Plaza in San Fran-

cisco (Cooper Marcus and Francis, 1990). The plaza type of this thesis is related to all three of these types of outdoor space, though they typically take the form of the urban plaza, with some characteristics of the neighborhood park or minipark added.

[See Appendix B for further explanation of the typologies outlined in *People Places*.]

### *Spatial typology*

Many scholars have found it useful to isolate the spatial from the functional aspects of plazas. In 1485, Leon Battista Alberti, interpreting the writings of Vitruvius, applied Renaissance advances in math, engineering, and aesthetic theory to arrive at an ideal form for

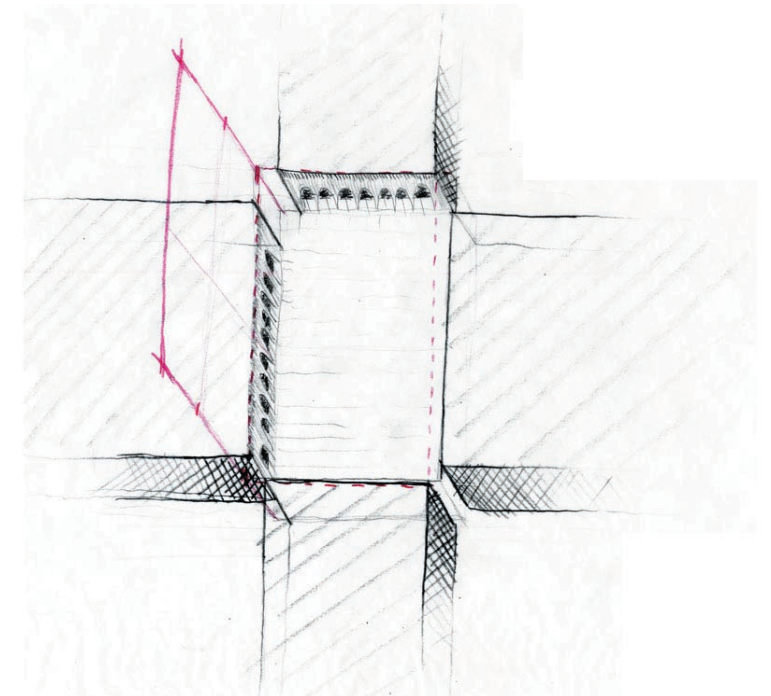


Fig. 1.2 - Alberti's plaza

the public *piazza*. He argued that it should be twice as long as wide, surrounded by buildings that were between 1/3 and 1/6 as tall as the square's width, and with porticoes where men could find refuge from the heat of the day<sup>3</sup> (Low, 2000). (See Fig 1.2)

Paul Zucker is a modern scholar who has analyzed plaza form. He sets aside functional characteristics to arrive at five distinct spatial plaza archetypes:

1. Closed Square: self-contained
2. Dominated Square: directed
3. Nuclear Square: formed around a center
4. Grouped Square: combined
5. Amorphous Square: unlimited (Zucker, 1959).

These types often blur together when using them to categorize specific squares, but they provide one

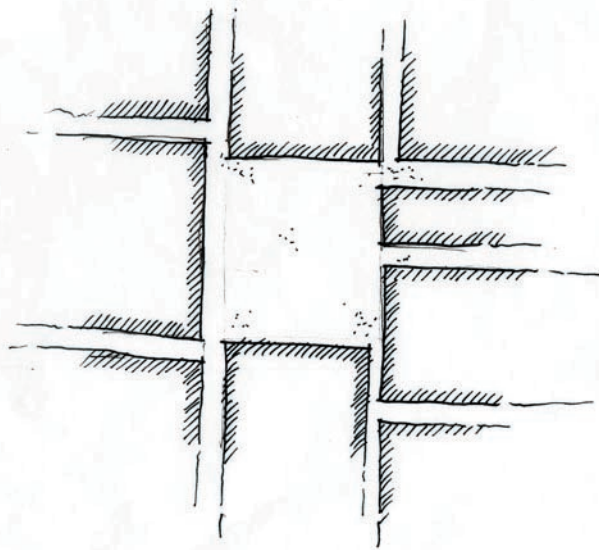


Fig. 1.3- Closed Square

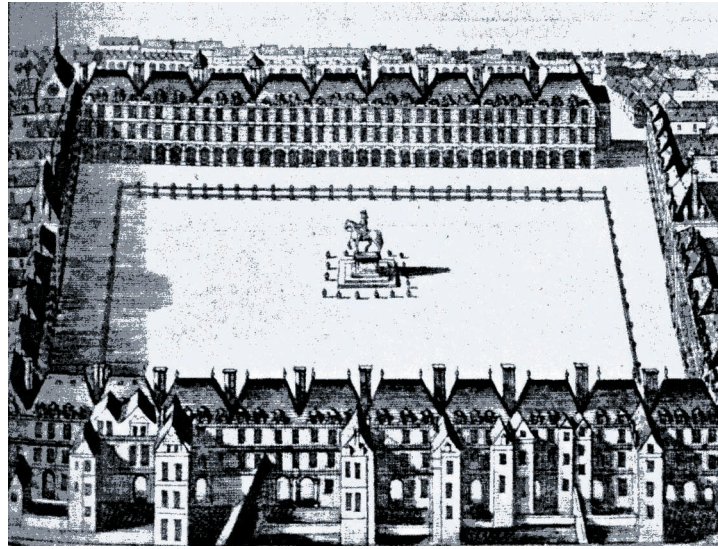


Fig. 1.4 - Place des Vosges (1) (© Columbia University Press)

way of identifying the variety and complexity of plaza characteristics.

The Closed Square is characterized by complete enclosure which is broken only by those streets leading into it. (See Fig. 1.3) An example of this is the Place des Vosges in Paris (see Fig 1.4). The primary element is its layout: quadrangle, rectangle, circle, or other geometrical form. Uniformity and character of facade is also a determinant of the Closed Square type, as is width-height ratio. This plaza type is most like a closed courtyard, but where a courtyard is private or semi-private, the Closed Square is open to the public and traffic flows (Zucker, 1959).

The Dominated Square is marked by being directed towards one building or group of buildings. The plaza and all other structures relate to this element, which is often a church, palace, or town hall. (See

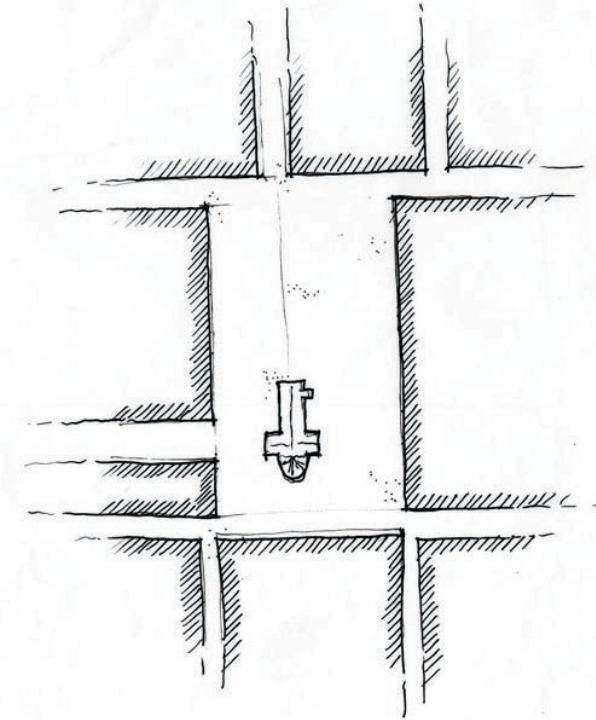


Fig. 1.5 - Dominated Square

Fig. 1.5) All perspectives lead towards the backdrop of this building, and a main street enters the square on axis with it. This axis and the perspectival dominance of the structure create the spatial tension in the plaza, and compels the viewer to move toward and observe the focal architectural element. The original medieval layout of the parvis of Notre Dame Cathedral was a good example of this type. (See Fig. 1.6) Interestingly, the dominant element may also be a view towards a mountain, a river or the open sea (Zucker, 1959). This type corresponds most directly with the urban plaza of *People Places* (Cooper Marcus and Francis, 1990).



Fig. 1.6- Medieval arrangement of Notre Dame (2) (© Columbia University Press)

Within the Nuclear Square, space is less readily perceived than in the Closed or Dominated Squares, though it is there. (See Fig. 1.7) What is necessary for this perception is a nucleus, usually in the form of a

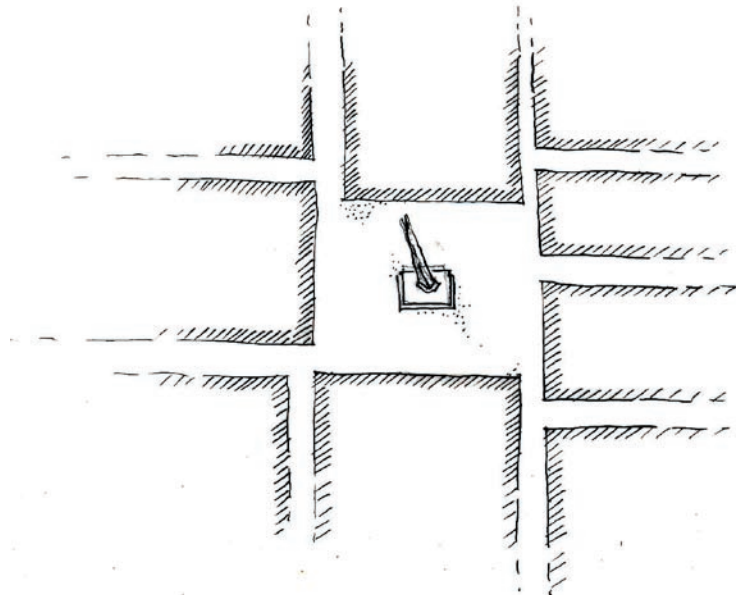


Fig. 1.7 - Nuclear Square

vertical accent: a monument, fountain, obelisk. What this element provides is a powerful center, creating tension and unifying the space. This tension results in the impression of a cohesive square. The Piazza di SS. Giovanni e Paolo in Venice exhibits these characteristics. (See Fig. 1.8) While it contains a large and imposing church, it is Verrocchio's Colleoni monument in the midst of the space which truly gives the plaza its unity. The plaza's artistic impact coalesces around this small key element. But just because a square has a focal element doesn't make it a Nuclear Square: St. Peter's in Rome, while containing an obelisk, is not unified by this feature. This impression of bounded space is not threatened by irregularity of layout or character of the surrounding buildings. However, due to the limited visual effect of a central monument, the dimensions of a Nuclear Square are likewise restricted, so if the expansion of the square in relation to the size of the fo-

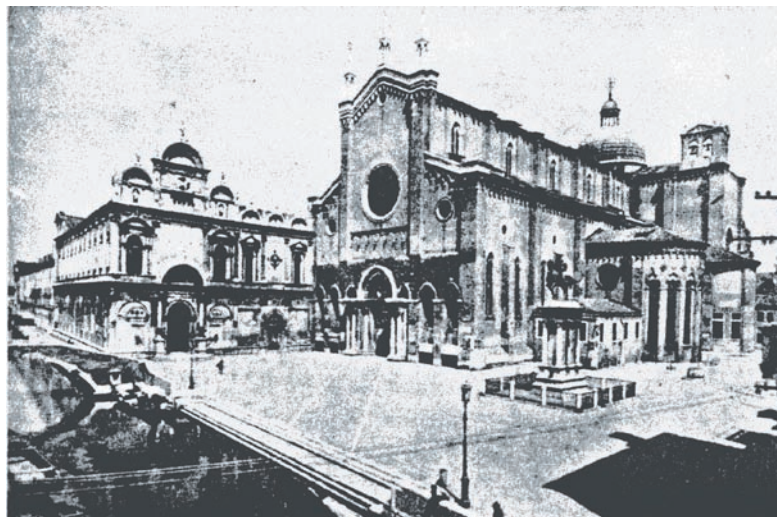


Fig. 1.8 - Piazza di SS. Giovanni e Paolo (3) (© Columbia University press

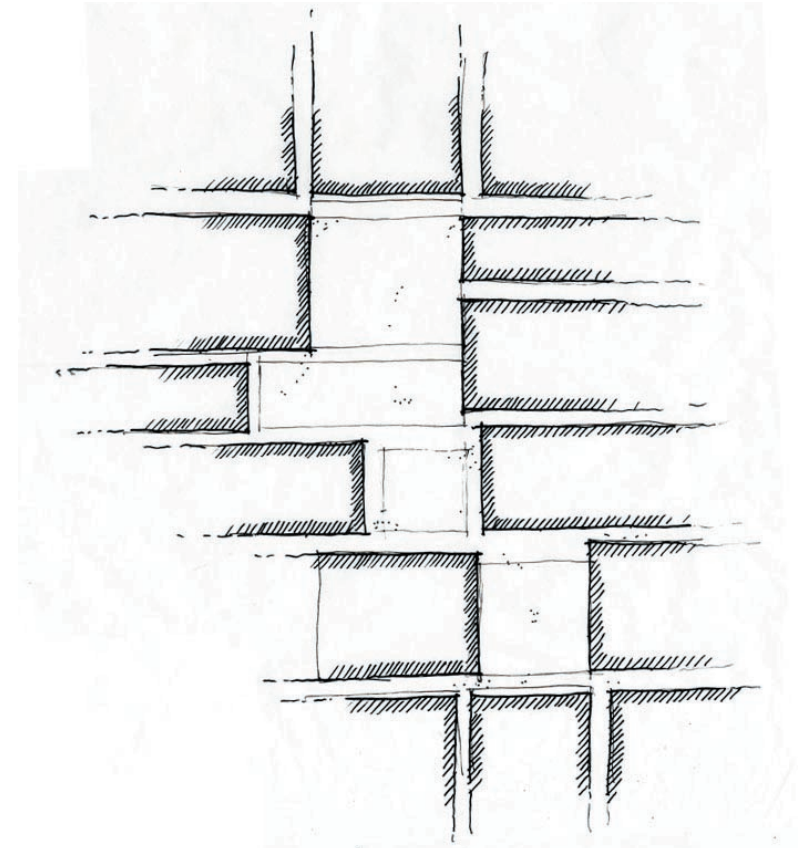


Fig. 1.9 - Grouped Square

cal element gets too large, it will lose its unity (Zucker, 1959).

The Grouped Square is similar to a sequence of rooms inside a palace: the first one prepares for the second, the second for the third, and so on, so that each square becomes meaningful to the subsequent one. (See Fig. 1.9) They are like links in a chain, and may be aesthetically combined into one comprehensive whole. The Imperial Fora in Rome is an ancient series of Grouped Squares. (See Fig. 1.10) The connections between the squares may be direct or indirect; what is

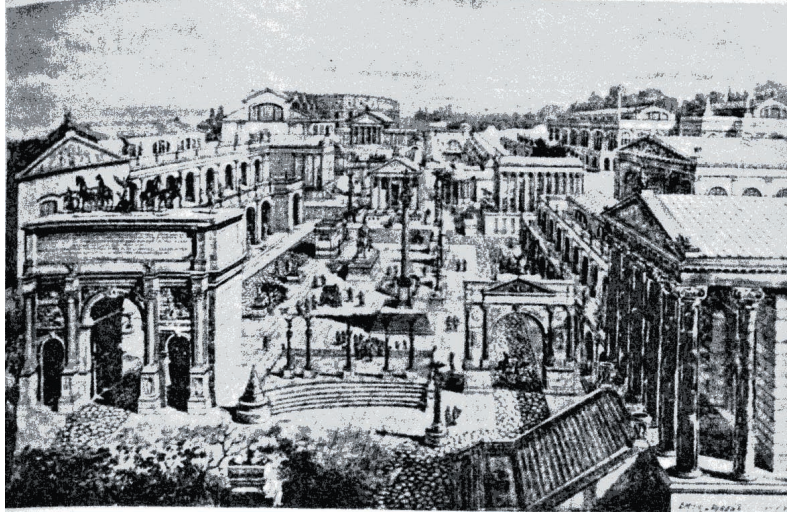


Fig. 1.10 - Roman Fora (4) (© Columbia University Press)

most important is that there is a mental registration by the observer of successive images of changing spatial conditions. Contrast between larger and smaller buildings, higher and lower eaves, location of fountains or monuments, arcades and entryways, may alter perceived and actual dimensions. Many means can be used to achieve linkages, but perspective forces and relative proportions are usually employed to visually tie the group together (Zucker, 1959).

The final spatial type of square is the Amorphous Square. (See Fig. 1.11) This category acts as a kind of catch-all for those squares with some of the previous categories' characteristics, without achieving the same sensation of cohesiveness necessary to qualify for those. The Amorphous Square does not signify any specific aesthetic, but it does share some of the elements of the previous categories, and may be mistaken for them at first glance. Somewhat surprisingly,

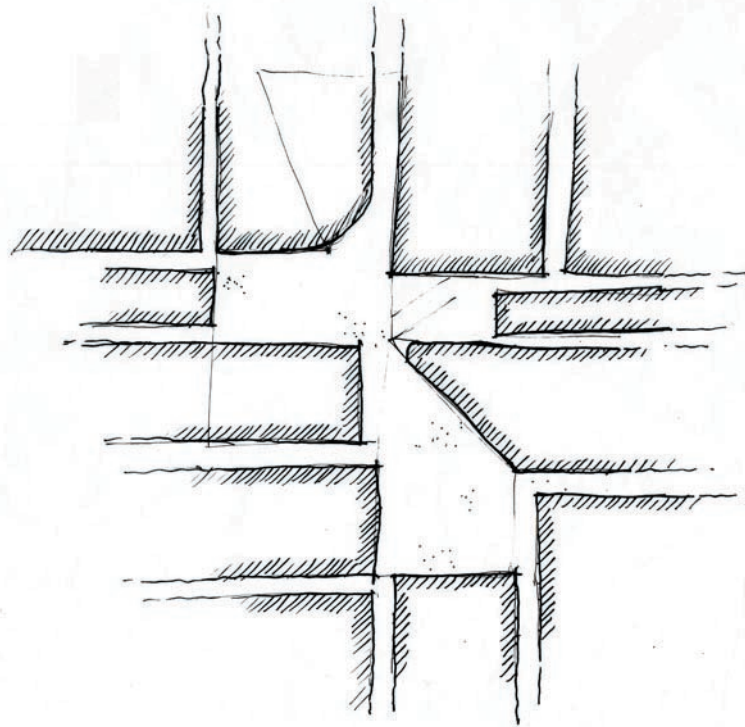


Fig. 1.11 - Amorphous Square

Trafalgar Square in London is a good example of this amorphous type. While the prominence and location of the Nelson Column would at first seem to classify it as a nuclear square, its hodge-podge of architectural facades and multiple streets leading into it at irregular intervals and directions act to disrupt its unity. It's more of a crossroads than a square. Washington Square in New York is another example. It is laid out as a rectangle and enclosed on all four sides, but is not a Closed Square due to its large dimensions, heterogeneity of surrounding structures, and scattering of unrelated elements, such as a small triumphal arch. The variety of elements at play here impede the unification of the

square into a Closed Square type, and disproportion weakens aesthetic impact. Such places have less artistic impact, but are plazas nonetheless (Zucker, 1959).

### *Functional / contextual typology*

In addition to solely spatial categories, it is helpful for us to look at a typology of plazas based on spatial and functional attributes. These categories are both more expansive (in that they encompass functional and spatial qualities) and more focused. In *People Places*, they identify five categories: Street Plaza, Corporate Foyer, Urban Oasis, Transit Foyer, and Grand Public Place. (A description of the first four types can be found in Appendix A.) They include the spatial dimension, but add functional (what they are used for) and contextual categories (what's around them) in order to provide a more contemporary typology of American plaza types. These typologies are closer to current American design practice, as opposed to the mostly European models seen in Zucker's writing.

The most important category to this thesis is the last one: the Grand Public Place. This type most closely resembles the spatial categories described in Zucker's work. It tends to attract a wider variety of users from farther away, since it is big and flexible enough to host a variety of functions. It might be the place for lunch crowds, cafes, concerts, art shows, or rallies. It is usually publicly owned and is considered the heart of the city. It can be a city plaza, mostly hard surfaced,

centrally sited, and highly visible. An example of this type is Justin Herman Plaza in San Francisco. Or it could be a city square, which differs in that it is an intersection of major thoroughfares. This type is not attached to a particular building. Rather, it is bounded on all four sides by streets and can take up an entire city block. The Grand Public Place usually has a fine balance of hardscape and planting, so that it could be considered a halfway point between the plazas reviewed previously and a park. Additionally, it might have a large feature such as a monument or fountain, and contemporary examples might incorporate underground parking. Union Square in San Francisco is an emblematic city square (Cooper 18).

While these categories are interesting for the variety of forms which contemporary American plazas can assume, most are not relevant to my thesis. Perhaps above all, the authors' analysis demonstrates that both users and designers have altered the plaza into idiosyncratic shapes and uses. This gives me more justification for selecting the plaza type as the subject of my thesis inquiry, since it can be adjusted and shaped into forms fitting different places and needs.

## The Plaza in Latin America

Designers often have to strike a balance between the universal and the particular. While I want my plaza to be open and relevant to a wide variety of people, the most immediate users are Hispanic immigrants. Thus, I thought it important to examine the tradition of

plazas in Latin America, where the plaza traditionally had certain characteristics that distinguished it from other urban places. There are three unique factors: 1. Iberian influence – as Spanish conquerors spread throughout Latin America, they brought with them the ideal of the ordered, grid-patterned town and plaza (Gade, 1976). This is generally acknowledged and agreed upon, though its importance has also been disputed.

2. Geometric centrality – most plazas were planned to be at the center of the towns, according to the Laws of the .

3. Land use – traditionally, plazas were the site of certain ceremonial functions: religious, state, and military (Gade, 1976).

In contemporary cities, though, many of these characteristics are no longer present. Remodelings and re-designs removed many traces of Spanish influence, towns have expanded and sprawled far from their original centers, and ceremonies have moved or assumed less importance to increasingly diverse publics. Plazas remain as traces of former city form, or are designed and built as mandatory open space set-asides for new buildings (Gade, 1976).

### Terminology

Different countries give different names to their central squares. Plaza is usually the constant, and during the Colonial period, in most countries the terms *plaza mayor* or *plaza real* served to designate the main

square. Variations exist from country to country. In Mexico, it was usually called the *plaza mayor* or *zócalo*. Many Central American countries utilize the term *parque central*. In the Northern Andean countries, *Plaza Bolívar* is common, while in Peru and Chile the term *plaza de armas* prevails (Gade, 1976).

Within the general type of plaza (or square), we can make further distinctions. Costa Ricans have called small plazas *plazolitas* (Low, 2000). The term *placita* has also been used in the US in the design of public spaces for two churches in New York City (McKenna Square and Tiffany Plaza).

### *Functional evolution of the Latin American plaza*

Though originally designed for religious processions or military display, Latin American plazas have always been used for a variety of purposes. From an unimproved site, to marketplace, to ceremonial center, to social concourse, to garden park, and finally to traffic hub, plazas have accommodated a wide variety of purposes depending on the size and demands of the people throughout the years (Gade, 1976). This progression, described in detail in the paragraphs that follow, almost perfectly predicts the history of such plazas as Parque Central in San Jose, Costa Rica (Low, 2000).

Many plazas began as unimproved, simple open greenswards (or “dirt swards”). In small towns, the plaza is rudimentary, usually comprising a grassy

rectangle unadorned by trees, furniture, or other amenities. Animals may be pastured there, and it could serve as a threshing floor during the harvest. The town spigot or well might be found there, as well as laundry tubs or latrines, and the plaza could even be given over to temporary home sites in the case of earthquakes or floods. In this early incarnation, the plaza clearly serves as a hub of basic economic and human necessity for these small towns.

Plazas can also be marketplaces. This function typically stimulated the most activity and brought together the most people into plazas. Early plazas might have had markets everyday; smaller towns usually had them weekly on Saturdays or Sundays (Gade, 1976). This pattern continues with many contemporary American plazas, such as the popular weekly farmers market on Market Square in Alexandria, Virginia. Most of the central plazas in large Latin American cities served as market places where provisions were sold. Additionally, many plazas often served as a place to hire farm workers and servants. Some plazas were the site of slave auctions (Gade, 1976). These functions have particular resonance with my thesis project, since I'm designing a place where workers are hired.

Plazas served as ceremonial centers from the beginning. These spaces represented the intersection of religious, governmental, and military symbolism. Churches were often sited on a plaza, and ceremonies and processions were sometimes carried out in the outdoor venue (Gade, 1976). Semana Santa proces-

sions, with their elaborate displays of finery, statuettes, and incense, often began or ended in plazas. Political display and oratory were also a common feature in central plazas. Flag-raising, hero dedications and remembrance, and announcement of decrees were carried out in plazas. Many plazas include memorials to national political figures, which can also be seen in US town squares (Gade, 1976). Military assembly has also formed a large part of the ceremonial function of plazas. Armies need a place to muster and drill, and infantry and cavalry barracks were historically located near plazas. The gallows and stocks were often found in central plazas, where executions were carried out in public view (Gade, 1976).

More happily, plazas also served as a stage for socializing. While unimproved plazas weren't always so agreeable for promenading, this practice took hold once municipalities gained enough revenue and power to sponsor upgrades and amenities. Social niceties typically included benches, street lights, and sidewalks. Sometimes a fountain or bandstand (*kiosko*) provided a focal-point. Depending on the climate of the plaza in question, people could be found mingling there in the warm sunshine, or in the cool breezes of evening (Gade, 1976).

### *The Paseo*

As a key facet of social discourse in plazas, the institution of the promenade warrants examination. Latin Americans adopted the Mediterranean custom

of the public stroll, and these often centered on the plaza. (The promenade is also called *serenata*, *retrata*, *buena noche*, *vuelta del perro*, or *paseo*, depending on region.) It's still popular in Central America, Mexico, and Brazil, perhaps due to climatic factors. The *paseo* was historically the province of the upper classes, but it spread to the lower classes as suburban migration removed much of the aristocracy from the environs of the plaza. Traditionally, young men and women circulated the plaza in opposite directions, so as to get a better look at each other as they met. The whole family typically participated in the promenade. This phenomenon has certainly declined over the years, as popular culture and entertainment have grown to compete for the attention of young people. But the *paseo* can still be found in Latin American and North American cities in shopping malls and automobile cruising rituals (Gade, 1976). The *paseo* culture of plazas represents one of the noblest forms of loitering, which seems to be so feared and discouraged in North American public spaces. The "fine art of lingering" can be most readily observed in the Latin American plaza. North Americans often refuse to loiter in plazas, either out of fear of central city dwellers, or a cultural disinclination to use time for lingering (Gade, 1976).

The plaza often evolves into a garden park. This typically happens when a neighborhood becomes self-conscious about the image it projects to the rest of the city. It desires to remove the unsightly uses of the unimproved plaza (the animals, spigots, latrines, mar-

ketplace, soccer field, etc.) The ideal of civic beauty is pursued most visibly in the rehabilitation of the central plaza, which is transformed with trees, flowers, and other vegetation. This process occurred in Latin America mostly in the nineteenth century. Buenos Aires transformed the Plaza de Mayo in the 1880s, while Mexico and Ecuador redesigned their central plazas in the 1860s. Most all larger cities in Latin America have applied the garden park design to their central plazas. These are intended as showpieces for the community with elegant, often formally arranged plantings. They are not typically conceived of as naturalistic retreats to experience nature, as in Central Park (Gade, 1976).

Finally, the Latin American plaza has often been converted into a traffic hub. Those streets around the central plaza were often the first to be paved, widened, and straightened. As they were improved, they often cut pieces out of the plazas, and they always led to increased traffic around them. Once the automobile was introduced, noise, pollution, and pedestrian risk became issues. As auto ownership rises, pressure on central plazas increases with the need to improve traffic circulation, and some plazas suffer the final indignity of transformation into a traffic circle. Plaza appropriation by automobiles, whether for travel lanes or parking spaces, will become an increasing problem in Latin American cities in the coming years (Gade, 1976).

## **Immigration and Public Space**

In the course of research for my thesis, I sought

to gain a basic understanding of some of the many concepts on immigration. I believe that in order to design for a specific population, it's helpful to know as much as possible about their motivations and needs. The following section of the literature review is a brief look at a few of these concepts related to Hispanic immigration to the United States, and how it relates to use of public space.

### *Tolerance and assimilation*

Recent events have shown the importance of tolerance and cultural assimilation. Mass riots in the high-rise suburbs of Paris point to the fact that cultural differences should not be ignored or ghettoized. These riots occurred in a community of immigrants who were legal, but denied citizenship and equal economic and educational opportunities. While these riots were about many things, including unemployment, cultural identity was a large factor. The groups rioting felt invisible and forgotten. Immigrants should not be shunted into impersonal, monolithic suburban enclaves by societies uninterested in assimilation.

A better alternative is to establish discrete barrios within existing urban neighborhoods. These places ideally have a well-established mix of homeowners and renters of different ethnicities and incomes. While there may be tensions resulting from an influx of newcomers, existing political and social networks (such as Neighborhood Advisory Groups or commissions) can reach out to immigrants and create a dialogue with

authorities, before problems get out of hand. Such discussion and political tinkering were part of the force behind the creation of a day labor pavilion in Arlington, Virginia (see Case Study below), which likely would not have been established in a neighborhood with a less aware and active population of existing residents. The surrounding Nauck neighborhood had many discussions and negotiations with Arlington County staff and nonprofit representatives to help deal with the situation of day laborers. The existing, heterogeneous neighborhood location encouraged tolerance established through dialogue.

It's helpful to look at the definitions of these two words. "Tolerate" is defined in Webster's Dictionary as "1. to allow, 2. to respect (others beliefs, practices, etc.) without sharing them, 3. to bear (someone or something disliked); put up with." Both the 2nd and 3rd definitions are relevant to this discussion of differing user groups. "Assimilate" is defined as "1. to become like or alike, 2. to become absorbed and incorporated." (Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus). This definition raises questions: is it good for a group to be assimilated into a larger culture? Arguments can be made both for and against assimilation. What is important to me is that the group being assimilated should have control of which aspects of their culture they wish to keep, such as language, dance, food, history, dress, marriage customs, and public behavior.

Tolerance and assimilation are related concepts. While not opposites, each must necessarily be pres-

ent for the most positive outcome in relations between dominant and immigrant cultures. Tolerance by the dominant culture allows new cultures to retain aspects of their own identity. For example, Anglos might say, “Our homeowners’ association tolerates Hispanics’ decoration of their yards with shrines to the Virgin of Guadalupe.” This tolerance allows for a less rigid assimilation of Hispanic culture into Anglo norms. Complete tolerance would demand no assimilation of the new immigrants into dominant culture: they’d retain their language, history, practices, religion, and laws with no acknowledgment of the dominant cultural context around them.

While this condition of complete tolerance from the dominant culture is not technically possible, examples of more tolerant (and less “assimilationist”) societies exist, such as the Netherlands. It’s too complicated to argue simply for or against tolerance or assimilation; they are both vital parts of cultural identity. A balance between the two should be a goal. Historically, 14th century Muslim Spain is often cited as a dominant culture that tolerated Jews and Christians, without demanding total assimilation. This balance was upset when Christians expelled the Muslims in the 15th century, with the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition representing extreme intolerance and demanding total assimilation (Duncan, 2003). My project is a means to strike this balance between tolerance and assimilation. By providing a space where both Anglos and Hispanics can be seen and feel welcome, both groups are more

likely to tolerate the other.

Reactions to tensions between new immigrants (especially day laborers) and existing homeowners usually ranges from “moral panic”<sup>1</sup> to paternalistic tolerance (Duncan, 2003). A more generous response would allocate public spaces that afford behaviors immigrants are used to, while allowing for traditional Anglo behaviors in the same arena. By viewing each other in a safe, non-threatening environment, understanding might be reached.

Should designed public spaces have as an implicit goal the assimilation of Hispanic immigrants into Anglo society? I argue that they should. The function of public spaces is to provide a public face for a variety of communities. Homes and private spaces are where people live; public spaces are where they display themselves to the larger neighborhood and region. So they serve the important function of allowing the groups to represent themselves to people different from them. If we can create public spaces where more than one group feels welcome and represented, then increased understanding and tolerance between the two groups is likely.

<sup>1</sup> Moral panic is fear that arises when spatial and social boundaries are challenged. Such fear reveals beliefs about belonging and the importance of territory. When boundaries are crossed by those different than us, we can experience moral panic, which is often exacerbated by media attention and public outcry (Duncan, 2003).



*Fig 1.12. - Murals on the wall of this Chirilagua establishment – a local example of barriology.*



*Fig 1.13. - More murals can be seen on the side of this Chirilagua apartment building, which has been painted in colors more at home in the American Southwest than in Northern Virginia.*



## *Barrioization and Barriology*

In the American southwest, scholars of Latino/Hispanic immigration patterns use two paradigms to explore how Latinos interact with the urban landscape: “barrioization” and “barriology.” The barrioization paradigm explains the formation of Latino neighborhoods as a process whereby disadvantaged Latinos stake out a territory in a city which subsequently becomes overwhelmed by poverty, crime, and unwanted land uses. Barriology, on the other hand, characterizes the positive force of reassertion of control over neighborhoods through gradual attainment of political power, community activism, urban planning acumen, and identity creation through public art (Herzog 103).

Barriology in California can be seen as an attempt to “Mexicanize” the stagnant landscapes of the Chicano population. Chicano Park in San Diego offers a great example. In the DC region, several neighborhoods likewise show signs of Barriology, such as Chirilagua in Alexandria. (See Figs. 1.12, 1.13) (See Appendix A for more information on Barrioization and Barriology.)

### *Thirdspace concept*

The idea of “thirdspace” is helpful in explaining some of the tension and unease that characterize our views of immigration to the United States. Edward Soja first defined the concept in his writings on geography and modern American cities. Thirdspace is a

transnational concept that arises from certain tensions between one's place of origin and current residency. “Firstspace” is the lived-in space, wherever you are now. This is the DC Metropolitan area for the Hispanic immigrants in question. “Secondspace” is a perceived and remembered place of origin. This would be the respective countries of the immigrants. Many immigrants live in this kind of “betweenness-of-place:” their lived-in space is vastly different from their remembered country of origin. Certain places and processes can act as “thirdspaces” if they redefine space and territory in a way that brings these two together. The immigrant soccer leagues of Washington, DC are thirdspaces – they are somehow in-between the normal “here” or “there” (Price, 2004). Community centers and day labor sites could also be characterized as thirdspaces. A hybrid typology between day labor center and plaza should aspire to this sense of thirdspace.

### *Loitering*

Hispanic immigrants are often accused of loitering. Used in this context, this practice is a racialized, gendered, and class-categorized concept. It is a way of appearing, a type of posture, a way of being different from non-Hispanics that converts this seemingly innocuous behavior into an offensive and even threatening act to non-Hispanics. The same type of behavior by whites might not be viewed as threatening, and might instead be defined as “waiting.” The very sight of Hispanics can provoke feelings of unease in many whites,



*Fig 1.14 - These signs are attached to a wall at a take-out restaurant in Arlington.*

since their presence can be viewed as a symbol of insecure national borders. Border insecurity is a sensitive issue, especially after September 11th (Duncan, 2003). The arrival of the citizen group The Minutemen Project in Herndon attests to this. The Minutemen were formed originally for the purpose of monitoring the US-Mexico border. The fact that they’ve shown up in Virginia is proof that Hispanics’ existence here is a manifestation of national border insecurity.

Loitering is sometimes viewed as a kind of visual pollution, with immigrants seen as elements of clutter and disorder in public places. Their presence sitting on benches and the gazebo in the park in the suburban town of Mount Kisco, New York, was viewed by Anglo residents as detracting from the general quality of

life. Clearly, the aesthetic values of the Anglo citizens was prioritized above the survival of the immigrants (Duncan, 2003). If the public space is transformed, the behavior is transformed from “loitering” to “waiting,” an acceptable public behavior.

### *Aesthetics and visibility*

James and Nancy Duncan assert that aesthetics and social justice are linked, and this is certainly the case with landscape aesthetics and immigration in Northern Virginia. Much of the labor that migrant workers do is intimately tied to the landscape. It has been argued that wealthy American homeowners’ desire for the pastoral aesthetic is one of the main drivers of day labor. Hispanics are hired to install and maintain the landscapes of wealthy Americans (Duncan, 2003). As a landscape architect, the realization of our designs depends upon the labor of Hispanic immigrants, many of whom are day laborers.

The Duncans examine a situation in two neighboring towns in upstate New York. Hispanic day laborers live in Mount Kisco, but depend on work in next-door Bedford, with its wealthy estates and pristine, pastoral viewsheds.

The influx of immigrants into Mount Kisco has been viewed as an invasion of Hispanics. Like Northern Virginia, this town is at the vanguard of 21st century cultural shift posed by globalization: the “Latin Americanization” of the United States (from Mike Davis, quoted in Duncan, 2003).

The reason that day laborers have caused so much concern is that they are the most visible manifestation of illegal immigration. Ironically, their livelihood depends upon being visible in public places where employers can see them<sup>2</sup>. They don’t have business networks to connect them to employers. So they depend upon loitering, an activity that has been deemed socially inappropriate, and often illegal.

Much labor goes into installing and maintaining landscapes, yet the workers themselves often remain invisible to those who enjoy these views. Land preservation efforts often depend upon intensive labor by groups who may not be legal citizens. This is the case in Bedford, with its combination of exclusionary large-lot zoning, strict environmental regulation, and dependence upon the cheap labor of Hispanic day laborers who live in nearby Mount Kisco (Duncan, 2003).

These factors serve to exclude the laborers who maintain the landscape so jealously guarded in Bedford, rendering the workers practically invisible<sup>2</sup>. They can’t live in Bedford because exclusionary factors drive housing costs up, making rents unaffordable for the Hispanic laborers (Duncan, 2003). Wealthy

2. Invisibility is one manifestation of “aversive racism.” Unlike “dominative racism,” which is characterized by overt actions such as slavery and institutional segregation, aversive racism is avoidance and separation from the offending race. Negative aesthetic reactions are one form of this more practical form of racism, as are general nervousness, disgust, and distancing. Peoples’ homes and neighborhoods are so closely tied with their identity that the presence of outsiders there can be deeply threatening, leading to a rift between place and identity (Duncan, 2003).

landowners and consumers of aesthetic landscapes thus spatially insulate themselves from questions about immigration, race, and poverty, keeping out of sight the reminders of the consequences of their privilege (Duncan, 2003).

### *Links to DC and Herndon*

This is similar to the situation in Northern Virginia. Loudoun County is a wealthy suburban district where controversy over large-lot zoning, housing density, and slow-growth policy simmers. It’s an area that has long been prized for its rural character and pastoral views, and many people move there to escape the vagaries of life in the Metropolitan DC area. Most of the laborers who toil in the landscape of Loudoun County live in neighboring Arlington County, a decidedly urban and diverse place.

Recently, the issue of day laborers in Loudoun County became more public. In the town of Herndon, day laborers began congregating on the streets and in parking lots of local convenience stores to wait for work. Their visibility had increased dramatically, and this created tension in the community. The controversy boiled over when the town council approved a measure to allow the establishment of a publicly-funded “day labor center,” a site where workers could wait for employers to pick them up for construction and landscaping jobs. This site recently opened, with day laborers, supporters, and protesters turning out on opening day.

## *Role of designers*

The interest of the Minutemen Project in events in Herndon serves as evidence that the day labor problem there has reached the level of moral panic. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that the SEEC<sup>3</sup> in Arlington has helped alleviate this sense of moral panic. The center functions well, and neighbors have been placated. Due to our ability to improve the aesthetics of undesirable or unwanted infrastructure, landscape architects have a role in alleviating the moral panic associated with day laborers. By helping to design and create a more aesthetically and culturally acceptable day labor center, my design can help lessen the sense of moral panic associated with highly visible day labor centers. Designers could help in the process of barriology of Hispanic neighborhoods, creating spaces where loitering becomes tolerable and even celebrated.

In order to better understand the spatial and functional characteristics, I did a case study of a formal day labor site. The following section describes this unique place, located in nearby Arlington, Virginia.

<sup>3</sup> The Shirlington Education and Employment Center (SEEC). This non-profit agency, located in Arlington, Virginia, helps Hispanic immigrants find jobs and connects them with various social services. The SEEC operates an office and pavilion where day laborers can wait for work. The pavilion is the subject of a case study in the following section of this paper.

