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Irving Grossman, 1954-1964: A Young Architect's Response
within Modernism.

by:

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A (thesis) submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and
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degree of Master of Arts in Canadian Art History

Carleton University

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the early career of Toronto architect, Irving Grossman. It presents his architectural production between 1954 and 1964 in the context of postwar developments of Modern architecture in Canada. The thesis proposes that Irving Grossman attempted to redefine Modernism's tenets by introducing alternative forms, based on experiences working in London, England in the early 1950's, and critical arguments directed at postwar suburban expansion in North America. An analysis of residential and memorial buildings of this period precedes a more critical examination of a housing project named Flemingdon Park in North York, Ontario. The selected buildings illustrate Irving Grossman's attempt at developing a Modern architecture based on human sense-experience rather than technological and material preoccupations of contemporary architecture of the period.

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Introduction :

After 1945, Canadian society wanted relief from the recent traumas of Depression and War. These circumstances urged Canadian culture to forget its past. The ensuing economic growth in the 1950's meant that opportunities were ripe for the adoption of a new symbolic language in the built environment. The ideas of modern abstraction, Functionalism and technological exploitation were therefore rapidly accepted into mainstream society. This new ethos, now divorced from history, captured the spatio-temporal conditions of Canada's developing technocracy. In this changing climate, a young architect from Toronto named Irving Grossman, began his career among a generation of architects who would build this new nation according to Modernist principles.

The architectural legacy of the Modernists was inspired by Functionalism's doctrines. In the postwar decades, the Modernist architects translated to the built landscape a rational Functionalism which attempted to respond to the chaotic nature of 20th century modernity. But this idiom was rapidly exhausted and soon challenged by postwar Humanist concerns. A skepticism of technological idealism and a growing sense of social alienation due to recent

Modern planning strategies, inspired a second generation of Modern architects like Irving Grossman, to attempt a revisionism from within Modern architecture, in the hope of returning a sense of humanity to Modern Rationalism. Later judgements described the architecture of this period as dogmatic, hegemonic and restrictive. But early Post-Modernists overlooked the complexity of architectural production during the late 1950s.¹

An apt reflection of the complex nature of Canadian architecture of the 1950s can be found in the work of Irving Grossman's early career, (between the age of eighteen and thirty-seven.) Unlike the dominant American-imported plurality of styles, which dominated Canadian architecture at this time and which was colonized from the 'Masters' of the Modern Movement, Grossman's early architectural influences encompassed the ideologies of Europe and North America. It meant that by the late 1950's Grossman introduced a new facet to Canadian Modern architecture that has often been misunderstood and overlooked.²

1. By the mid. to late 1960's a critique based on a linguistic paradigm had developed to counter the teleological progressiveness of Modernism and its functional determinism. On the one hand, Marxist derived radical criticism of all architectural production as ideology, was argued by the Venetian Tendenza. On the other, Liberal reappropriation of historical signs within an established communication system, was presented in Colin Rowe's 'bricolage' approach, or the sign systems underlying Robert Venturi's architectural complexity. Both criticisms drew on a skepticism of Modernism's rational totalization and grand schemes for renewal.

2. There are few references to Irving Grossman's architecture in general surveys of Canadian architecture. Published surveys of contemporary Canadian architecture from the 1970's and 1980's, briefly acknowledge earlier architects of the postwar period. e.g. Leon Whiteson, Modern Canadian Architecture, (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1983). Harold Kallman's A History of Canadian Architecture, (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1994), overlooks architects of the postwar period who may have had more substantial input than the ones he has written about.

The intention of this thesis is to argue that Irving Grossman's work in Ontario between 1954 and 1964, reflected an important theme within postwar Canadian architecture. He attempted to produce an alternative Modernism that tried to challenge the social alienation and individual anonymity of modernity. He argued that mainstream contemporary architecture had failed at resolving this condition because of its pragmatic Functionalism and Rational emphasis. To respond to individual values, he attempted to revise aspects of Modernism from within its canons. His earliest methods were influenced by pre-war Modern architects, but when he was hired to design a large-scale housing project, he tried to distance himself even further from contemporary Modernist thought. This ultimately proved ineffectual because he was influenced by theories that were unsuccessful in bringing into clearer form his critical stance. This was because Grossman did not recognize their affinity with the Modern Rationalism he sought to counter. Thus, Grossman was not a 'pioneer' Canadian architect and must be approached within this understanding.

To more fully comprehend Grossman's early work, this thesis will emphasize certain key events in his life rather than provide a detailed chronological biography. An attempt

has been made to situate these events within the broader context of his social, cultural and intellectual environment. Consequently, each chapter positions his ideas and experiences in relation to the larger analysis of architectural currents that were indirectly or even distantly significant to his work.

This thesis generally proposes that Grossman's anti-Functionalist stance in Canada during the late 1950s led to the appearance of two main themes in his work: one, a revisionism of pre-war Modernist avant-garde architecture, and two, a more independent mediation based on foreign architectural theories. To explain these themes, the first two chapters provide the foundation for each response, while the last three chapters explain how he further developed and applied these positions.

The first chapter will explain Grossman's impressionable youth. Between 1945 and 1953 he studied at the architecture school of the University of Toronto and then worked in London, England for three years after winning the Pilkington scholarship. A contextual explanation of Grossman's London surroundings will be examined, since much of his later architectural production derives from these experiences is rarely referred to by him in his later years. The second chapter will review his earliest attempts at developing his own architectural position after he returned

from England to open his Toronto firm in 1953. His first tentative critique of Modernism will be explained in the context of his High Art social milieu in Toronto and its importance to Toronto's postwar culture. The following chapter will present domestic and memorial buildings from the mid. to late 1950's as examples of his tentative attempts to introduce Modern elements alternative to those prevailing in Toronto at this time.

The following two chapters will emphasise Grossman's shift towards an expanded critique of postwar architecture of the suburbs and how this affected his designs for a high-density housing development north of Toronto. Chapter four focuses on popular criticisms of the suburbs and how these views produced a myth of the suburbs that supported some Toronto architects' intentions to introduce a new interpretation of the row house. Moreover, their redesigned housing type provided the basis upon which Grossman could develop a more radical application.

The last chapter will present Grossman's most famous project: a high-density town house community in North York Ontario named Flemingdon Park. A history of the site's development leading up to Grossman's involvement in the project will precede an analysis of the town houses and apartment blocks he designed. It is then possible to assess whether his methods and designs successfully satisfied his

own anti-suburban position by relating them to underlying theoretical influences to which he had been introduced while in London. This also permits a more discriminating consideration of Grossman's architectural methodology.

The formulation of these arguments was based on a variety of research methods. Most of Grossman's personal material was easily accessible due to his early involvement at *The Canadian Architect* and other periodicals of the period. Much of Grossman's early biographical details were deduced from this material and compared with the results of phone interviews of contemporary friends, professional acquaintances, classmates, and his associate architects of the time. Yet because of the passage of time and obscurity of personal memories from four decades earlier, these sources had to be critically compared to each other.

Grossman's numerous published articles and exposes of his buildings provided reasonable documentation of his earliest important opinions and works. There was little access to his personal archival material or original sketches and drawings, but this was alleviated by numerous visits to and documentation of most of his surviving buildings of the time. Grossman's early essays provided a more substantial understanding of his architectural intentions and permitted a more thorough comparison with his

actual buildings.

The nature of this thesis likewise demanded a thorough understanding of comparable contextual material on postwar architecture. Much of the secondary material emphasised the work of Grossman's Toronto colleagues or other impressions of Canadian architecture from the time, since there have been few substantial works on Canadian architecture of the 1950s in general. The *Architectural Review* and contemporary readings by notable British critics and architects provided a clearer understanding of his London environment of the early 1950s. Though many of the contemporary sources were often prejudiced and indeed more often polemical, this was balanced by due reading of more recent historical analysis of events.

These sources provide a reasonable basis on which to develop a framework of Irving Grossman's early career in Ontario. Through an analysis of Grossman's work it is possible to provide a more thorough conception of Canadian architecture in the 1950s. Focusing on the building achievements of an architect who had already become well respected among his peers while still in his twenties, we are able to bring to light a man whose work represents an important element in the development of postwar Canadian Modernism. This work also reveals the motivations of at

least one member of that generation of architects who first appeared on the scene during this period of rapid expansion.

Chapter 1: Shaping of a Young Architect

Irving Grossman's intention to become an architect was crystallized in 1945 during his last year at Harbord Collegiate in downtown Toronto. His English teacher had read Woodsworth's *Upon Westminster Bridge*, awakening in him an aspiration to the art of design and building.³ That autumn he enrolled in the University of Toronto's School of Architecture.

It was between 1945 and 1953 that Grossman was introduced to Modernism's social and technological canons that had become the dominant expression of postwar prosperity. However, he was also being exposed to the growing crisis within the Modern Movement. His architecture essentially developed out of three significant experiences prior to establishing a firm in 1953. Initially, it was the influential atmosphere of the newly modernized architecture curriculum at the University of Toronto, where the pro-Modern faculty disseminated a techno-functional idealism. The second major influence was his brief summer apprenticeship under Rudolph Schindler in 1947, where he was introduced to the Austrian's biological-regionalism which contested the formalism of Hitchcock and Johnson.

After his graduation, Grossman spent three years in

3.Adele Freedman, "A Salute to Two Heroes of Modernism," Globe and Mail, Oct. 17, 1994, p.C1

Britain and the Continent between 1950 and 1953. During this ideologically-charged period Grossman worked first for the partnership of Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew and later for the London County Council (LCC). Grossman's time in London familiarized him with the debates between the older pre-war Modernists and their skeptical younger counterparts. Central to the controversy was the revision of the aging Modernists' functionalist rhetoric with a national sentimentalism, which opposed the youth's formalist and existential assertions. The younger generation's interest in the individual within postwar society countered their elder's populism and universal psychological empiricism. This debate would affect Grossman's architecture when he returned to the provincialism of Toronto. It provided him with a more substantial knowledge of current issues than many of his peers. Yet his architectural revisionism would not be as radical as that of some of his London acquaintances. He therefore returned with limited ideas of how to respond to his own concerns about Modern architecture.

Education in Modernism

The University of Toronto was one of the few schools in Canada in the immediate postwar period offering a diversity of programmes which could respond to the changing demands of post-secondary education. In particular, rapid expansion

eventually led to the separation of the School of Architecture from the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering in 1946.⁴ This was significant since it meant that architecture became independent of the pragmatic approach of engineering and this facilitated the introduction of a revised curriculum which embraced Modern design concepts and principles.

Irving Grossman's undergraduate education took place during these late years of the 1940s. Surrounded by a faculty of ardent Modernists, including notable architectural historian Eric Arthur and urban planner Anthony Adamson, Grossman participated in a school which was lively with debate and the promotion of Modern architecture; John A. Hall, a part-time professor of freehand and watercolour classes, remembered the period as an eager and exciting time to be involved in the School.⁵ Unlike other Canadian schools of architecture, Toronto's ideological shift reflected British Modernist influence, apparent both in the make-up of the faculty and the content of the

4. The tidal wave of Canadian war veterans taking advantage of post-secondary education support meant that the University needed to respond by recruiting more professors and accommodations. While still under the School of Engineering in 1946, the Architecture Department needed physical space for the overwhelming enrolment. This was resolved by retaining a campus in Ajax, which started to offer courses in January of 1946. University of Toronto Archives, (hereafter UTA) A76-0029/009, Director's Files, Student Administrative Council, 1949-56. By 1950, the student body had risen from fifty students in 1948 to 276. Ibid.

5. John A. Hall was an OCA graduate who had worked with Arthur Lismer and was a part-time professor of freehand and watercolour classes. Grossman met Hall at the School and eventually he assisted Hall on the exhibitions and planning for the "women's interests" department at the Canadian National Exhibition. Phone interview with John A. Hall, Jan. 8, 1997 and Pearl McCarthy, "Art and Artists: Young Architect Plans Toronto Studio Centre." Globe & Mail, Jul. 29, 1950, 8.

curriculum. It was also a reaction to student interests.⁶ Even the conservative values of the director had recognized the 'new spirit.'⁷ The British and Continental modern ethos of the curriculum meant studio classes focused on technical skill and the development of new technology in the building industry, while the design and humanities components were based on the teleological histories of Modern architecture then emerging and often written by British Modernist architects and historians.⁸

Grossman's was the first generation of student architects in Canada to be aware of the potentiality of the recently introduced Modern aesthetic and they soon identified with the works of influential contemporary architects. For example, the Architectural Society, established in the School's first year by the students, invited many prominent architects and historians from the

6. The faculty of 1947-1948 included: H.H. Madill, Eric Arthur, William E. Carswell, R.J.K. Barker, J.A. Murray, G. Eaglesmith, A.P.C. Adamson, S.R. Kent, J. Barrington, J.S. Langley, C.F.T. Roundwaite, and part-time prof.'s, W. Shulman, W.J. McBain, F. Coates, H.B. Dunnington-Grubb, and John A. Hall. James Murray believed that the interest in Modern architecture came from the students and not a "matter of school policy." James A. Murray, "In Search of Modern Architecture in the North-East States." Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, 23:9 (Sept. 1946): 219. [Hereafter, JRAIC.]

7. H.H. Madill's annual addresses for the graduating classes of the late 1940s consistently emphasized that architectural design was "...based on the function of the building and the materials and methods of construction determining the solution of the problem." UTA, A76-0029/009, Director's Files, Student Administration Council, 1949-1956. See also, Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, The New Spirit: Modern Architecture in Vancouver, 1938-1963. (Montreal:CCA, 1997):30.

8. The reading lists for courses on town planning, modern architectural history and theory, usually taught by Tony Adamson or Eric Arthur, included numerous English Modernists: Ralph Tubbs, Nicolaus Pevsner, F.R.S. Yorke, and J.M. Richards; American authors included Lewis Mumford, W. Lescaze, W. D. Teague, C. Bauer and Sigfried Giedion. University of Toronto, Academic Calendars, 1947-1950.

Eastern United States to come and lecture.⁹ This East Coast connection meant that in following years the School produced several postgraduate students for Harvard's programmes.¹⁰

It was in this atmosphere that Grossman received his architectural education. His yearly honour status suggests a real enthusiasm for the ideas he was being taught. However, while other students were attracted to the works of Frank Lloyd Wright or Bauhaus immigrants, such as Mies van der Rohe or Walter Gropius, Grossman's interests did not lie in the work of the East Coast Modernists, but rather in the architecture of Le Corbusier. As a classmate noted, he was the "gifted drawer and the Corbu. man of the class."¹¹ And where his classmates produced rudimentary Wrightian and Gropian imitations, Grossman's earliest published work superficially imitates elements of Le Corbusier's *Grands Travaux* of the 1930's, albeit superficially. His third year proposal for a factory [fig. 1] has similarities with the compositional promenades of the Centrosoyus and the Palais des Nations. [fig. 2,3] Grossman's elementarist asymmetry

9. Invitations were sent out to : Marcel Breuer, Frank Lloyd Wright (accepted) in 1948, Alvar Aalto in 1949, Walter Gropius in 1949, Joseph Hudnut (accepted) in 1949, Pietro Belluschi, Lewis Mumford, Philip Johnson (accepted) in 1951, and Siegfried Giedion in 1955. UTA A76-0029/003, Director's Files, 1934-1957, A-C.

10. In 1946 there were six Canadian students in various departments of the Harvard School of Architecture, (including University of Manitoba graduates John C. Parkin and Harry Seidler.) "University of Toronto, School of Architecture." JRAIC, 23:4 (April 1946): 88. Various field trips were organized by the School in the late 1940's to the United States. In 1946 there was a brief trip to Boston, meeting Dean Wurster at MIT, and Gropius at Harvard. In 1949, thirteen students and some faculty travelled to the Tennessee Dam Project, while also seeing Chatham Village, Breuer and Gropius' New Kensington Wartime Housing and a meeting with Eiel Saarinen at the Cranbrook Academy. JRAIC, 27:4 (April 1950): 132.

11. Phone Interview, James Strutt, Mar. 6 1997.



Figure 1: Moffat Stove Factory Model. 1948. [JRAIC 25:5 (May 1948):154]

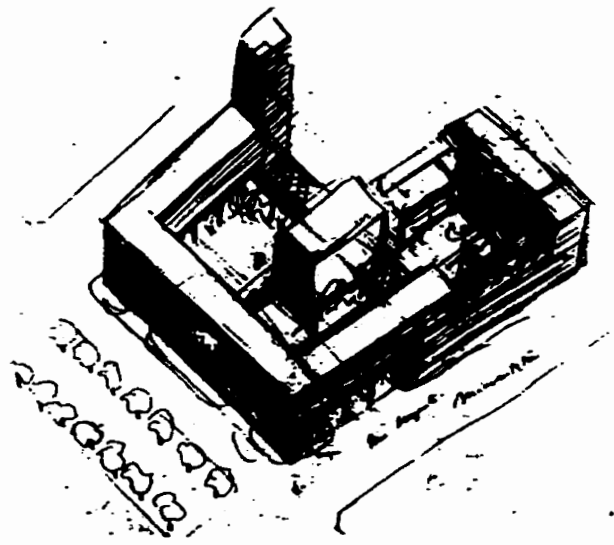


Figure 2: Le Corbusier, Centrosoyus Sketch. [Palazzolo and Vio, In the Footsteps of Le Corbusier, (N.Y. Rizzoli, 1991): 121]

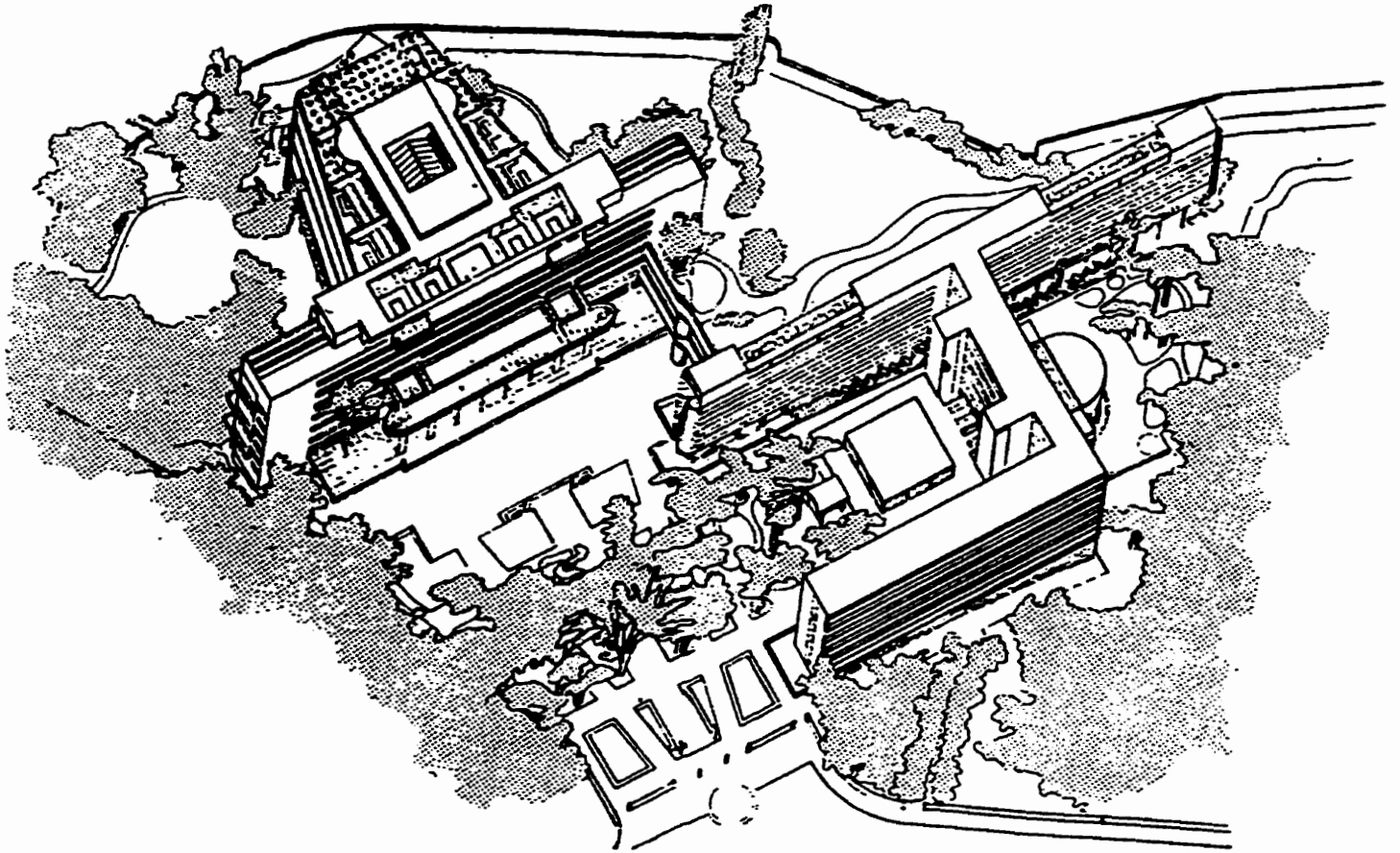


Figure 3: Le Corbusier, Palais des Nations, Geneva, 1926-28. [Palazzolo and Vio, In the Footsteps of Le Corbusier, (N.Y. Rizzoli, 1991): 118]

and interior courtyard suspiciously echo Le Corbusier's urban works of the 1930s, which had been published in his Oeuvre Complète by the time Grossman was in university. Although Grossman's project does not address the projection of urban continuity central to Le Corbusier's 'Grands Travaux', this interest is clear evidence the master architect would play a role in the development of Grossman's architectural concepts through the 1950's.

By his last year in the architecture programme at the University of Toronto, Grossman was a recognizable talent among his classmates. For the fifth-year design thesis, Grossman's project was a response to inadequate accommodation for artists and architects in Toronto, especially for the immigrant-artist who could not afford a studio. The proposal was for an 'artist colony' in Toronto's Rosedale ravine, located near the Group of Seven's Studio Building. Grossman's design process was based on interviews with many Toronto artists and their attraction to shared accommodations. The eventual design was for forty-four day studios for architects, painters and several studio apartments. The design also included the preservation of the Studio Building and incorporated a gallery and sculpture garden. Several students had submitted similar 'artist colony' projects, but it was Grossman's project which was an exception, since it led to his eventual nomination for the

Pilkington Glass Scholarship of 1950.¹²

While this academic success paved the way for later opportunities in the field of architecture, it is worth noting Grossman was developing other interests as well. He had an amateur interest in ballet which he studied during his university years at the Boris Volkoff Canadian Ballet School.¹³

A Summer in California.

A feature of the U.of T. programme was a requisite summer work-study term before graduation. This exposed Grossman to a new influence distinct from East-Coast Modernism and so to an early understanding of the heterogeneity of the postwar architectural scene. In the summer of 1947, after second year, he was hired to work in the Los Angeles office of Rudolph Schindler. It is unclear why he decided to work with the aging Schindler, but it may be Schindler's human-oriented Modernism was analogous with Grossman's own developing views, views which would be consciously articulated only decades later.¹⁴ Yet Schindler's unique history as an 'alternate' Modernist sheds light on the work Grossman would ultimately produce in the

12.Pearl McCarthy, 8.

13.He may have also been involved with Sadler Wells Ballet while in London, Ibid.

14.Grossman has stated that he was already enamoured by the work of Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius. re: Moffat Factory Proposal., and he did not "appreciate the greatness of the guy [Schindler] until [he] left his office." Adele Freedman, G&M, C1.

late 1950's.

By 1947, Schindler's firm was in its waning days, building wealthy residences straddling the slopes of the Los Angeles Valley. But his acclaimed spatial theories extending from his work under Frank Lloyd Wright and creating such pioneering residences as the Lovell House were widely respected among the postwar West Coast Modernists. Schindler's rejection in the 1930's of East Coast Bauhaus-based formalist aesthetic, may have foreshadowed Grossman's and other architects' later criticism of the functionalist preoccupations of the architectural mainstream.¹⁵

On a more mundane level, the brief time that Grossman spent in Los Angeles may not have had an initial impact on his designs, but the experience in an office preoccupied with domestic designs, would prove useful when in the early years of his firm he too depended on private residential commissions.¹⁶ Still, it was only decades later that he readily admitted the significance of Schindler's work.¹⁷

The British Years: Among the Polemics of Generations

In 1950, Irving Grossman was awarded the Pilkington

15.Schindler rejected the formalist basis of Hitchcock and Johnson's International Style Exhibition in 1932.

16.The late 1950's residences contain a similar stylistic and planar quality that was present in Schindler's oeuvre. (See chapter 3.)

17.Phone interview, Bernard Gillespie, (an associate of Grossman's firm from 1959.) Sept. 1997.

Glass Scholarship;¹⁸ it offered him the opportunity to work in London for the firm of Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew and the London County Council. His years in London coincided with a period of ideological ferment. Many of the 1930's Socialist-Modern architects had shifted away by the late 1940's from their earlier Continental purism. They were now being challenged by a younger avant-garde generation, many of whom were recent graduates of the Architectural Association in London, who were searching for new formalist interpretation. The love-hate relationship of the young with the modernist idealism of their older peers meant that a less Romantic and often 'brutal' exposure of the self would eventually influence housing and planning as the aged generation faded from the profession. This schism, which Grossman observed, was significant for his later housing designs in Toronto. Elements of both the social idealism of the pre-war Modernists and the skepticism of their dogmatic politicization by the young British avant-garde in the 1950's were to find their way into his work. It meant that these fruitful years would influence much of the course of his future architectural stance.

18. The Pilkingtons were prosperous English brothers who were glass producers in England and Canada. They had developed the scholarship in 1947 to give Canadian architecture students an opportunity to study in England and allow for travel on the continent. Of the three submissions by the University of Toronto, Grossman had the best marks, and being in honour standing each year of his degree meant a deserved reward for his talent. UTA A76-0029/10 Director's Files, 1934-57, Scholarships, C-T.

The dichotomous nature of the English debate in the early 1950's evolved out of widespread criticism of postwar housing programmes. On the one hand, many of the older generation professed a Humanism which attempted to appeal to 'the people', but their belief in the principles of the Athens Charter was becoming increasingly untenable. Yet in the early 1950's there were no clear ideological boundaries and architectural offices in large public corporations like the London County Council reflected the multiplicity of opinions pervading British postwar architecture. Although many of the details of Grossman's experiences in London are not available, it is clear that his later housing designs stem from these fruitful debates.

Grossman's 'grand tour' of Europe was possible through the \$1 500 travelling allowance given as part of the Pilkington Glass Scholarship. This provided for an eight month stay in Europe, of which six were to be spent in Britain.¹⁹ But Grossman stayed well beyond the scholarship's requirements, spending time travelling to Paris, Greece and Israel.

After his arrival in London in the fall of 1950, he spent ten months employed by the firm of Maxwell Fry, Jane Drew and Partners, who were working on the upcoming Festival

19. Grossman's award of the scholarship had broken a three year domination by John Russell's architecture programme at the University of Manitoba.

of Britain. This was to open on England's May Day of 1951 along London's South Bank of the Thames. Grossman assisted in designing the Waterside Restaurant, an undulating roof restaurant. It was in these initial months that Grossman began to acquaint himself with London's art and architecture community, and the growing criticism of the Festival's "popular decorativeness" by the younger generation (even though many were involved in its development.)²⁰ But he would not clearly observe this professional tension until he returned to London from travelling in the summer of 1951. At this time he was hired by the London County Council.

The Festival of Britain's planning was an important aspect of British Modernism of the early 1950's and central to the emerging polemic between the two generations of post-war architects. This centenary of the Great Exhibition of 1851 was intended to promote Modernism's structural innovations and socio-economic application, while also publicising the recently-ousted Labour government's postwar reconstruction programme and Welfare State ideology. It was also an attempt to appeal to a public that had not completely embraced the 'anonymity' of their rebuilt nation. Robert Maxwell, (who had worked under the director of the Festival, Hugh Casson, in the early 1950's) contended that

²⁰Grossman met the 'Brutalist' artist, Eduardo Paolozzi, who had designed the fountain sculpture for Fry and Drew's restaurant.

the Festival,

was intended to be a boost to morale and production in the midst of post-war scarcities, and a promise of better things to come. It was intended at the architectural level to demonstrate that a vernacular of modern architecture already existed. The common man had been inclined to identify modern architecture as flat-roofed and peculiar: the pavilions...were to show him that it had a human face.²¹

Under Sir Hugh Casson, the Festival's 'human face' was essentially a decorative covering of the pre-war purist designs by the very same architects already associated with Modernism, including Grossman's boss, Maxwell Fry. Though the buildings were of ephemeral quality, the picturesque groupings were a noteworthy accomplishment [fig. 4].²² The deliberate scattering of buildings around the focus of Ralph Tubbs' Dome of Discovery, created a public familiarity and popularity that became fashionable. But Kenneth Frampton later interpreted the Festival as an event which,

...served to give this undemanding cultural policy a progressive and modern dimension by parodying the heroic iconography of the Soviet Constructivists....[and] represented nothing more consequential through their structural rhetoric than the 'circus' of life for which presumably the 'bread' was soon to be provided. It was not that the exhibition was not without content, but that its content was presented in a gratuitous manner.²³

21. Robert Maxwell, New British Architecture. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972) 9.

22. Anthony Jackson. The Politics of Architecture: A History of Modern Architecture in Britain. (Toronto: U of T Pr., 1970.) 179.

23. Kenneth Frampton. Modern Architecture: A Critical History. 3rd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 263.

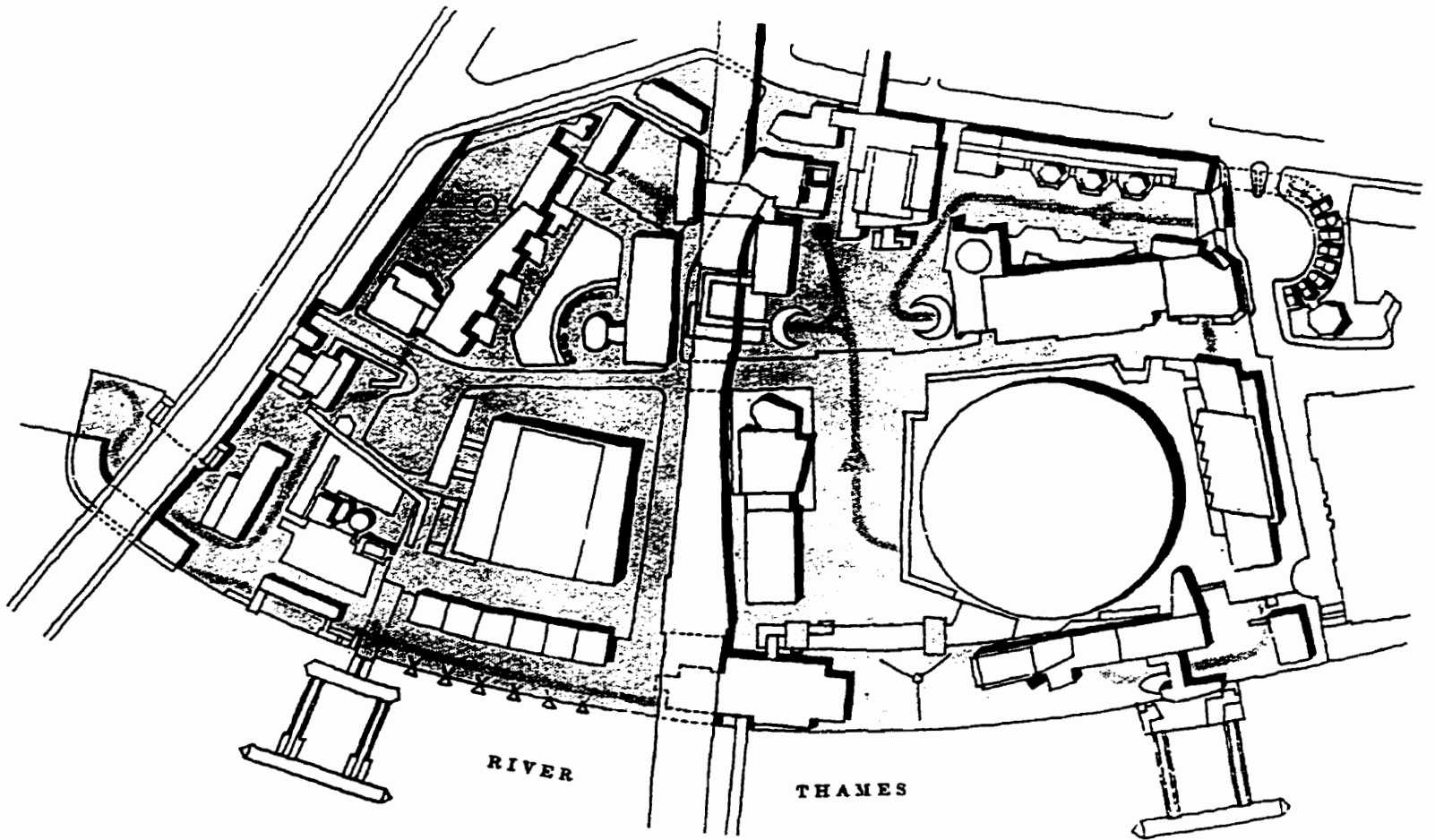


Figure 4: Festival of Britain Site Plan, London South Bank, 1951. [Anthony Jackson, The Politics of Architecture. (Toronto: U of T Pr., 1970):143.

Frampton's "gratuitous manner" may have corresponded to the so-called "The New Humanism," a term coined by the *Architectural Review*, to describe current housing and planning based partially on historical picturesque elements within the English landscape tradition of asymmetry and irregularity.²⁴ This was partly a consequence of British postwar interest in the regional architecture of Scandinavia, especially apparent in Swedish housing construction.²⁵ But this scenographic-mimetic 'visual Englishness' also stemmed from pre-war socialist architects' continued interest in British Modernism's 19th century vernacular and Arts and Crafts origins. These elements were recast, (ironically by some of the most purist architects of the 1930s,) in the attempt to create a nationalist/socialist representation for the post-war period. Their architecture was partially inspired by the Social Realism propounded by Stalin's cultural commissar, Andrei Zhdanov,²⁶ and the Zeilenbau interests of the diaspora architect, Walter Gropius.²⁷

24. Initially formulated by Sir Uvedale Price in the late 18th century, and revived by the *Architectural Review* in the late 1940's by editor, Hugh de Cronin Hastings, and supported by art editor, Gordon Cullen's didactic catalogue of sketches. See *Architectural Review*, 106:636, (Dec. 1949): 355-374. [Hereafter *AR*.]

25. N.Pevsner, "Picturesque England," in *The Englishness of English Art*, (London: Architectural Press, 1956):163-180.

26. This lasted until the death of Stalin in 1953 and Nikita Khrushchev's revision of Soviet architecture by adopting more economical construction methods. His policies eventually resuscitated a meagre version of Russian constructivism.

27. The socialist architects' view was summarized by Herbert Read in 1935, "Architecture is a necessary art, and it is intimately bound up with the social reconstruction which must take place under Communist regime. How do we, as Englishmen, conceive a Communist architecture? As a reversion to Tudor rusticity, or Georgian stateliness, or the bourgeois pomp of the neo-classical style? Surely none of these styles can for a moment be considered in relation to

(continued...)

By 1952 the architectural manner of early postwar reconstruction in England had come under growing scrutiny and criticism for its "routine functionalism."²⁸ But while the *Architectural Review's* editors were proponents of the "New Humanism," the more extreme criticism came from younger architects eager to rid English architecture of its national sentiment. They wanted to reinvent Modernism's material emphasis and combine it with a sociological methodology.²⁹

Irving Grossman's introduction to the ideological debates began when he returned from Europe in the autumn of 1951 to work for the London County Council. We do not know the precise details of his biography at this time, but it is apparent that he gravitated towards the younger London architects since he often spent time at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), where many of the pioneering architectural discussions were occurring.³⁰

In the early 1950's, the ICA was home to both the elite British establishment and the younger artists and architects. But unlike the semi-public Institute which

27.(...continued)

the city of the future. Must we not rather confidently look forward to a development of the new architecture of which Walter Gropius is the foremost exponent; of that architecture which, in his own words, 'bodies itself forth, not in stylistic imitation or ornamental flippery, but in those simple and sharply modelled designs in which every part merges naturally into the comprehensive volume of the whole.'" "What is Revolutionary Art?" in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, ed. *Art in Theory: 1900-1990*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) 502. See also, Reyner Banham. *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* (London: Architectural Pr., 1966) 11.

28.J.M. Richards, "The Next Step?" *AR*, 107:639, (March, 1950): 167, 170-171.

29.This was succinctly satirised by Alan Colquhoun in a letter to the *Architectural Review* in July of 1954.

30.Grossman was an acquaintance of the Smithsons.

exists today, the original Dover Street location was a small informal gathering place. As Grossman observed, this

...provided...a means of being exposed to the ideas and works of artists-the famous and the arriving-and for the artists, provided a common ground whereon they could meet, and rub temperamental shoulders.³¹

By 1952 there was a growing sense that the ICA had lost touch with the younger generation. Herbert Read, the head of the ICA and an influential critic in the 1930s, essentially represented what the youth were against. For Reyner Banham the younger generation was essentially rebelling against "the marble shadow of Sir Herbert Read's Abstract-Left-Freudian aesthetics."³² This sentiment eventually gave birth to the loosely organized dissenters, the Independent Group (IG), who held their first exclusive lectures at the ICA in the summer of 1952.³³ Consequently, ICA management opened up the discussions of the IG by organising a series entitled "Seminars in the Aesthetic Problems of Contemporary Art" in early 1953.³⁴ With this it was indisputable that the younger

31.Irving Grossman, "Report of the Pilkington Glass Scholar, 1950 Part 1," JRAIC, 13:9 (Aug. 1954): 255.

32.Nigel Whiteley, Pop Design: Modernism to Mod, (London: The Design Council, 1987):46. and Reyner Banham, "Futurism for Keeps," Art, (Dec. 1960): 33.

33.The Independent Group was born from meetings at the ICA in early 1952. Among those present were Reyner Banham, (who later became Convenor,) Tony del Renzio, Edward Wight, Colin St. John Wilson, Sam Stevens, Theo Crosby, William Turnbull, and Richard Lanoi. The initial lectures in the summer of 1952 were by invitation only and introduced intellectual discussions on mass media, the machine aesthetic and technology. Eduardo Paolozzi's pop imagery stemmed from interests in Paris' art brut and Surrealism, which had been developed by Jean Dubuffet and Michel Tapié earlier in the decade. The IG seminars had a similar tone of rawness, as opposed to the driving purist refinement of other Modern -isms. See Frank Whitford, Eduardo Paolozzi, (London: Tate Gallery, 1971):44. and Whiteley, 45-74.

34.The lectures produced some of the first tentative theories on Pop Art and included discussions on fashion, American car styling, communication theory, and a lecture entitled "Were the Dadaists non-Aristotelean?" Whitford, 45.

generation had begun to influence the course of avant-garde art and architecture in Britain.

Grossman was affected by the refreshing elements of the ICA discussions. (For example, he bought one of Eduardo Paolozzi's sculptures prior to his departure.) The ICA discussions gave Grossman an opportunity to develop his architectural ideas. He remarked that

Frequently an evening there [ICA] was spent in the presentation of some building or project by the architects responsible, during which slides were shown, intentions and philosophies stated and general criticisms made from the audience...there was in the end the immense satisfaction to the spirit, and further clarification of one's own direction.³⁵

The evening discussions at the ICA and the input of the IG's pop eclecticism inevitably influenced the architectural exhibitions. For example, Peter and Alison Smithson's "Parallel of Life and Art" exhibit at the ICA in 1953, which involved members of the IG, clearly showed a new raw aesthetic, unlike previous Modernist refinement [fig. 5]. The 'scrapbook' imagery of technical, biological and anthropological photographic details and moments in time, stemmed from the scatological elements of the Parisian Existentialism's 'art brut'.³⁶ The unrefined and anti-

35. Grossman, "Pilkington Part 1", 256.

36. Jean Dubuffet and other artists of the late 1940's had developed *art brut* out of Dadaism and Surrealism, but instead emphasised an a-formality or anti-culture position by discovering expression among the marginal, (criminals, children, the insane) of Western culture. Eduardo Paolozzi, who had worked with the Smithsons on the exhibition had spent time in Paris with Dubuffet and Giacometti.



Figure 5: P. and A. Smithson, Parallel of Life and Art Exhibition, ICA, 1953. [Nigel Whiteley, Pop Design: Modernism to Mod., (London: The Design Council, 1987):47.

classical stress of the show reflected the Smithsons', (and other young architects) desire to present a more authentic working-class culture.

For British architects, a similar expression was discovered in one of most influential structures of the period when Le Corbusier's 'béton brut' Unité d'Habitation was completed in 1952. The exposed concrete maisonette block was the fruition of Le Corbusier's urban designs of the pre-war period and offered young British architects a housing alternative that they could apply to postwar reconstruction in their own country. For example, the Smithson's Golden Lane proposal adopted the concrete rawness and street deck of the Corbusian model as their alternative to the Rational-Empirical debate of the early 1950's. They developed an irregular clustering of apartment blocks linked by Corbusian pedestrian ways in the air while retaining an English street nostalgia. In essence, they were attempting to develop an alternative, sociologically inspired form of nodal structures, that allowed for a complexity which most functional postwar housing did not recognize. [Fig. 6]

Ultimately, the Smithsons' and like-minded architects' were to confront the aging pre-war Modernists at the CIAM conferences held by the MARS group in the 1950's. By the late 1950's the exhaustion of proposals by this older generation led to the dissolution of CIAM and the birth of

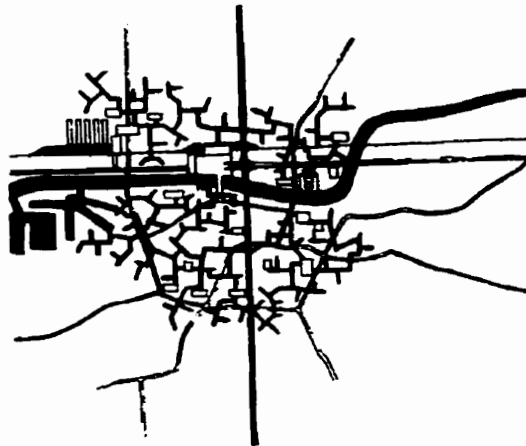
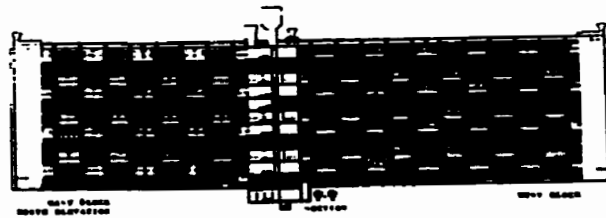
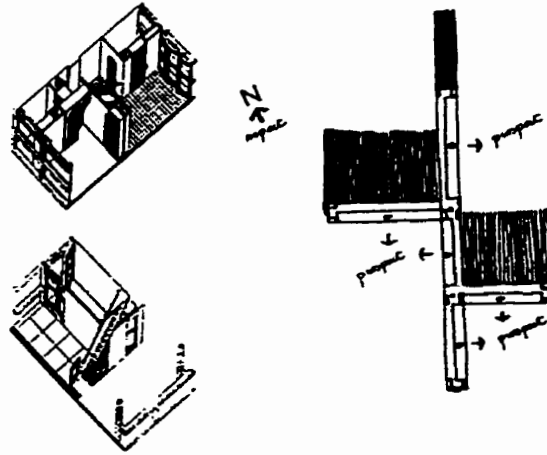
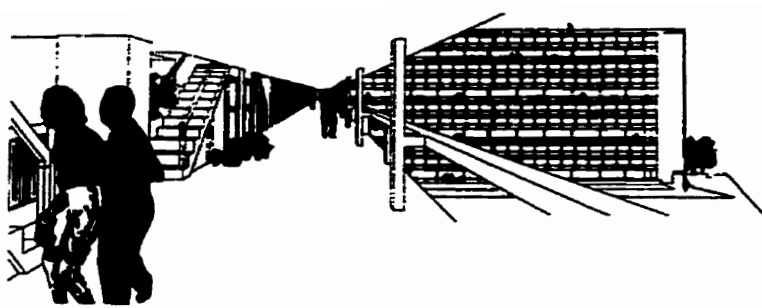


Figure 6: Alison and Peter Smithson, Golden Lane Competition Design and 'Golden Lane City', City of London, 1951-52. [A. Smithson, Team X Primer, 1968.]

the Team X group. The clear dichotomy between the picturesque sentimentalism of the "New Empiricists" and the Existentialism of the young avant-garde, embodied in the Independent Group, was a fruitful tension in British architecture. It was a tension which resonated in all the architectural firms, including the London County Council.

The Mirrored Debate: Young Architects in the London County Council:

In the fall of 1951, Grossman returned to London and was hired by the Housing Division of the London County Council. He worked until July of 1953, coming into contact with many of the young architects that would shape the future direction and trends in British architecture.³⁷ As Joseph Baker later describes,

He [Grossman] was quick to identify...in the offices of the London County Council, to imbibe their social vision of a post-war world made whole by a white and radiant architecture. They were heady times, sharing dreams and quarters with some of Britain's angriest young architects, sculptors and painters.³⁸

The LCC, founded in 1889, was the world's largest housing authority in the 1950's, and was the overseer of much of the County of London's postwar redevelopment scheme

37. Private employment was scarce and many young architects worked for the LCC in the early 1950's, including Peter and Alison Smithson, Alan Colquhoun, Peter Carter, and Colin St. John Wilson. The Smithson's worked for one year in the School Division; Colin (Sandy) St. John Wilson was in the Housing Division between 1950 and 1955.

38. Joseph Baker, "Irving Grossman: A Profile." The Canadian Architect, 41:2 (Feb. 1995): 26. [Hereafter TCA.]

under the Town and Country Planning Act of 1944.³⁹ It was inevitable that the LCC, under the newly hired chief-architect, Leslie Martin, would be forced to confront the ideological strains in 1950's London. At that time the LCC's housing reconstruction schemes were based on recreating new communities from the preceding nuclei of social and functional centres that were particularly strong in the County of London,⁴⁰ while emphasising a dispersalist policy by creating New Towns beyond a greenbelt and reducing the central core population. Though much of the scheme was not instituted, it was an opportunity for the Council to develop a largely effective housing division within the County.⁴¹ The Abercrombie-Forshaw plans were "...a tangible brief [which] now...all London -not this slum or that-...was the canvas on which the staff could work."⁴²

In December of 1949 pressure from the public criticisms of J.M. Richards, editor of the *Architectural Review*, and Robert Matthew, the Council's head architect, returned housing design from the Valuer's Department to the Housing Division,

39. Based on Patrick Abercrombie and J. H. Forshaw's fifty year plan produced in 1943 and 1944 by invitation of the newly-formed Ministry of Works and Building.

40. Gerald Dix, "Patrick Abercrombie 1879-1957," in Gordon E. Cherry, ed. Pioneers in British Planning. (London: Architectural Pr., 1981): 115.

41. The LCC New Town schemes of the late 1940s were not successful considering the postwar influx of workers back into the core of London, the cost of transportation, and lack of industry. Andrew Saint, "Spread The People: The LCC's Dispersal Policy, 1889-1965," in Andrew Saint, ed. Politics and The People of London: The London County Council. (London: Hambledon PR., 1989) 230-231.

42. R. Fumeaux-Jordan, "L.C.C.: New Standards in Official Architecture." AR, 120:718 (Nov. 1956): 311.

under a new Principal Housing Architect, J. Whitfield Lewis.⁴³ The shift was in response to the growing criticism of the 'Georgian barracks' which the Council was developing a reputation for under the Valuation department [fig. 7].⁴⁴

Under the energetic directorship of Lewis, the department grew to a staff of over 300 architects who were separated into twenty-two autonomous groups of fifteen architects. The groups emphasised a teamwork approach in developing new housing projects, rather than a (private) hierarchical structure.⁴⁵ This system created a dynamic within the Department between the concerns for 'community' and the creation of "pioneering work which would simply not have been possible 'under commerce'."⁴⁶

Grossman's experience working in these creative surroundings was an opportune period for a Canadian architect to be connected with the debates between the

43. Similar pressure came from the housing examples being produced by more innovative London Boroughs' hiring of private firms. e.g. Lubetkin' in Finsbury, or Powell & Moya in Westminster. Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994): 104.

44. Irving Grossman, "Report of the Pilkington Glass Scholar, 1950 Part 1," JRAIG, 31:8 (Aug. 1954): 257-258. The pressure mostly came from J.M. Richards' stinging attack's on radio in the spring of 1949 and an article in the Architectural Journal. By December of 1949, the LCC's design department was shifted to housing architect, Robert Matthew; C.W. Gibson, the Housing Chairman and supporter of purely economic postwar housing, was replaced with pro-Modernist, Reginald Stamp. Glendinning and Muthesius, 104.

45. The anonymity within the LCC harked back to its pioneering period: "...in its earlier works there is a consistency of style and outlook arising, not from the boss imposing himself, but from a social and architectural ideal-the Morris-Lethaby-Webb ideal..."Fumeaux-Jordan, 306 and 321.

46. Fumeaux-Jordan, 303-323, and Glendinning and Muthesius, 104. Many young avant-garde architects were captivated by the participatory nature of the LCC; some had been attracted away from the innovative Hertfordshire County Council.



Figure 7: Bridgewater & Shephard, LCC Landsbury, Nankin St. and Pekin Close, London, L. 1940's. [Glendinning and Methesius, Tower Block. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994): 31.]

stereotyped formalist 'Hards' and the empirical 'Softs'.⁴⁷ LCC designs of this period embodied a mixture of empirical and formalist biased architects. The numerous projects the LCC completed during the early postwar years therefore ranged from picturesque groupings of mixed developments and Corbusian-inspired slab blocks. But by the early 1950's the 'Hards' had become an increasingly influential force within the LCC and it was at this time that Grossman was collaborating on projects which reflected this trend. Of course most LCC architects were not solely responsible for housing designs because of the immensely complex collaborative process of designing, creating working drawings and on site refinements. Consequently, this stimulating anonymity resulted in the varied developments throughout London.

Grossman most likely saw the completion of designs and beginning of construction of two LCC mixed developments. The earliest scheme was at Princes Way and Wimbledon Park Side, (Ackroydon) where 436 flats were in nine types of dwellings, including various heights of apartment blocks [fig. 8].⁴⁸ Grossman was most likely involved with the Ackroydon Estate

47. Oliver Cox, who coined the generalized labels considered the 'Hards' as "architects ready to confront and amaze versus the Softs who were content to humour and persuade." Lionel Esher, A Broken Wave: The Rebuilding of England 1940-1980, (London: Lane, 1981): 107.

48. 11, 8, 5, 3-storey blocks with internal staircase access, and 3, 4, 5-storey blocks with balcony access with two types of maisonettes and terraced cottages. (The maximum height of any slab or point block was eleven stories in height. The Greater London County removed this by-law in 1958.)Glendinning and Methesius, 32.

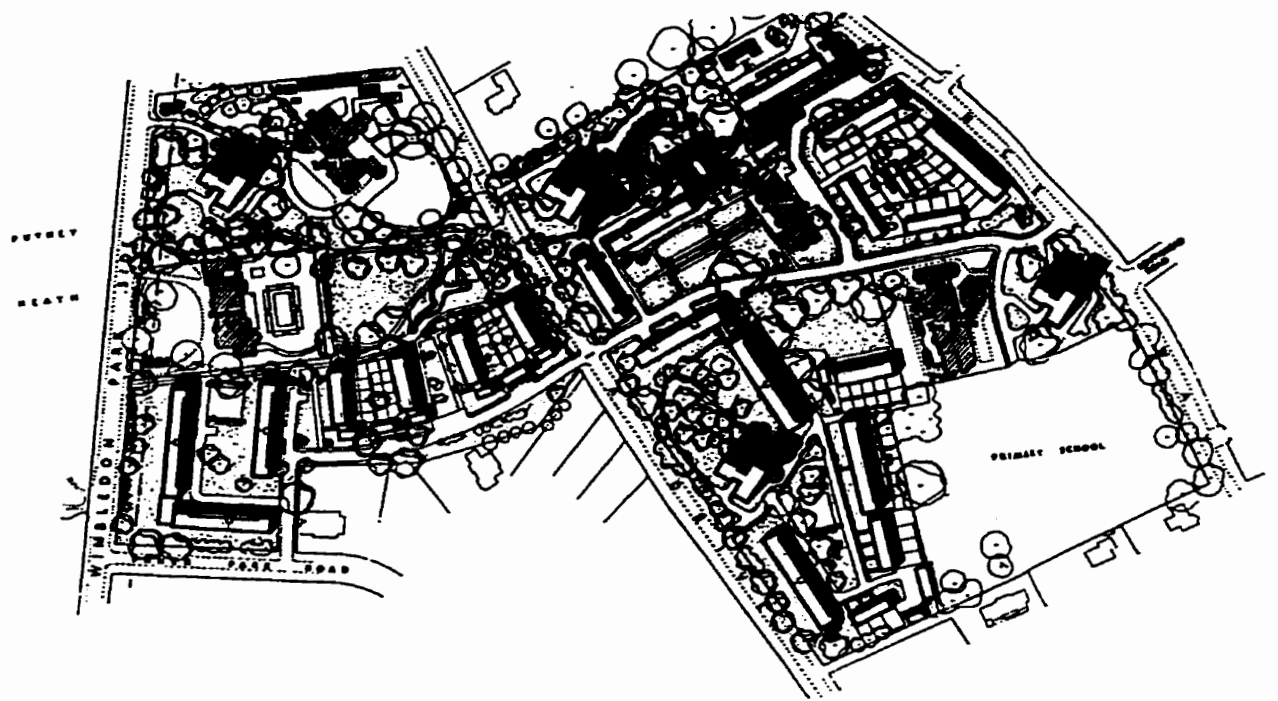


Figure 8: LCC, Princes Way and Wimbledon Park Side nos 2. & 3. (Ackroydon Estate), 1952. [Rolf Jensen, High Density Living, (N.Y.: Praeger, 1966):192.]

because of his anecdotal comments on an experience of reducing an eleven-storey to an eight-storey block due to public complaint; this was the only LCC estate where eight-storey blocks were included in a plan.⁴⁹ The housing variety of Ackroydon was an exception for the LCC. More common was the highly published Alton East Estate (Portsmouth Road) mixed housing which had numerous housing types, but no intermediate or eight-storey height blocks [fig. 9].⁵⁰ Portsmouth Road's extremity of density between housing types was more typical of the mixed housing schemes of the LCC. But housing types aside, both Ackroydon and Alton East were sympathetic to 'Townscape' mixed housing ideals. Each attempted to develop a balance of extremes between the 'prairie planning' of suburban New Towns, a "New Humanist" sentimentalism, and the persistency of Zeilenbau pressures of the late 1940s.⁵¹

Consequently, Ackroydon or Alton East attempted to integrate economic classes within one development. Mixed housing ideals were relatively new in British housing planning and were distantly extrapolated from the Garden City Movement. A more likely influence on each LCC scheme

49. Irving Grossman, "Report on the Pilkington Glass Scholar, 1950, Part II," *JRAIC*, 31:9, (Sept. 1954): 293.

50. 58% of dwellings were in high blocks, 32% in maisonettes and 10% in houses. Glendinning and Methesius, 32.

51. Most early New Towns featured the low-density row housing criticised in the *AR* by J.M. Richard and Gordon Cullen, while pre-war Modernists continued the 'clinical' designs during the late 1940's: e.g. Lubetkin's Tecton designs of Priory Green and Spa Green for Finsbury MBC, or the young firm of Powell and Moya's Churchill Gardens, Pimlico for the Westminster MBC, begun 1946.



Figure 9: LCC. (Colin Lucas et al.) Portsmouth Road, (Alton East), 1951. [Glendinning and Methesius, 57]



Figure 9: LCC, (Colin Lucas et al.,) Portsmouth Road, (Alton East), 1951. [Leonardo Benovolò, History of Modern Architecture: Volume 2. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT P., 1971): 816.]

was an explicit Nordic translation in their irregularity of block placement and had been applied in the previous year to Frederick Gibberd's Mark Hall area of Harlow New Town. This was the first British point block built among row houses [fig. 10].⁵² By the mid-1950's the LCC had begun to reflect Thomas Sharp's assertion for mixed developments. There was a shift away from the naive Howardesque romanticism of town-in-country principles to a position more sympathetic to the radiant city vision.

The Corbusian 'Hards' were beginning to assert their ideas within the Housing Division while the LCC was in general still sympathetic to mixed townscape developments. Many young architects like Alan Calquhoun, Colin St. John Wilson or Peter Carter, were clearly attempting to introduce a Humanism which they interpreted from the recent completion of Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation in 1952.⁵³ The LCC alternative to Alton East Estates was its neighbour, Roehampton Lane, Alton Estate West, designed in 1952. [fig. 11] While there was a mixture of terraces, point blocks and eleven-storey slab blocks, it was clear that the exposed concrete staggered slab blocks, with box-framed maisonettes

52.F. Gibberd employed Bernard Gillespie, who had studied under town planner, Lord W. Holford, (who later designed St. Paul's Precinct, 1956), for the Mark Hall area of Harlow New Town. Gillespie immigrated to Canada and worked for Henry Fliess before being hired by Irving Grossman in Oct. of 1959, for technical administrator for Flemingdon Park. Bernard Gillespie, phone interview, Sept. 1997.

53. Positive comments describing the sociological superiority of higher density and the street deck of the Unité D'Habitation were discussed by LCC architects in the AR, 109:653, (May 1951):293-300.

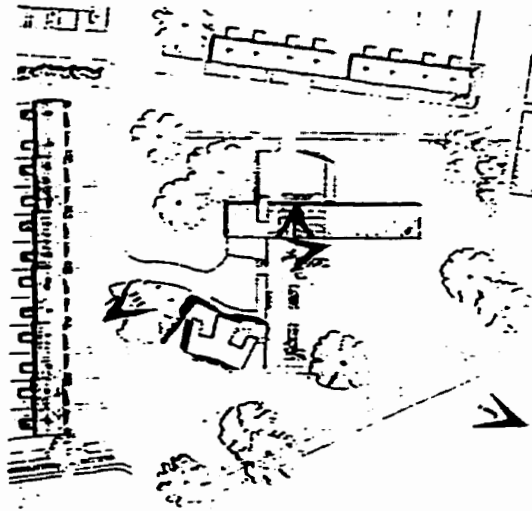
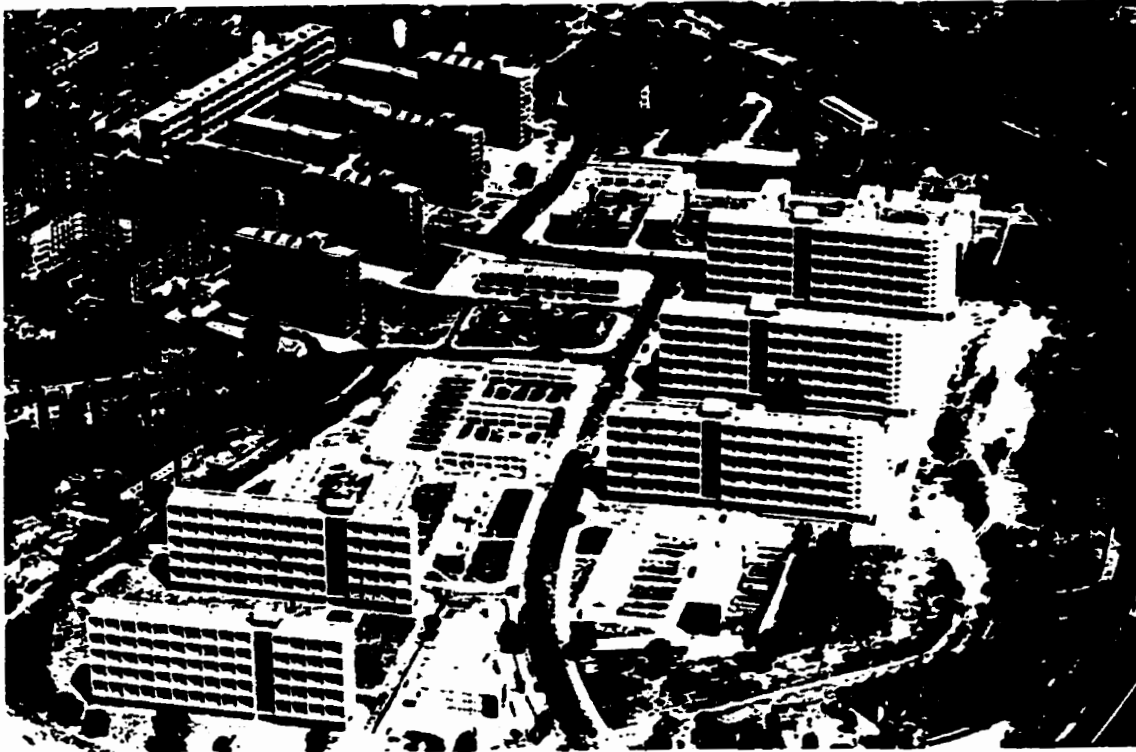









Figure 10: Frederick Gibberd et al. Mark Hall, Harlow New Town, 1950. [F. Gibberd, Town Design, 4th Edition. (London: Architectural Press): 320.]



-  Parking and people's circulation
-  Greenery
-  Parking, circulation and greenery
-  Parking, greenery
-  Parking, circulation
-  4 and 11 storey blocks
-  Parking, greenery

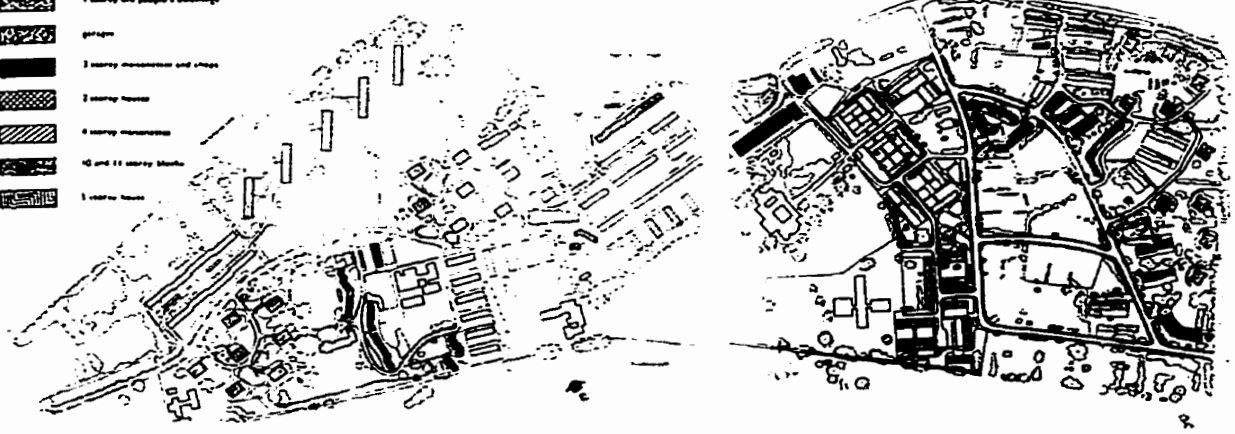


Figure 1: ICC. (Powell). Cox. Stjernestedt et al. Poehampton Lane (Alton West), 1953. (Stendinning and Hesthus, 1977)

and external balconies supported on pilotis, established a denser form of housing than the point blocks built elsewhere. Although the Corbusian intricacies were reduced to simplified facade grids of maisonettes, the slab block's sociological justification was the communal emphasis of the 'street deck' balconies, versus the social isolation of the point block. In the following years several Corbusian 'ville radieuse en miniature' were designed by Colin St. John Wilson, C.G. Weald, and Cleve Barr.⁵⁴ These developments continued to include a variety of housing types but their rectilinear plans contrasted the irregularity that earlier LCC schemes had emphasised.

This diversity of approaches within the LCC echoed the complexity characteristic of the London architectural community at this time. There were no defined boundaries of allegiance; instead the debates essentially centred around amorphous tendencies reflecting architects' interests. Visions spanned from the youthful avant-garde of the IG at the ICA, who were asserting a neo-existentialism, to the influential criticisms by the *Architectural Review*. This upheaval with its generational basis clearly inspired heated words among architects, but it also generated a youthful spirit of experimentation that produced a dialectic which was to last

⁵⁴e.g. Loughborough Rd., Lambeth, designed in 1952, built:1954-57. Bentham Rd. Hackney, c. 1955 and Picton St. Camberwell, built 1955-57.

in British Modern architecture for the following decade. In turn, it would be transported by architects such as Grossman to the Canadian setting.

Reflections on England:

Grossman's first hand experience in the LCC's shift away from its 'barrack' housing for the people, to the Corbusian inspired 'Radieux en miniature' left a deep impression. In particular he returned to Toronto in 1953 with an allegiance to the ideas of Le Corbusier. Like many at the LCC, Grossman was supportive of introducing the mixed income groups and higher densities to housing projects. He would pressure for these at Flemington Park. And like most Modernists, Grossman argued against the inefficiencies of the single detached house. As he described it, excessive land consumption, costs of roads and transportation, removal of countryside and monotony of design created the "million dots on the horizon."⁵⁵ Early in Grossman's life, this functional efficiency was deeply ingrained into his overarching architectural vision. He described the ideal city as a "functioning organism" of multiple family dwellings which provided communal amenities and open green space which was lacking in the new suburbs. "In working with these high density blocks, I was delighted to see how these

⁵⁵Grossman, "Pilkington II", 295.

open parks were actually realizable..."⁵⁶ A similar example of this was Grossman's high regard for the Hertfordshire County Council's flexible pre-fab. modules of their early postwar schools.

But while Grossman espoused a variant of the Radiant City vision, he also regarded the gargantuan bureaucracy of the LCC as undermining these ideals. He had found that this bureaucracy meant "the organization had inherent disadvantages to the creative architect, which were detrimental to the production of good design."⁵⁷ He cited the numerous delays which accompanied the mass production of the Citroën-maisonette prototype designed by P.J. Carter, A.H. Calquhoun and Colin St. John Wilson in 1953.⁵⁸ For him, quality architectural design often resided outside the LCC in the freer private firms of other London boroughs.⁵⁹

It was his interest in personal expression and social concern within Functionalism that he would attempt to recreate when he returned to Toronto. In London, Grossman "found for the first time, an architectural atmosphere, that was thoroughly saturated with social conscience, and high ideals."⁶⁰ He, like his English contemporaries, had been

56.Ibid.

57.op cit., 294.

58.Ibid.

59.Ibid.

60.Ibid.

educated as one of the first enculturated generation of Modernist architects and urban planners. But whereas young British architects were reinterpreting the iconic masters of the Modern movement, many Canadian architects, were only beginning to introduce a Canadian translation of international Modernist currents. Grossman's practice was therefore influenced by an awareness which many Canadian architects did not possess. Nonetheless it would seem that Grossman returned to Canada in 1953 with a limited conceptual understanding of what was occurring in London and this will be evident in his buildings during the following decade.

Chapter 2: Return and Reaction: Grossman and Transforming Toronto

After three years in Europe, Irving Grossman returned in 1953 to a rapidly transforming Toronto: a city attempting to shed its Victorian image of 'Toronto the Good' and cast its colonial status aside for an international role as a Modern progressive metropolis. For Grossman, the new self-awareness of the city meant the opportunity to apply his architectural experience from London to a city, which until the beginning of the War, had been arguably unaware of the Modern architecture of Europe.

The explosive postwar economy fueled by the arrival of the baby-boom generation, a large wave of immigration and supportive government actions, laid the basis for Toronto's transformation. The consequential prosperity also resulted in the creation of a mass-consumption modern culture. For 'second generation' Modernists in Toronto, the response to this postwar consumerism, which had been commodified into a kitsch culture, was paradoxical. On the one hand they hoped to assume the role of an avant-garde but at the same time we see a pattern of conformist modernism.

Toronto clearly assimilated the positive, progressive notions of Modernism. Growing middle-class affluence rapidly adopted Modernism's functional-pragmatic architectural expression and its technological myths, nurtured by postwar

rational planning. On the other hand, Toronto's high art and architectural culture also attempted to confront the popularization of Modernism's avant-garde legacy by attempting to preserve, in face of the growing 'incoherence' between high and low art, an elite social identity as disseminators of a privileged knowledge.

In terms of architecture, the Modernist's functional aesthetic was rapidly commodified, (now shed of its revolutionary Socialism) and introduced into the cityscape. The 'corporatized' Modernism that was flourishing in the United States, was entrenched by such powerhouse Toronto firms as Page and Steele or John B. Parkin Assoc.

Grossman's emergence from the London avant-garde buoyed his aspirations to confront this dominant cultural Modernism. But, in contrast to London, Toronto's avant-garde culture was weak and colonised, heavily dependent on external sources. This meant that as much as he was critical of certain aspects of Canadian Modern architecture, (particularly with the Miesian/Gropian adopted aesthetic,) his expression was based on the only knowledge he had to apply: the technological and formalist Modernism he had been taught at University, and the insights of the London scene. Thus, during the earliest years of his Toronto practice, between 1954 and 1959, when he received residential and memorial projects, he adopted a strategy of reinterpreting a

variety of historical avant-garde positions for the specific context of central Canada.

Branch-Plant Modern: The Mainstreaming of Toronto Modernity

Toronto in the 1950's was a paradigmatic postwar pioneer metropolis for unbridled capitalist growth. It was clear by this time that Toronto had come out from under Montreal's shadow and became the national business and media centre for Canada.⁶¹ Stripped of its 19th century Orange tone and prevalent dowdiness, it embraced intense postwar development of consumerism and rapidly became a prominent North American commercial centre.⁶² The ensuing consequences of rapid suburban expansion and congested streets meant that pre-war Modern planning strategies became the panacea of the age. The object of the new urban landscape was therefore to bring 'order' to modernity's chaos by discarding the old and responding with a new vision. Within this climate and 'crisis' mentality, Toronto's architecture broke from its inherited traditions and turned to the functional and technological-based canons of International Modernism.

Capital's confidence in the boom atmosphere of Toronto meant that it economically out-performed most North American cities. Consequently, bank consolidation, manufacturing and

61. Toronto radio, television and print media further entrenched its national prominence during the decade. Henry Manning, "The Fastest-Growing City in the World," *Macleans*, 69:6 (Mar. 17, 1956): 15.

62. Toronto outstripped growth figures of all North American cities including Los Angeles. *op cit.* 9.

trade increased. The building sector naturally prospered in this confident climate by adding 200 million dollars a year between 1953 and 1956 to its eventual half a billion dollars in yearly sales in 1957.⁶³ The developers saw the economic rewards which came from fulfilling the middle-class desire for security and consequently renewed the pre-war northward suburban expansion. For many, large-track speculative developments brought wealthy dividends.⁶⁴

Yet the strains of rapid development necessitated planning control or Toronto's sprawl would be uncontainable in the future. The vision of the most influential Modern Toronto planners was for a city intersected with thruways, a subway system, a greenbelt area, and redeveloped slum areas.⁶⁵ This was accomplished through Toronto's unique but contentious metropolitan political system, established on January 1st, 1954, which attempted to balance representation between the outlying municipalities and the city. Metro. Council was headed by the unshakeable visionary, Frederick Gardiner, who like his New York City counterpart Robert Moses, would indelibly stamp his views on the urban

63. op cit. 15.

64. For example, Rex Heslop, a former cab driver, went on to develop large tract housing in Etobicoke, Georgetown and self-named, Rexdale. Other developers included the Saracini family of builders, and the partnership of Noel Zeldin, Lawrence Shankman, Louis Stulberg and Jack Fienberg, who adopted Levittown aspects to their developments. Op cit., 70, 72.

65. The earliest planning act was proposed in 1943 and submitted by the Toronto Planning Board. After the Government of Ontario passed the 1946 Planning Act, and redistributed the planning powers to the Ontario Municipal Board and the Dept. of Planning and Development, a less visionary thirty year plan was adopted by the city. James Lemon, Toronto Since 1918. (Toronto: Lorimer and National Museum of Man, 1985): 106.

landscape of Toronto.⁶⁶

Due to the rapidity of development, the architectural consequences logically tended towards inexpensive, easily built, efficient buildings. The necessity of efficiency meant that the reinterpreted Modern aesthetic was an ideological choice for the developers. Throughout Toronto, glass and steel reinterpretations of stark pre-war European Modern buildings began to overshadow the masonry-clad, pre-war skyscrapers of Toronto's central business core.

Many of the designs were influenced by East Coast American precedents, such as Skidmore, Owings, Merrill's, Lever House in New York City from 1952. These were translated to the Toronto setting by such firms as Page & Steele, John B. Parkin Assoc., or Marani & Morris. But within the Toronto architectural community, there were diverse interpretations of these foreign influences. The two polarities of this spectrum are summarily represented on the one hand by the stark classicism of Harvard educated John C. Parkin at the powerhouse firm of John B. Parkin, and on the other by the dynamic catholicity of Peter Dickinson of Page and Steele.⁶⁷ Parkin's OAA Headquarters of 1954 or Ortho

66. Though Gardiner was later derided for planning decisions of Metro, (e.g. the Spadina Expressway,) some successes such as the highly-used mass transit system were helpful in preventing an extreme dichotomy between the suburbs and the urban core.

67. Adele Freedman. "Peter Dickinson: Anglo-Canadian Modern," Sightlines: Looking at Architecture and Design in Canada. (Toronto: Oxford U Pr., 1990): 14.

Pharmaceutical completed the following year, [fig. 12] brought the Miesian-Gropian aesthetic to Toronto.⁶⁸ An alternative to Parkin's reductive architecture was the more decorative work of AA-trained Dickinson.⁶⁹ Typical of Dickinson's work was the Benvenuto Apartments of 1955 [fig. 13]. It was a dynamic composition reminiscent of designs from early postwar English architects who had emphasised decorative appearances.⁷⁰ The mannered Dickinson and the lucid rationalist Parkin introduced their colonial versions of Modern architecture to Toronto, successfully establishing a mainstream Modernist language for corporate projects that would last throughout the following decades.

Grossman and a Neo-Avant-Garde:

In mid-1953, Grossman returned to a very different Toronto society than when he had left: An expressway to the city core from the newly opened 401 highway was being built, a subway line was on the eve of completion and even the conservative drinking laws had been relaxed. And yet for Grossman, it was clear that his aspiration to introduce a subjectivism to the highly objective Modern architecture of the new city could only occur by means of an artistic

68. The Headquarters' transparent mathematics and exposed materials was later seen as the "proved pivotal in the acceptance of contemporary architecture in Ontario." Leon Whiteson, Modern Canadian Architecture, (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1983): 122.

69. He had immigrated in 1951 to head the Toronto firm of Page and Steele.

70. Set out over Toronto's Avenue Rd. escarpment, the Benvenuto's emphasis was the decorative accents of the materials and the visual texture and interplay between vertical and horizontal patterning. Freedman, 8.

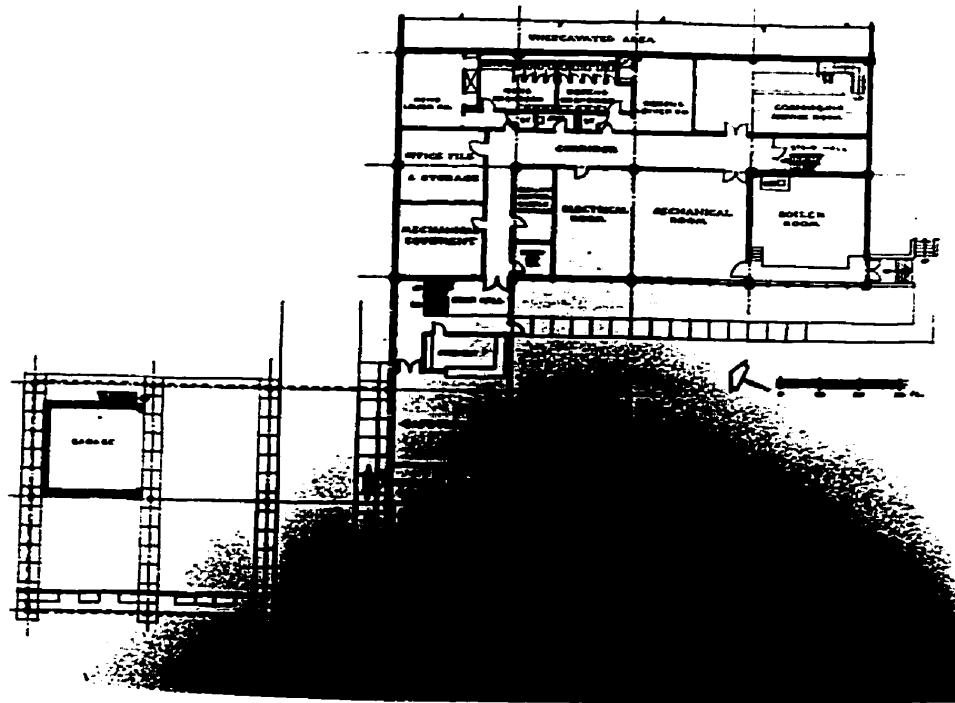


Figure 12: Parkin Assoc. GAA Grthe Pharmaceutical, North York, 1955.



Figure 13: Peter Dickinson, Benvenuto Apartments, Toronto, 1955.

subculture, such as he had found in London. But unlike the avant-gardism of the London scene, Toronto could not sustain a truly creative resistance to the mainstream because of its passive colonial condition; that is its reliance on foreign models. If Grossman was intending to resist aspects of Modern architecture, he would need to eventually seek inspiration from outside the local context.

The true nature of Toronto's artistic subculture of the 1950's is perhaps best revealed through art. For example, the postwar abstract expressionism, which pervaded the works of many Toronto artists, often adopted New York City's Greenbergian aesthetic. In the works of the Painters 11 group and their contemporaries, they clearly were inspired by the American abstract artists.⁷¹ This colonial consciousness was further entrenched by an emphasis on the internalized motivations of the artist and a neglect of political or social commentary.⁷² The fixation on the autonomous art-object and the intensification of art's commercial institutionalization,⁷³ precluded the Toronto

71. Some members had studied under Hans Hofmann in upstate New York, while others, like William Ronald emigrated to New York City, where he encountered Greenberg and invited him to Toronto. Ronald was seen by 'many local artists [as] the 'return of the conquering hero' when he exhibited his New York works at the Laing Gallery in 1960. Dennis Reid, A Concise History of Canadian Painting, 2nd ed., (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1988): 265, and 268-269.

72. Most artists of the period had been influenced by Greenbergian aestheticism. 'The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself-not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.' Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," ed. John O'Brian, The Collected Essays and Criticisms, 4 Vol. (Chicago: Chicago U Pr., 1986-93): 85.

73. Many private art galleries were opened in Toronto during the 1950's: e.g. , Avrom Isaacs' first gallery, The Greenwich, (est. 1955), the Gallery of Contemporary Art, the Park Gallery, Dorothy Cameron's Here and Now Gallery (est. 1959).

scene in the 1950's from disrupting the High Art culture.

It was clear that Toronto was dominated by New York, and could not manifest an original avant-garde, neither in art nor architecture. This colonial condition would finally be consciously recognized after the cultural nationalism of the late 1960's. As Dennis Lee later observed of Toronto artists of the 1950's,

The disdainful amusement I and thousands like me felt for Canadian achievement in any field, especially those of the imagination, was a direct reflection of our self-hatred and sense of inferiority. And while we dismissed American mass culture, we could only separate ourselves from it by soaking up all the elite American culture we could get at. If anyone from another country was around we would outdo ourselves with our knowledge of Mailer and Fiedler and Baldwin, of the beatniks and the hipsters, of-if we were really showing our breadth of mind- the new plays from angry London. And we fell all over ourselves putting down Canadians. This was between 1955 and 1965.⁷⁴

Aspects of Grossman's earliest architecture reflected this colonial condition, and yet within him there was a legitimate voice attempting to assert itself.

Grossman's Cultural Positioning:

If Toronto's cultural Modernism lacked an indigenous confrontational space within which to attack the mainstream, it was particularly lacking in the commerce-serviced field of architecture. Unlike the pseudo-avant-gardism of the

74. Dennis Lee, "Cadence, Country, Silence: Writing in Colonial Space," *Boundary 2*, 3:1 (Fall, 1974):156-157.

Toronto artistic scene which modeled itself on New York, the architectural community lacked recognizable alternatives to its progressive Modernism.⁷⁵ When Grossman returned and established his small firm, he therefore gravitated towards the artistic community rather than the established architects. Nonetheless it is significant that he courted a relationship with the city's architectural establishment.

On his return Grossman was quick to recognize the infant exuberance of the city's progressive drive, but he also noticed the frustrating lack of dialogue and ideas.

....there exists in England, and for that matter in most European countries, something which I find lacking here; something which is intangible, difficult to cultivate, and impossible to import, and yet, as necessary to architecture as the very materials out of which it is made. I think I can best describe it as a climate of ideas.⁷⁶

By comparison, London's intellectual community of young architects and artists participating in the Institute of Contemporary Arts or its renegade Independent Group, was immensely more fulfilling for Grossman.⁷⁷ But, it is clear that he was already searching for the opportunity to apply to a Canadian setting a form of Modernism based on his overseas experience. This frustration with the dominant

75. For example, the University of Toronto's architecture students objected to the Mathers and Haldenby plan for the New City Hall in 1955, which forced an international competition. The jury chose Finnish architect Viljo Revell.

76. Grossman, "Pilkington Part 1," 255.

77. *Ibid.*

architectural trends found sympathetic ears among the artistic subculture. As Joseph Baker remembered, there were many late night discussions in the apartment above the office, between painters, sculptors, musicians and architects.⁷⁸

Most notable was his life long friendship with abstract artist, Graham Coughtry, with whom he would eventually cooperate on several designs.⁷⁹ Though not as critical as Grossman, Coughtry recognized that Toronto was responding to an imported abstraction. Furthermore they understood that only a few years earlier Toronto had been lukewarm to International Modernism, unlike cosmopolitan Montreal or pioneering Vancouver.⁸⁰

The particular dilemma for Grossman, was that his architectural interests lacked an audience among the established architectural community. The company of like-minded individuals could only be found among intellectuals and artists.

It has been my observation, that such a[n architectural] climate has not yet shown itself here. In any discussions I have with persons of similar interests, what has generally been of prime importance has been of a practical nature. It is not to be doubted that knowledge of bank

78. Baker, op cit., 27.

79. Coughtry's studio was on the second floor of the Grossman's house. *TCA*, 3:4 (April, 1958): 44. Originally from Montreal, he came to a Toronto that was "very exciting," though with "no particular aesthetic movement [italics mine]...but certainly a surge of activity everywhere...[and] the beginnings of public awareness." Robert Fulford, "Artists in Boom-town: Young Painters of Toronto." *Canadian Art*, 14:4 (Winter, 1957):68.

80. Fulford cites the Puritan mould of Toronto's traditionalism. Ibid.

loans, the economics of apartment building, the scale of fees, or the numerous ways of fixing bronze nudes to marble walls, is important factor in creating sound buildings, and safe investments. But what of architecture? Although we are getting on with the job, in a most admirable way, one has to question the artistic development...⁸¹

The lack of clear aesthetic and ideological positions was a source of concern for Grossman. How, he asked, was the country going to create an indigenous architectural expression if architects consistently avoided theoretical discussion? Grossman suspected that,

this state of affairs is closely tied to the fact that few Canadian architects identify themselves outspokenly with any of the known schools of thought in design, or...are made to feel somewhat guilty about it.⁸²

The self-consciousness and immaturity of many in the architectural community meant that for Grossman, the widespread belief that an indigenous architecture would "blossom out of the pure Canadian soil, without any ideologies being imposed on it, [as] maintained by many architects..."⁸³ was naive. The lack of a culture of criticism meant that few "battles of ideas" were to occur, and unlike the London scene, the absence of battle was the result of the absence of differences, and consequently little evidence of strong convictions.⁸⁴ It is evident that

81. Grossman, "Pilkington Part 1", 256.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid.

Grossman saw himself as the representative of a more recent European avant-garde position, which self-conscious Canadian architects were supposedly hesitant to embrace. This international outlook and ideological interest therefore found its closest parallel not among mainstream architects but among the young artists and architects of Toronto's experimental subculture.

Yet Grossman's alliance with this alternative culture did not distance himself from the very community which he was criticizing. In 1956, after two years in Toronto, he was hired as a lecturer in the School of Architecture. Likewise he participated in the debates among the Toronto chapter of the OAA.⁸⁵ More representative of this relationship was Grossman's membership in the Vitruvian Society, established by Eric Arthur, Tony Adamson, and James Murray. This Society of thirty Toronto architects was "part of both Tony and Eric's establishment attitude...They were very much concerned with architect-as-gentleman..."⁸⁶ Grossman's role within the Society must have been prevalent since he eventually became the secretary of the Society for 1957-

85. For example, Grossman debated with James Strutt on the ideas of Le Corbusier versus Frank Lloyd Wright. (Strutt was influenced by Wright's work.) Geoffrey Simmins, Ontario Association of Architects: A Centennial History, 1889-1989, (Toronto: OAA, 1989): 70.

86. John C. Parkin in Freedman, 14. Members were to give papers at each meeting; Grossman's was a cursory history of the meaning of mathematics in architectural form. Irving Grossman, "Mathematics in Architecture," JRAIC, 33:2 (Feb. 1956): 31-36. The following year he participated in a seminar by the Society on "Modern Architecture-Rich or Poor," moderated by Alan Jarvis, director of the National Gallery. Canada Council Application File: Irving Grossman. National Archives of Canada, RG 63, Vol. 200.

58.⁸⁷ Thus the bridge between ages permitted Grossman's youthful spirit of criticism to be included amongst the discussions of first generation of Toronto Modernists. In this way, Grossman was fulfilling a self-assumed role of aesthetic mediator of diverse attitudes.

By the late 1950's, he was not only involved in both professional architecture magazines, but had become involved in various productions for the CBC, including being a panel guest on the erudite *Fighting Words* programme, hosted by Nathan Cohen.⁸⁸ Grossman's personal intentions aside, the Benjaminian 'aura' of the architect was now being disseminated on the widest scale in Canadian society. This was evident when he was profiled in the September 1959 issue of *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, [fig. 14] and illuminates the 'auratic' quality of the High Modernist architect of the time. His staged relaxing pose in his bachelor apartment, surrounded by abstract artworks and international-influenced furnishings, (that were often promoted by the magazine,) reveals the High culture Grossman represented. It was this aspect of Grossman's image which also reflected the complexity of his cultural positioning, on the one hand, international Modern architect, on the other, the Bohemian

87. Canada Council Application File: Irving Grossman. National Archives of Canada, RG 63, Vol. 200.

88. Eli Gottesman, Who's Who in Canadian Jewry. (Montreal: Central Rabbinical Seminary of Canada, 1967): 330.

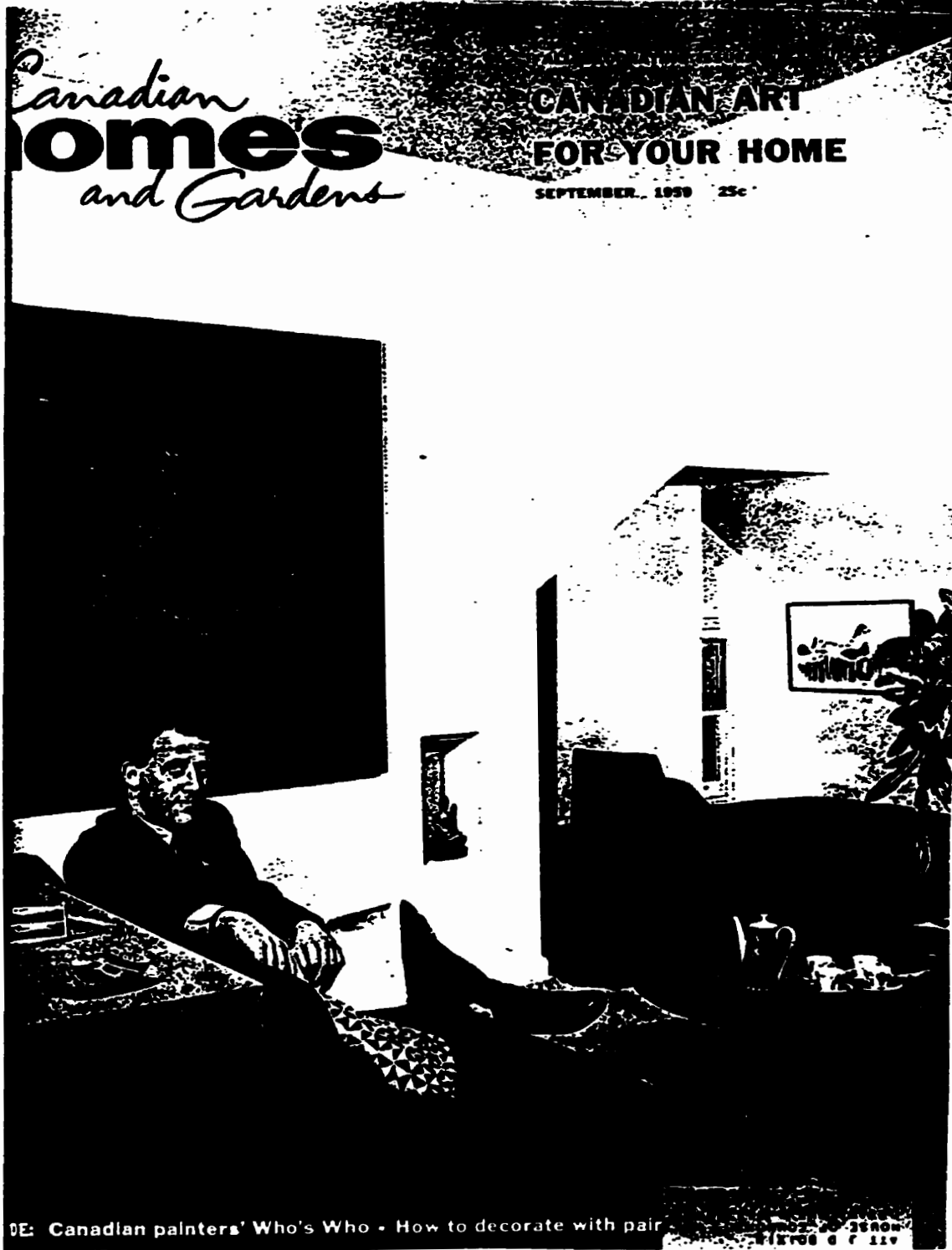


Figure 14: Cover Layout, Canadian Homes and Gardens, 36:9, (Sept. 1960)

artist aspiring to reinterpret Modernism for the Canadian public.

These diverse aspects of Grossman's social surroundings show the complexity of his early Toronto years. Like his contemporaries, he was driven partly by the aspiration to apply an international Modernism to the city. Yet, it was also evident that he was not fully comfortable with the anonymity of this functional-pragmatic expression of the architectural establishment. Thus, Grossman attempted to position himself midway between the progressive anonymity of the dominant architecture and the subculture Toronto's artists.

Grossman and the Toronto Jewish Community:

Grossman's ease of movement between Toronto's different social groups reflected his independence within the architectural profession. In late 1953, he opened his small firm in an office duplex on Spadina Street and the following year moved it to a remodelled Victorian row house on Sultan Street, (behind Bloor St. East.)⁸⁹ From the outset of the firm, he was not going to be constrained by a Gropian-inspired team approach that encapsulated other young architects working in the larger practices. The opportunity

⁸⁹. It contained his studio, a loft apartment for himself and other studios on the second floor, one was rented by his friend Graham Coughtry. It was from this location that he spent the next thirty years conversing with his peers and producing his works.

to apply his ideas was provided by the new suburban haute-bourgeoisie of Toronto's Jewish community.

Patronage for Modern architecture in Toronto, outside of the corporate clients, came from the increasingly wealthy middle-class who desired an expression of their status through an investment in architectural design, rather than accepting the plebian product of the developer. For Irving Grossman, patronage came from the newly established Jewish community in the Bathurst area of North York. Grossman, along with other first generation Jewish-Canadian architects, created through this relationship a stronger Jewish presence in Canadian architecture than had been seen heretofore.⁹⁰

This relationship was partially due to the markedly different postwar conditions for Toronto Jews that lead to an affluence and visibility which had not been present prior to the War.⁹¹ The Jewish-Canadian generation of the 1950's was more extroverted with suburbanization and postwar prosperity. This 'fourth generation' of Jews was less inclined to preserve the traditions of a closed community or separate language and opened itself to the larger world of

90. Toronto had had a small minority of Jewish architects prior to the War. Twelve of the nineteen architects in Canada resided in Toronto. Louis Rosenberg, Canada's Jews: A Social and Economic Study of the Jews in Canada. (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1939): 196.

91. Prior to the Second World War, there was an infusion of Eastern European Jews, establishing Jews as the second largest ethnic group in the city by 1921. This 'third wave' of Jewish immigration included Irving's Polish parents, Ben and Jennie, who came in 1926, the year prior to Irving's birth.

Canadian society. Indeed, the younger generation adopted few of the ritual traditions of the culture.⁹² But, it was a transitional period for a young generation who asserted itself without necessarily clear goals.⁹³ And this self-awareness brought Canadian-Jews into many areas of the developing Canadian culture, exposing the nation to a new sense of independent cultural determinism.⁹⁴ Indeed, for Modern Toronto, Jewish involvement was key to the new cosmopolitanism of the city.⁹⁵

Yet Jews continued to be on the periphery of various professions and often were head of high-risk enterprises, such as retailing or real estate.⁹⁶ The result was a strong contingent of young Jewish men involved in various levels of the development and building profession in Toronto.⁹⁷ But Jewish involvement in real estate had a respectable history in Toronto, compared to Jewish involvement in engineering

92. More often identifying with the trauma of the Holocaust and the strength of the Zionist movement.

93. As Ben Kayffetz observed of the Toronto Jewish community: "The sharp edges of ideologies have been blunted, partisans of divergent philosophies of Jewish life find they are not so far apart. The synagogue of a generation back and its leadership is totally different. It represents a suburbanized community with an interest in Judaism much more self-conscious and articulate than that of 20 or 25 years ago, though not as confident and assured of its goals." Ben Kayffetz, "The Jewish Community in Toronto," in Albert Rose ed., *A People and Its Faith*, (Toronto: U of T Pr., 1959): 26.

94. Many young Canadian-Jews became successful literary artists and were an important facet in television production.

95. "The Toronto whose symbols were the Lord's Day Alliance and the Orange Order has given way to a quite different, sophisticated, cosmopolitan centre and it is in this context that its Jewry is finding its way." Kayffetz, 26.

96. Jews were still not welcomed into the Anglo-dominated financial and judicial sectors. (Their exclusion from private clubs were not reversed until decades later.) Harold Weller, "Power in the Jewish Community," in M. Weinfeld, et al. *The Canadian Jewish Mosaic*, (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons, 1981): 155-156.

97. These included the Rubin brothers, co-owners of Toronto Industrial Leaseholds, and Rubin Dennis' development company, with Harry B. Kohl as head architect.

and architecture.⁹⁸ There were few Canadian-Jews in these professions, yet most garnered strong reputations in their fields.⁹⁹ Grossman sought out other young Toronto Jews for his firm; Morden S. Yolles, Alex Tobias and Gerhard Granek worked on various projects for Grossman.

The prosperity of the new suburban Jewish community in North York meant early interest and support for Grossman's young firm. Most of the initial projects were private residences for wealthy patrons, and newly established Jewish congregations in need of synagogues.¹⁰⁰ Though Grossman received projects outside of the Jewish community during the late 1950's, it was their support which essentially provided for the recognition and opportunities for the firm.

The upward-mobility of Jewish suburbanites in the post-war years of intense capitalism did not disrupt the hierarchical relationships which traditionally existed between architect and patron. The result was a lack of interest or perhaps opportunity for a true avant-garde position by young postwar architects. But Grossman and his Toronto contemporaries of the 1950's were intent on

98. For example, Leon S. Yolles, a senior partner with developer, Kenneth Rotenberg in the 1950's, had been involved in building since the 1920's. Freedman (1990), 7-8. The involvement of Jews in architecture was a phenomena of the 1950's. "Anti-Semitism was, in the profession of architecture and engineering, a formidable obstacle....admission into these professions encouraged the operation of race bias and the exclusion of Jews." The Jewish Standard, May 15, 1959, p.16.

99. There was a small group of notable young Toronto Jewish architects: Jerome Markson, and the firm of Klein and Sears; each had similar interests as Grossman, though rarely as public with their ideas.

100. He also designed the new Workmen's Circle Peretz School in North York, which had moved from the downtown core.

introducing variants of the Modernist legacy based on foreign sources. This was obvious in Grossman's desire to create an externally-motivated Canadian architecture, that confronted the establishment's hesitancy to digest the very internationalism which was at the root of Toronto's boom-town atmosphere.

Although by the early 1960's, a 'culture of crisis' had been instigated by the strains between the artistic sub-culture and the public,¹⁰¹ architecture generally continued its copacetic relationship with progressive Modernism. But Grossman had realized upon his return to Toronto that the rapidly built and culturally accepted rational pragmatic-functionalism found in the city also displayed a poverty of meaning. This would need to be counteracted by a strategy of introducing new forms of Modernism. Thus Grossman and many of his contemporaries would attempt in the late 1950's to search within the strictures of their past heroes' Functionalism for a more liberal and pluralistic form of self-expression.

101. By the late 1950's it was clear that strains of pop art and neo-Dadaism were introducing a new aspect for Canadian artists. e.g. Toronto's Michael Snow, Joyce Wieland, or Dennis Burton's shift away from abstraction, or the Surrealist-Regionalism of Greg Cumoe and Jack Chambers of the early 1960's.

Chapter 3: The Residences and Synagogues: Parallel Subjectivities

The mediated pluralism of Canadian architecture during the 1950's, rooted in earlier Modernist strategies, followed a similar pattern to other countries throughout the world. Although there were exceptions, most firms were clearly tied to an American Modern example. Within Canada, patterns emerge with Wrightian structures on the West Coast, Bauhaus interpretations on the Prairies and Central Canada, and the appearance of material expressionism in Quebec.

Generally, postwar Modernism did not retain the purism which pervaded the European avant-garde of the 1920's and 30's. In order to preserve Functionalism's 'objective' visual interpretation while superficially attempting to differentiate themselves from it, many firms developed an expressive functionalism characterised by a plurality of decorative surfaces and plasticity of material, though often at the expense of multivalent meaning.

The Modern Residences: Reflected Inspirations

Grossman's earliest residences follow this pattern. They can be seen as an exploration of Modernist concepts emanating from the heroic avant-gardism of the 1920s and 1930s. Yet, rather than a sophisticated extension of their principles found in the work of the 'master architects,' these first residences reflect their influence in a

superficial way. Both the Winesanker House, (c. 1954, Forest Hill, Toronto) [fig. 15] and the Houzer Residence (1955-1959, Rockcliffe Park, Ottawa) [fig. 18], the first houses to be completed, exemplify this opaque influence of an earlier Modernism.

The two-storey Winesanker House's unassuming boldness among the Tudor revivalism of a Forest Hill street, is as independent, as responsive to the surrounding setting. The modernistic elements of the exterior strip windows and the butterfly roof are designed with the traditional materials of brick masonry and wood cladding. This implies a negative reply to the surrounding revivalism. Yet even though Grossman is attempting a juxtaposition of old with new by means of materials and modernistic details, the house is as much a question of surface manipulation facadism as the revivals which surround it. The exterior quotations are modern, but they are essentially independent of its plan, comprised of discrete interior cubic spaces, and little different from the plans of its neighbours. Thus, the Winesanker House's sentimental Modern results in a design which lacks the vigour of pre-war avant-garde formalism and is close to the superficial 'Moderne' of the 1930's.

Nonetheless these cosmetic quotations are evidence of Grossman's reliance on Le Corbusier and British Modernism of the 1930s for inspiration. The entrance facade's strip

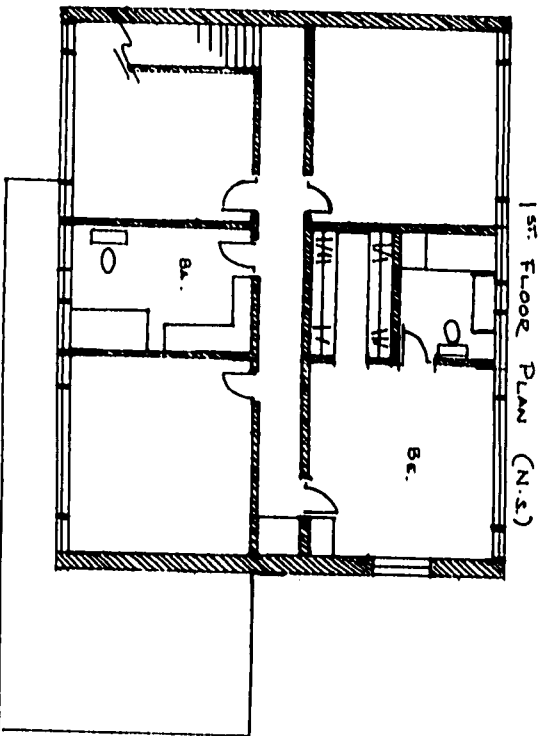
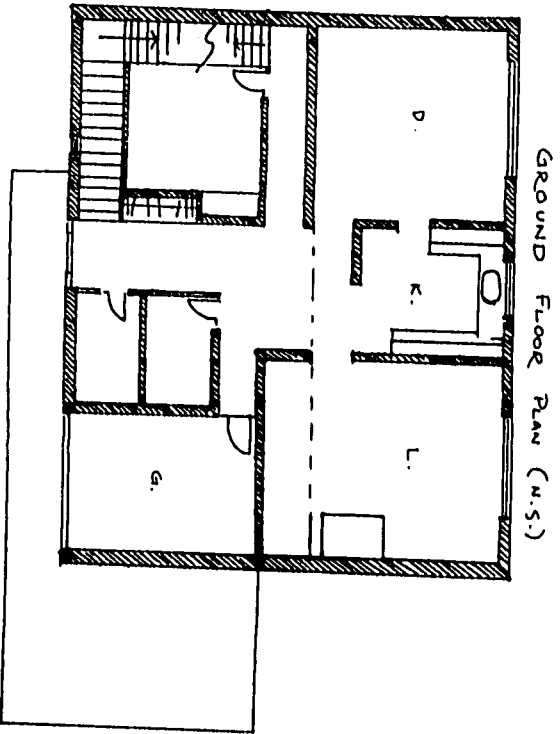


Figure 15. Irving Grossman, The Queen's University, Toronto, 1955.

windows, the columnless awning, and slight asymmetry allude to the International Style London residences of the 1930s.¹⁰² Furthermore, the butterfly roof, which had been exploited and popularly received by Marcel Breuer, was a detail possibly inspired by Le Corbusier's rustic residences of the 1930s.¹⁰³ But, unlike the master's response to site conditions, Grossman's superficial adoption of this detail exposes his impressionability rather than his considerations of the inherent conditions of the site.¹⁰⁴ The Winesanker House exposes Grossman's youthful hopes of producing a bold contemporary statement, in reality it is largely a question of Modernistic quotations used cosmetically.

The Houzer Residence (1955-59) [fig. 18] represents a less cosmetic appropriation of an avant-garde Modernism. The Rockcliffe Park residence exploits Modernism's embrace of technological flexibility by overcoming the difficulty of building in a marshy hollow. The result was an inverted cantilevered mass supported by four inch steel columns embedded in sunken concrete piers, allowing for a ground floor set on grade beams. It alludes to the 'floating' mass inversions of the postwar Harvard Box, or the Corbusian

102. e.g. E. Maxwell Fry's, Sun House, London, 1936. [fig. 16]

103. e.g. Maison Mathes (1934-35, Mathes, France) [Fig. 17] Maison Mathes results from a close relationship between the verandas overlooking the Atlantic coastline, and the corrugated asbestos roof channelling the considerable rainfall away from the vista. William J. Curtis, Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms, (N.Y.:Rizzoli, 1986): 114.

104. i.e. The use of the butterfly roof in the climate of Toronto.

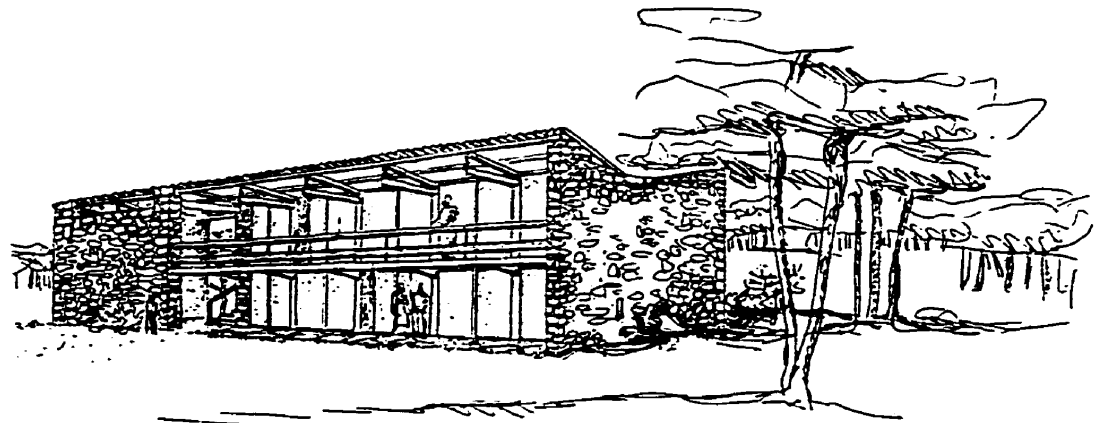


Figure 16: E. Maxwell Fry, Sun House, London 1936 [Jackson, 101]

Figure 17: Le Corbusier, Maison Maillol, 1935. [Le Corbusier et P. Jeanneret, *Oeuvre Complète 1934-1938*, (Zurich: Editions G. S. Berger, 1958.), 135.]

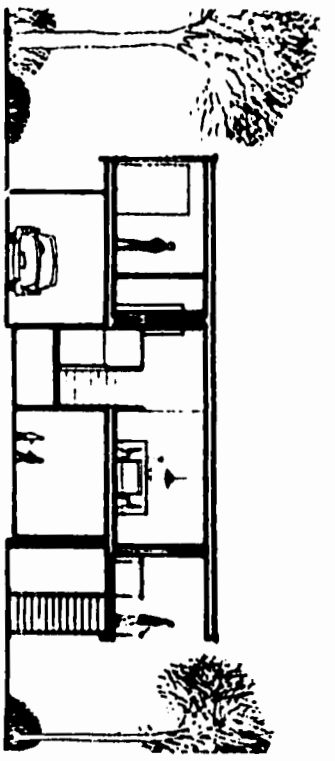


FIGURE 181: IRVING GROSSMAN, HOUSE: FOUNDANCE, Rockcliffe Park, Ottawa, 1955-59. (IRPAIC, 38 2 (AUG. 1957), 264-265)

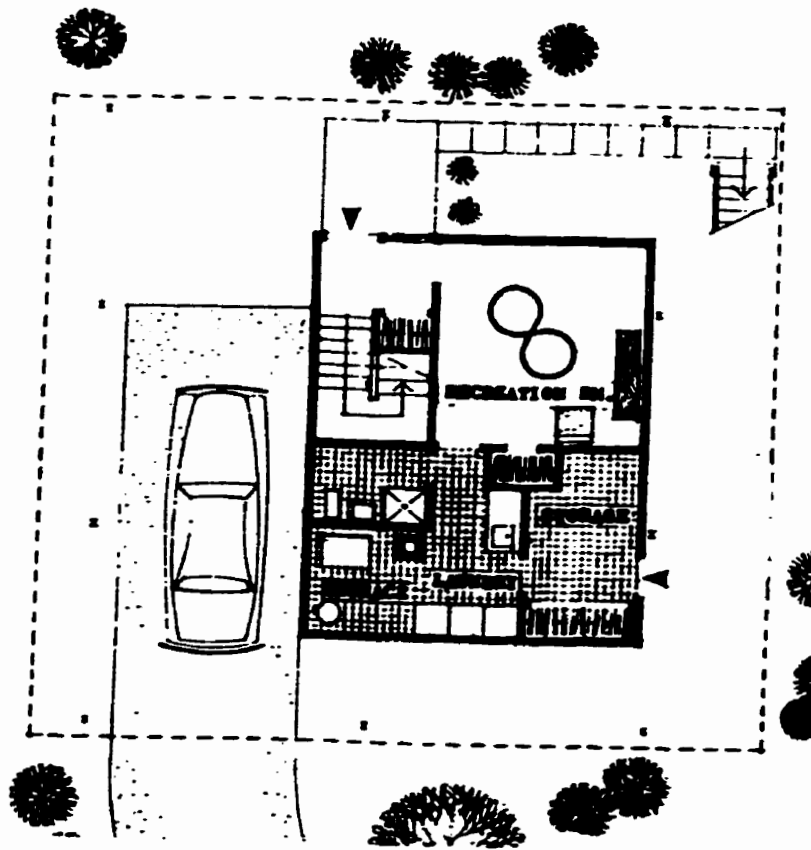
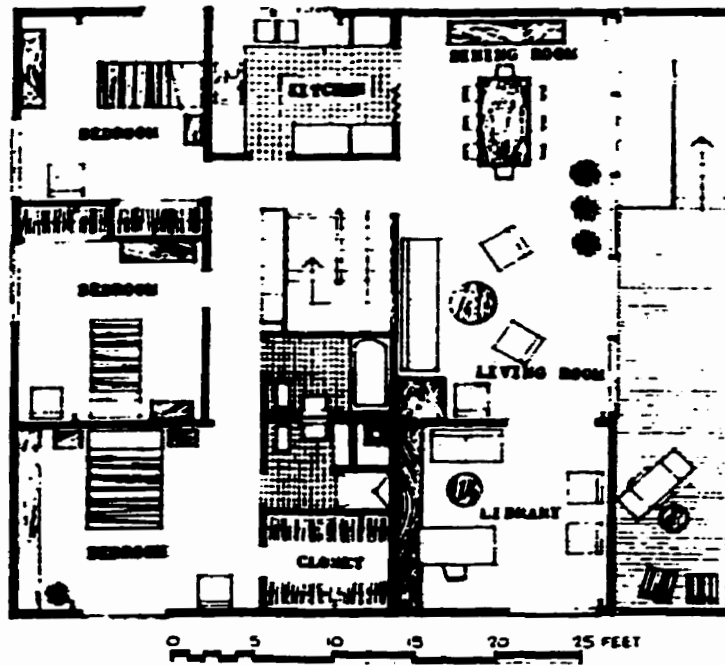


Figure 18: Irving Grossman, Houzer Residence, Rockcliffe Park, Ottawa, 1955-59. [JRAIC, 36:8 (Aug.1959): 264-265.]

exposition of the piloti and exterior staircase. But yet again, Grossman has emphasised these influences as superficial exterior quotations; the interior spatial manipulation is dominated by a series of proportionate service bands, rather than the exploitation of Modernism's peripheric possibilities or plasticity of planar spaces. Thus, the structural parti is a tension between the regularity of the interior and the unclear intention of the exterior.¹⁰⁵ It is a structure which contains an unfulfilled potential, considering the site it has been built upon.

In the context of the wealthy community of Rockcliffe Park, the Houzer Residence, built for an External Affairs civil servant, was a radical break from the horizontality of contemporary ranch-styled neighbours. But it was clearly a restrictive design that contained a searching attempt by Grossman to introduce a reinterpreted pre-war radical Modernism, but inhibited by an immaturity of Modern architectural concepts. In defence of his early residential designs, they were possibly constrained by restrictive housing by-laws or hesitant clients, but both residences do contain a suppressed potential for more confrontational private residential design within his Modern revisionism.

By 1956, Grossman had received several commissions for

105. The overall plan's proportional ratios of the rectangle, are offset by the asymmetry of the columns, offset windows, and diagonal cladding articulating the separation of the balcony.

client-directed houses from upwardly-mobile Jewish residents of North York. The Betel House (1956-58, Downsview, Toronto) [fig.19] and the Fogel Residence, (1956-c.59, Downsview, Toronto) [fig.20] were notable maturations of Grossman's architecture; he was eventually awarded the Massey gold medal for the Fogel Residence in 1961. Both residences continued Grossman's subjective response within the boundaries of Modernism, but instead of the superficial quotations of his earliest houses, the maturation of his concepts resulted in two clearly different designs.

The Betel House architecturally conveys a confident dynamic expressionism that is not apparent in his earlier residences. As Grossman stated in response to mere practical concerns of architecture,

we go on to the art of architecture and demand something more. This...is the visual statement which the architect makes in his building-the IDEA....This idea is the LAW of the building, which governs and unifies all the elements.¹⁰⁶

The intention essentially emphasised a visual transparency between internal and external forms of two perpendicularly resting non-convex polygonal volumes. The cosmetic quotations of the earlier residences are suppressed by Grossman's attempt to create a visually monumental sculptural structure set on the open lot:

106. Irving Grossman, "The Betel House," TCA, 3:6 (June 1958):50.

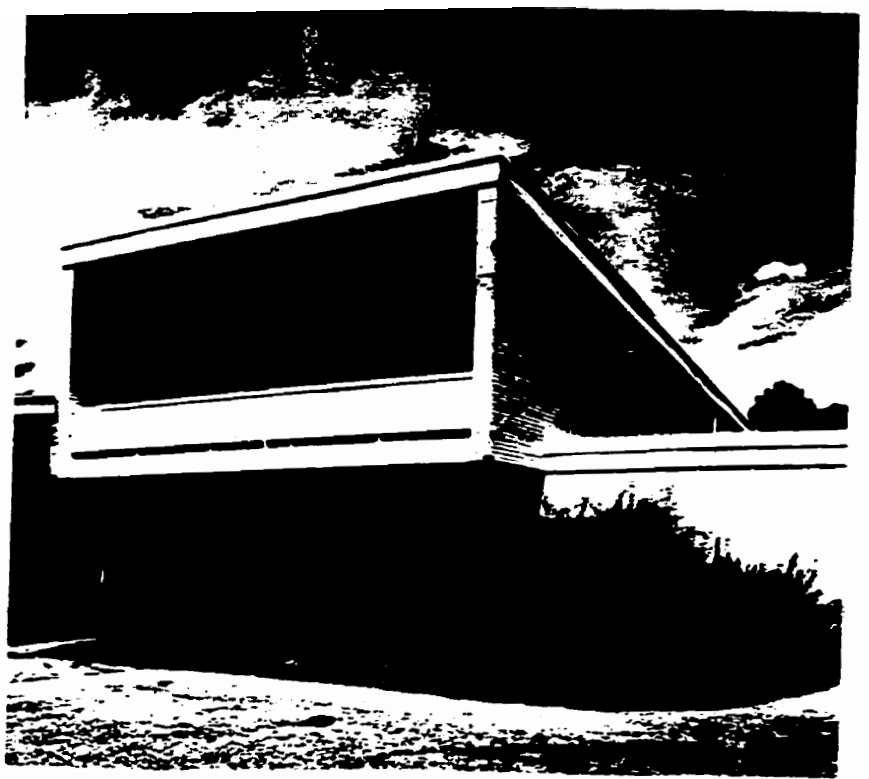


Figure 19: Irving Grossman, Betel Residence, North York, Toronto, 1956-58.

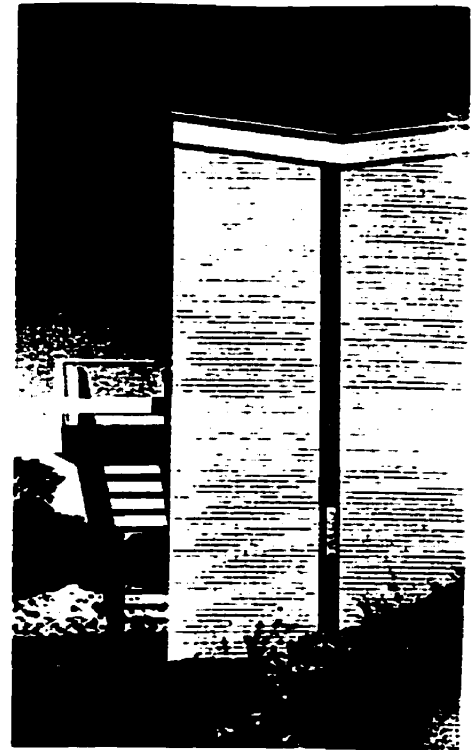
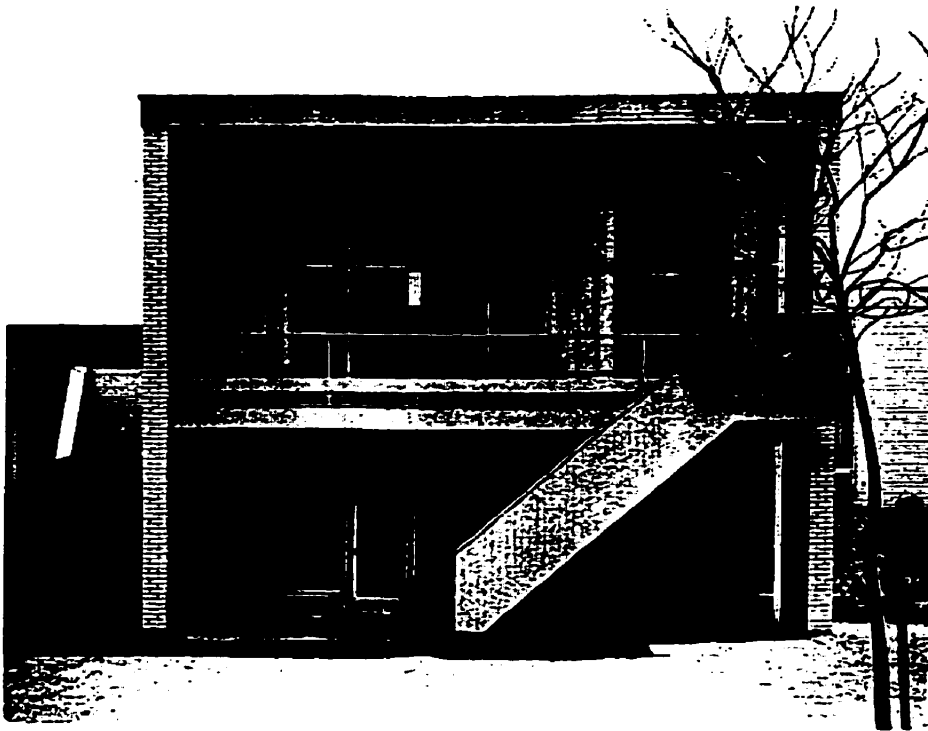
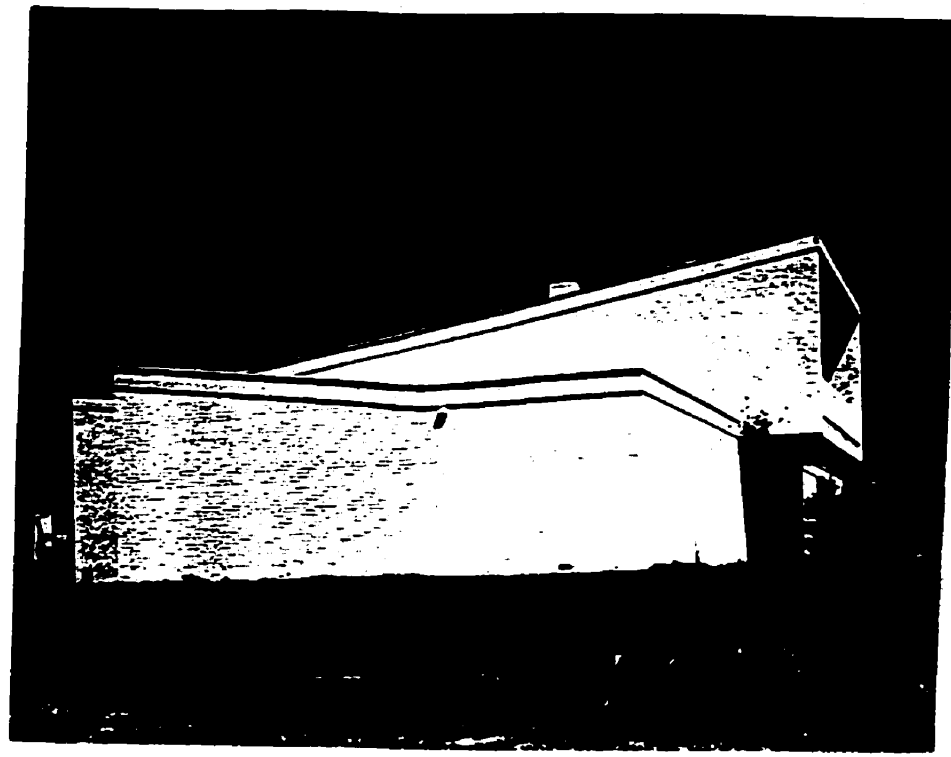


Figure 19: Irving Grossman. Betel Residence, North York, Toronto, 1956-58. [TCA 3:6 (June 1951): 50-55.]

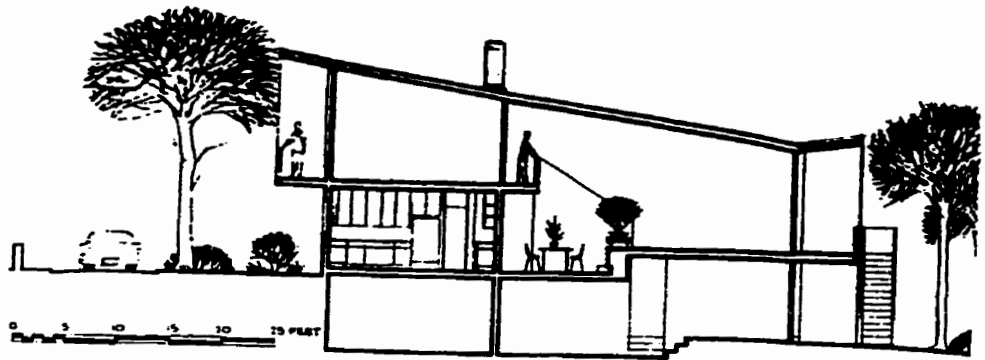
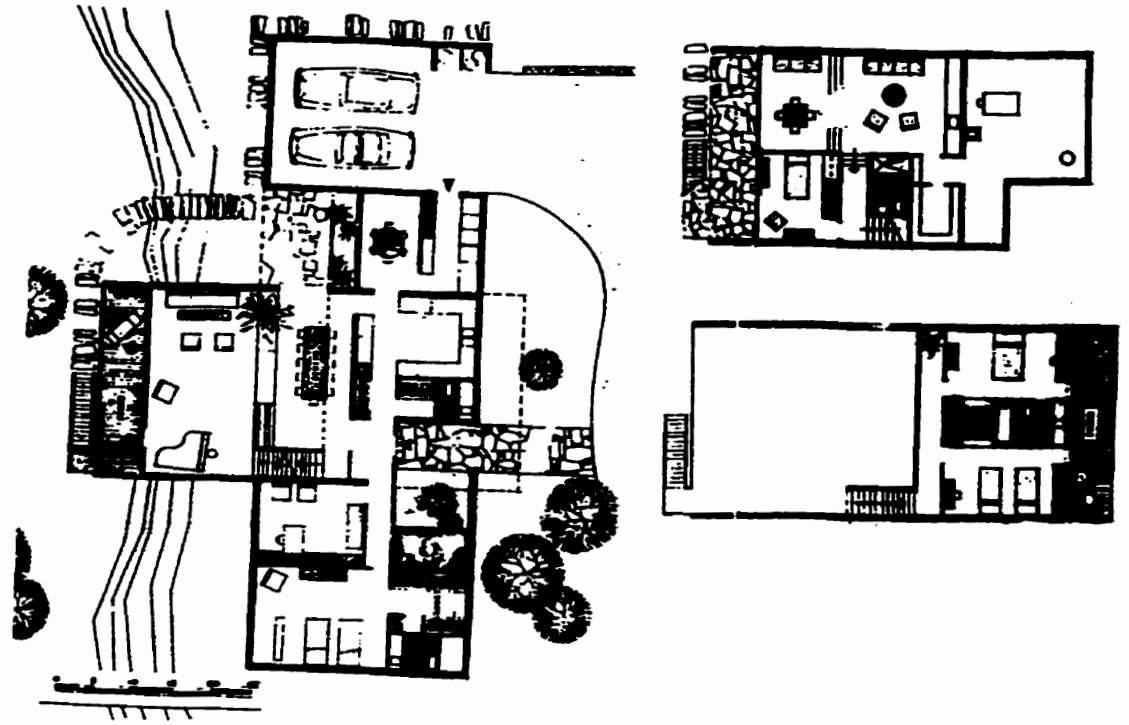


Figure 19: Irving Grossman, Betel Residence, North York, Toronto, 1956-58. [TCA 3:6 (June 1951): 50-55.]

The forms one sees are...the interlocking spaces which make up the house. Out of this direct expression it was hoped a drama might result: externally, the pure, large-scaled sculpture of white blocks sitting on a green carpet; internally, a moving space defined by sloping ceilings and changing levels...¹⁰⁷

Thus, the internal manipulations are explicitly revealed for the dweller. The varied levels, the open living room's downward-pitched ceiling towards the picture-window, or the subtle tension between the symmetrical divisions of the windows and the asymmetry of the whole building convey a clearly manipulated dynamism. Though the traditional solid mass of the load bearing walls, with their superficial white surface-glazed brickwork limits the possible spatial manipulations, the Betel House was a more successful attempt by Grossman to rework Modern Rationalism's transparency in the interest of a personally relevant abstraction.

A contrasting result to the geometric solids of the Betel House, but containing a similar response to earlier Modernism, was the Fogel Residence, begun in the same year (1956) for a Toronto building contractor [fig.20]. The Fogel House introduces a more transparent planar composition, than had been seen in his previous residences, and may have been inspired by his experience with Rudolph Schindler's firm a

107. "The forms one sees are...the interlocking spaces which make up the house. Out of this direct expression it was hoped a drama might result: externally, the pure, large-scaled sculpture of white blocks sitting on a green carpet; internally, a moving space defined by sloping ceilings and changing levels..." *ibid.*

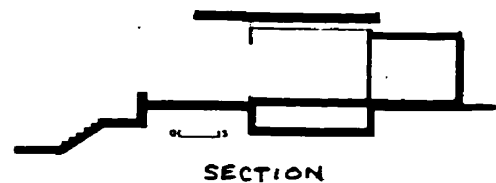
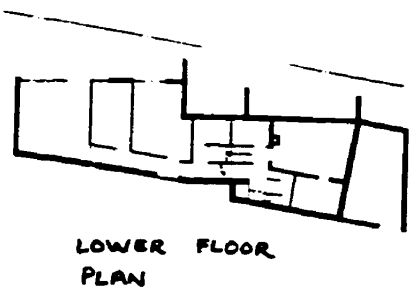
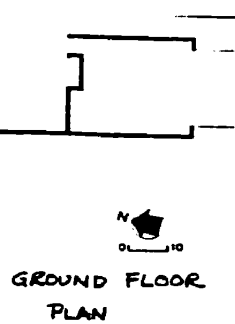
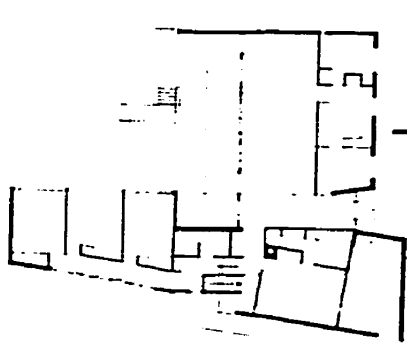
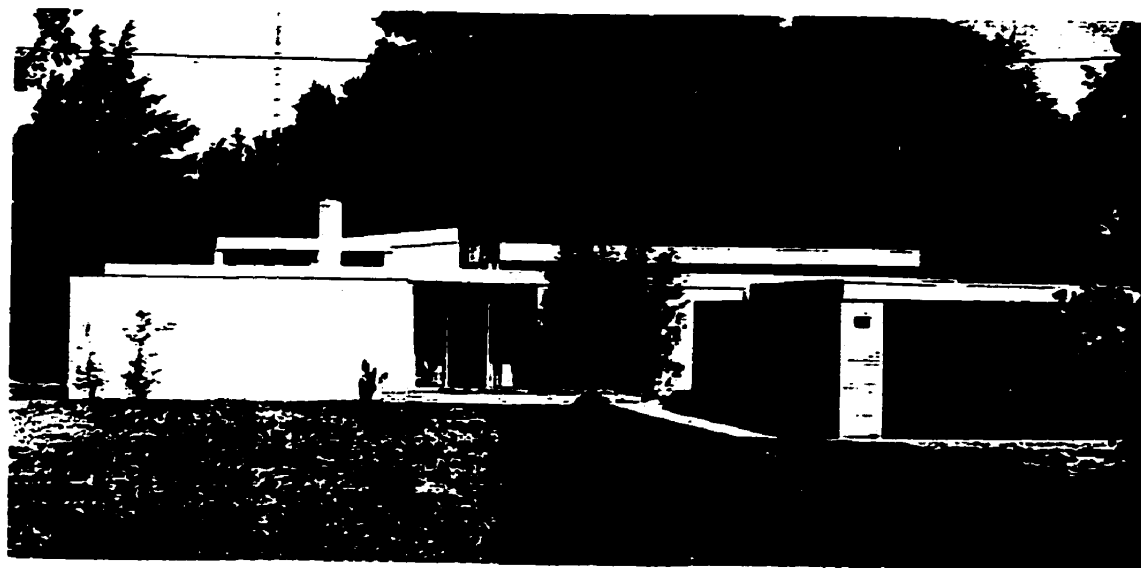
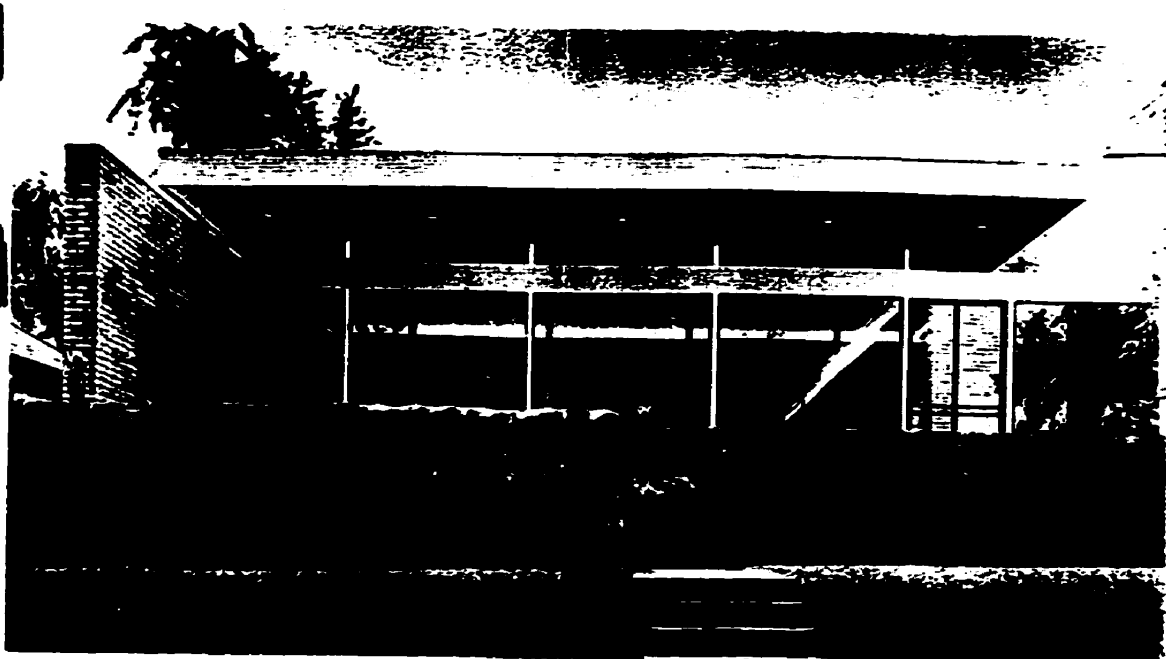
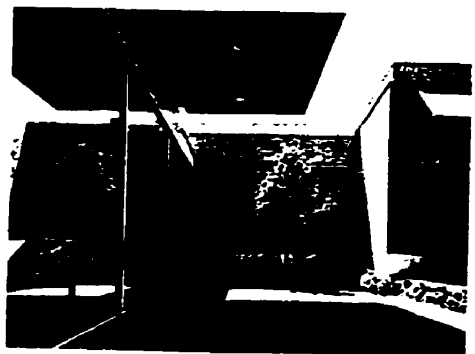


Figure 20: Irving Grossman, Fogel Residence, North York, Toronto, 1956-59. [TCA 5:8 (Aug. 1957) 48-49.]

decade earlier.¹⁰⁸ Though not as formally inventive as earlier Modernist formulations,¹⁰⁹ the Fogel House is bolder than his earlier residences in its divestment of cubic volumes.

The planar composition is clear when entering the house. Past the vestibule, the southern oriented living room is enclosed in glass and intersected by vertical frames and horizontal bands; this creates the tension of the floating flat roof extending out over the terrace. The accentuation of planes is reinforced by the contrasting solidity of the northern masonry wall and the elimination of corner framing.¹¹⁰ Further manipulation is provided by the entrance elevation's separate horizontal planes rising from street level, but in contrast to the actual lowered gradient towards the back of the site. These horizontal planar relations reflect Grossman's indebtedness to the pre-war explorations in Mies' work of the 1920s or earlier by Wright and his associates, Richard Neutra and Rudolph Schindler. As the published description suggests, the Fogel Residence was intended to relate both to the site and to the viewer's

108. Comparable stylistic elements are apparent in the Schindler House. The spatial dynamism of planar qualities in Schindler's work is clearly an inspiration for the Fogel House's living room clerestory between the lower window and roof. (Grossman may have denied this influence at the time.) Freedman, *op cit.*, C1.

109. e.g. Van Doesberg's abolition of the centre, Mies' Barcelona Pavilion, Le Corbusier's Villa Stein, Garches.

110. [The metal sash windows] were Canadian-made windows...but they were very British, very thin. The frames look good against the brick, very crisp and modern. Ruth Cawker, "Modern Lessons" in Bureau of Architecture and Urbanism, Toronto Modern Architecture: 1945-1965, (Toronto: Coach House Pr., 1987): 26.

consideration of that site.¹¹¹ Thus the semi-periphic openness not only responds to the sloping lot, but more importantly contains a personalized relationship with the abstracted volumes of the interior space.

Thus, like the disengagement of the 1920's avant-garde architects from the Beaux-Arts plan, Grossman's residences of the mid. to late-1950's attempted to respond to the *a priori* nature of much functional planning and design with its reliance on the gridiron plan in the generation of form. His response was to employ elements of pre-war formalism mediated by a consideration of the site. Initially, superficial quotations provided the basis for this methodology, but in his later residences there is a deeper conceptualization of Modernism's pre-war relationship with a visual psychology which underlay its objective forms. In essence, like many architects of the 1950's, Grossman was attempting to infuse Modernism with a spirit of the individual and so distance it and himself from the implications of Modernism's dehumanized universalism.

The Synagogues: Recomposing Tradition

The various Modern revisions that Grossman applied to his residences differed in outcome from the synagogues built during the same period. Unlike his domestic interpretations

111. "Fogel House, Downsview, Ont." TCA, 5:8 (Aug. 1960):48.

of the International Style, the synagogues reveal either compositional assemblages of topological forms or decorative detailing overlaying a modular system. Each programme was consistent with Grossman's intent on responding to a functional reductivism, but unlike the intentions of the residences, the synagogues aimed to fuse historical sources with Modernism's amnesia of the past.

Under the influence of Louis Kahn, international architecture in the late-1950's was in the process of shifting to an idiom of space expressed in form.¹¹² This shift seems to have influenced the designs of two of Grossman's earliest synagogues. The preliminary phase of Adath Israel Synagogue (North York, Toronto, 1956) [fig.21] is an additive composition of functional volumetric forms, concentric to the entrance foyer. In one direction are the rectilinear office areas, flanked by a curved reception hall and an elliptical cylinder, to other side of the entrance foyer is the hemispheric dome of the sanctuary, surrounded at the base by Wrightian/Saarinesque arches. The composition's concentricity is accented by a Corbusian archaic concrete arch abutting the elliptical cylinder.

This composition of functional forms likewise appeared

112. The compositional rigorist's rejection of "all preconceived whole forms and [concentrated] on the autonomous development of parts through process, attempting to create space forms more insistently physical in make-up and impact." e..g Paul Rudolph, or Louis Kahn. G.M. Kallmann, "The 'action' Architecture of a New Generation," Architectural Forum, 3:4 (Oct. 1959):136.



PRELIMINARY PROPOSAL



COMPLETED SANCTUARY

Figure 21: Adath Israel Synagogue preliminary phase and completion. North York, Toronto, 1956- c.1960. [JRAIC, 34:3 (Mar. 1957): 94.]

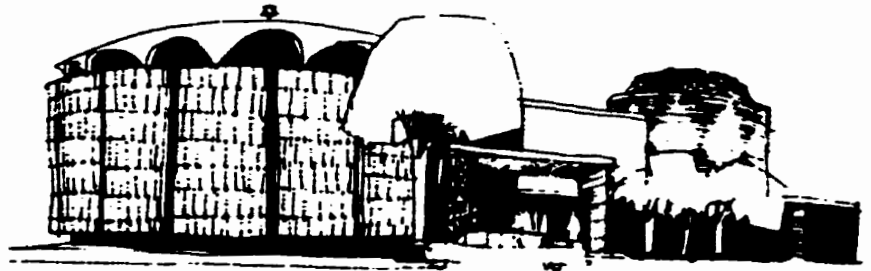
in Grossman's more decorative and transparent rudimentary schemes for Sharrei Tefilla Synagogue (North York, Toronto, 1955-59) [fig.22]. A similar plan separating the sanctuary from the administrative area by the entrance foyer is applied for this smaller synagogue. But the earliest scheme differs from Adath Isreal by an overabundance of superficial structural detail that resonates a decorative skin popularized by Minoru Yamasaki or Edward Stone in the late 1950's. The final scheme preserves the general plan but has eliminated much of the confusion by redesigning a cylindrical chapel complementing a revised rotunda sanctuary. But while a decorative surface is retained in the textured wall of the rotunda, the synagogue has become more introverted.¹¹³ In the final octagonal sanctuary and wraparound service spaces, the early transparency and irrelevant decorative detailing has been replaced by an integrated historicism. The octagonal brick sanctuary, crowned with a stained glass clerestory and complex roofing system, is reminiscent of Middle-Eastern predecessors which Grossman had researched for the projects.¹¹⁴ In the final version, exterior engaged buttresses imbedded with the Star of David, replace the earlier anonymous decorative

113. This was a necessity because of both the "cramped site with heavy traffic on two sides." I. Grossman, "Three Synagogues," *TCA* 8:6 (June 1963): 59.

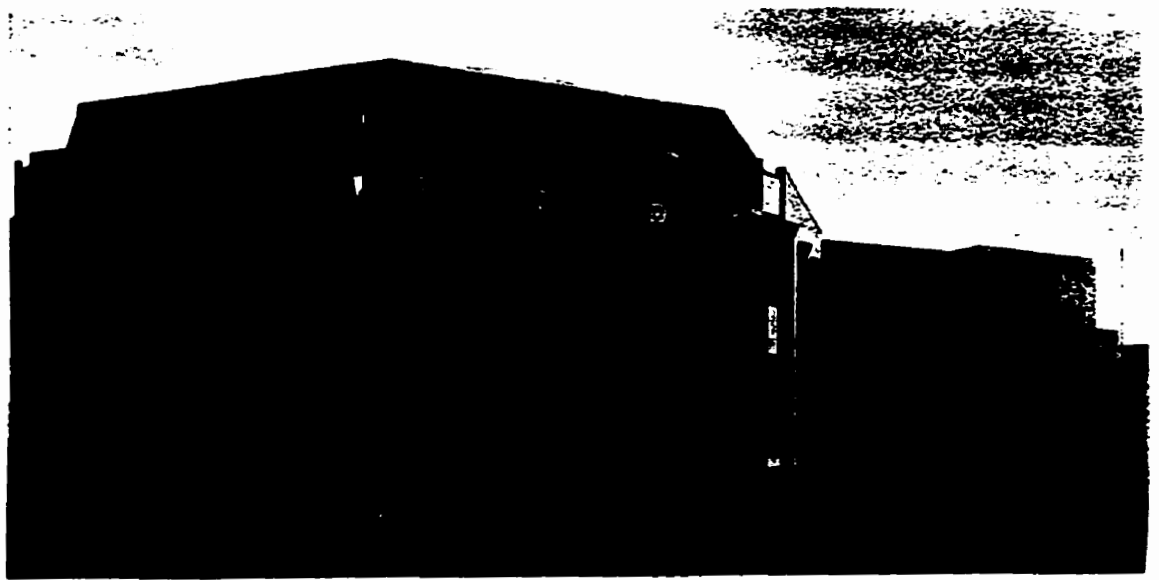
114. e.g. Beth-Alpha Synagogue, (Palestine, 6th Century A.D.) op cit. 56-58.



Preliminary Phase

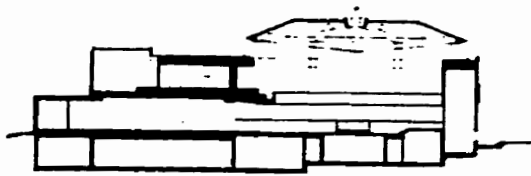


Preliminary Phase

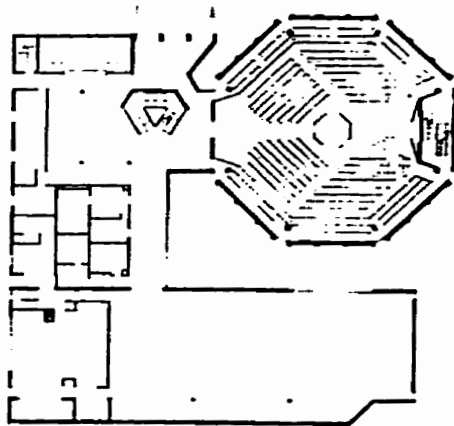


Completed Project

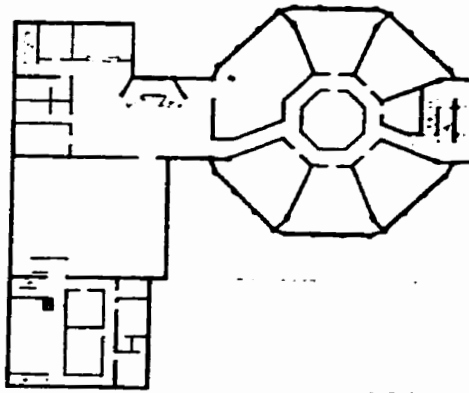
Figure 22: Shaarei Tefillah, 3 Phases, North York, Toronto, 1955-59. [TCA. 8:6 (June 1963): 59-61.]



Section



Ground Floor



Second Floor

Figure 22: Shaarei Tefillah, 3 Phases, North York, Toronto, 1955-59. [TCA. 8:6 (June 1963): 59-61.]

detailing.

The earliest phases of both Adath Israel and Shaarei Tefilla contain a weak compositional elementarism, but it is apparent that Grossman was attempting to combine Modern abstraction with Jewish traditional designs and its symbolic motifs. It is unclear what occurred to produce the completed Adath Israel. Here much of the early plan survives, but the early formal ideas have been replaced with a brick sanctuary that was possibly inspired by the popular predecessor of Beth Tzedec Synagogue, (1955, Toronto) by Peter Dickinson, and in turn, Basil Spence's influential Coventry Cathedral (1952-62, Coventry).¹¹⁵

His third synagogue, B'nai Israel Beth David (1958-60, North York) [fig.23] even more clearly demonstrates the complexity of attempting to successfully combine Modern spatial ideas with the iconic traditions of Judaism. Unlike his earlier synagogues, Grossman here produces a modular system of eleven eighteen foot concrete bays. This was a response to the narrow site and plans for a future extension to the synagogue. (due to the surrounding rapidity of suburban expansion.) The repetitive exposed concrete framing is countered with concrete infill relief within the bays and

115. Basil Spence's winning design was well received when Spence toured across Canada in the fall of 1953. Basil Spence, Phoenix at Coventry. (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962):78. It was later profiled in the JRAIC, 33:4 (April, 1956): 141.

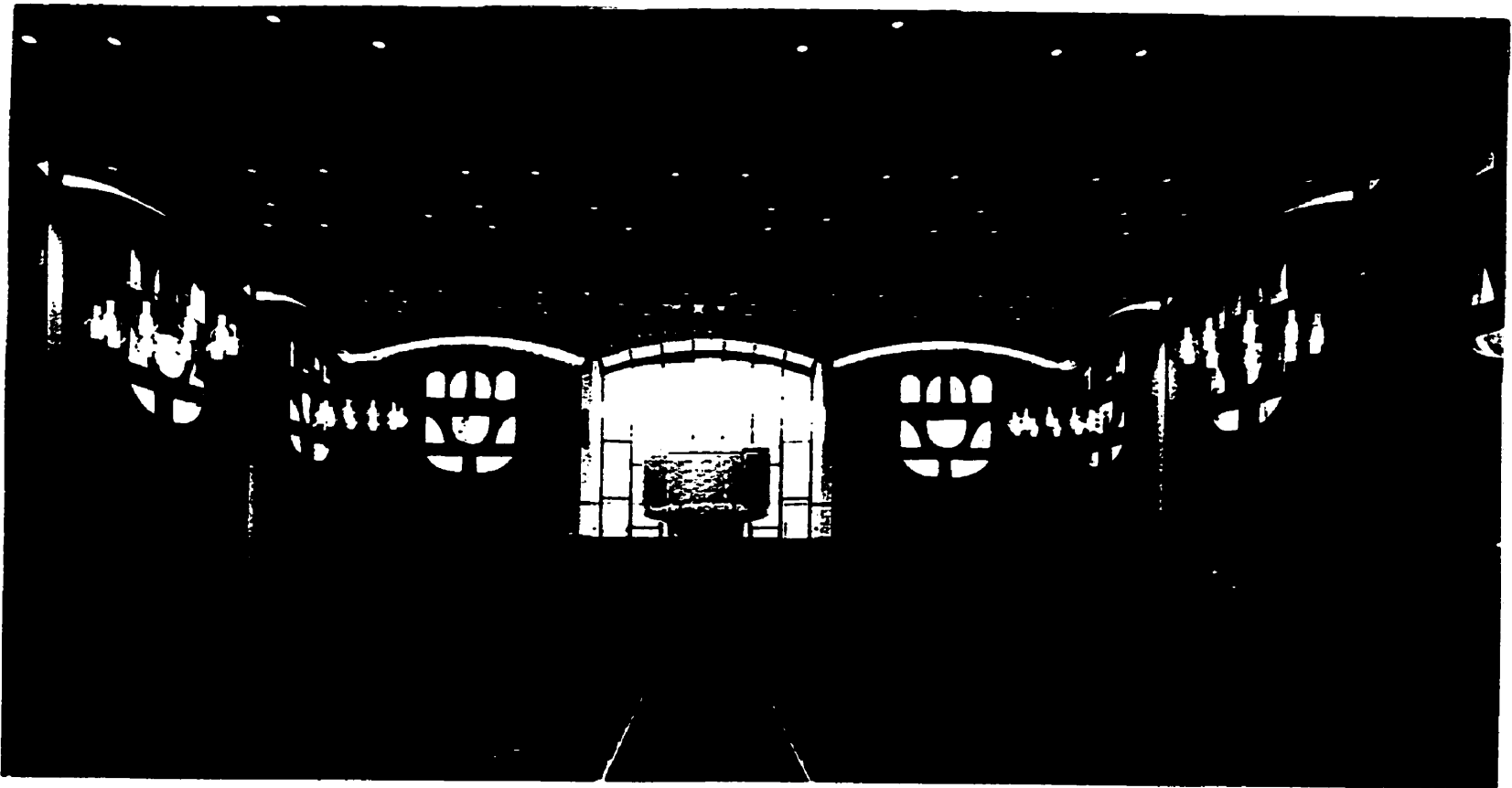


Figure 23: B'nai Israel Beth David Synagogue. North York, Toronto. 1958-60. [TCA. 8:6 (June 1963): 63-66.]

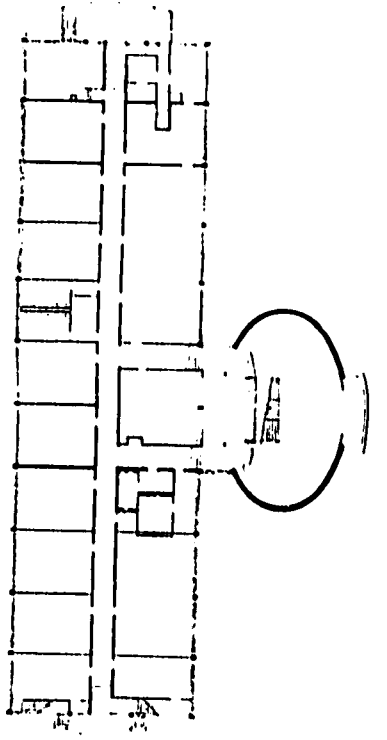


Figure 23: Main level

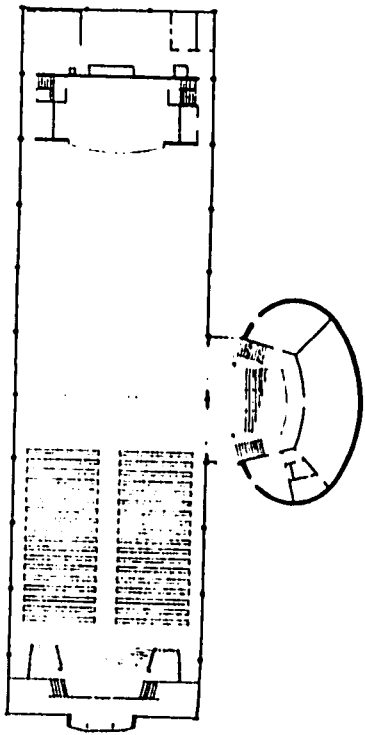


Figure 24: Basement level

Figure 23: Beth David Synagogue, North York, Toronto, 1958-60. [TCA, 8:6 (June 1965): 63-66.]

contrapuntal elliptical ovoid cylinder for an entrance. It therefore presents a visual disjuncture that is unresolvable.

The interior is separated into two floors. The ground floor contains the less ceremonial rooms, while the second floor is the flexible open space of the sanctuary, surrounded by the eleven sections pierced by light from the centre of the reliefs and behind the bema/ark. This cavernous interior is asymmetrically divided between the sanctuary and the reception hall by a collapsible wall. The result is a visually decorative skin of the repetitive abstracted Judaic symbols, present both inside and out.¹¹⁶

Grossman described Beth David at the time of completion as a "richly decorated jewel box."¹¹⁷ It presented an attempted synthesis of two antithetical sources: in essence, Judaism sheathed in an efficient concrete warehouse. And yet, the decorativeness of the "box" was thoroughly supported by the local suburban Jewish community, since it possessed both of these intentions; on the one hand, religious historicism, and on the other, the modern myth of efficiency.¹¹⁸

116. The concrete reliefs were designed by Graham Caughtry, in consultation with Rabbi Albert Pappenheim. The reliefs were inspired by Judaic symbols and Hebrew letters, spelling out Shalom, Shedai, Baroch, Yehovah. The windows represented the hand of a high priest. "New Beth David Synagogue Is A Tribute to Congregation's Devotion," The Jewish Standard, (June 15, 1959): 16-17.

117. Ibid.

118. "...expressing not only the efficiency of our modern society, but also reminding us of the ancient synagogue." Ibid.

The relationship between Modernism's efficiency and Judaism's traditions make Beth David of utmost significance to Grossman's attempt to distance himself from Modernism's anti-historical bias and functional symbolism. Unlike the residences or compositions of the previous synagogues, Beth David attempts to fuse allied arts within a Modern architecture.¹¹⁹ But rather than attempting to re-introduce a literal mimesis, Beth David presents a 'disjunctive similarity.' This is achieved by Graham Caughtry's repetitive abstracted Hebrew letters alluding to a metaphor of Jewish "pastness," which exists within the functional framing of the whole. It therefore distances itself from a historical revivalism and its ideological consequences by invoking a "pastness" while resisting "too accurate a memory of past styles."¹²⁰ Thus, Beth David remains within the Modernist remoteness towards the past but likewise reflects Grossman's attempt to include memory within the Modern frame.

For Grossman, like other postwar architects, the impetus to integrate art and architecture, was a search for an alternative meaning to the engineer's disposition for

119. Which had been in practice in contemporary architecture of the Vancouver scene. e.g. B.C. Binning's murals. Grossman later employed similar concrete reliefs on the interior of the Administration and News Building at Expo 67.

120. Alan Colquhoun, "Three Kinds of Historicism," in Modernity and the Classical Tradition. (Cambridge: MIT P, 1989): 16-17.

reductive refinement of function.¹²¹ After the completion of Beth David in 1959, Grossman further sought this 'humanization' of Modernism by exploring architecture outside the West.

In the spring of 1959, Grossman applied for one of the newly created Canada Council Arts Grants. His intention was to travel for three months in India, visiting temples of India's golden period of architecture and complete a comparative study of the relationship of painting and sculpture to architecture in Asian and Western Societies. With the support of Thomas Howarth, the director of the University of Toronto's School of Architecture, and Alan Jarvis, director of the National Gallery in Ottawa, Grossman received financial support for travel in the autumn of 1959.¹²² Because of his commitment to designing Flemingdon Park for the following five years, the trip was postponed until he rescinded the financial support in 1961.

His interest in ancient Indian architecture complemented his feeling that the nature of contemporary Modern architecture was inadequate for contemporary needs.

121. The plurality of decorative abstractions became more common by the late 1950's. The re-introduction of decorative detail meant a return to handcraft. The exposing of the 'hand' of the architect was the individualistic response which created the elaborate abstractions in many buildings. See Karl Van Leuven, "Integrating Architecture and the Arts," JRAIC 33:6 (June, 1956):223-226.

122. Grossman had been a full-time lecturer at the University of Toronto for several years. He had worked with Jarvis on the television production of "The Things We See", in the summer of 1957. Jarvis believed Grossman to be "one of our brilliant and enterprising young architects and one who has done a great deal in collaborating with painters and sculptors..." Letter, May 6, 1959. Arts Division, Special Projects: Irving Grossman, 1959-1961. National Archives of Canada, RG 63, Vol. 200.

In his prospectus he stated,

Architecture today is lacking in richness due to the fact that the arts of painting and sculpture are no longer integrated with the art of building, and that the language of ornament, traditionally developed and used by the artisan craftsman has disappeared from our technological society.¹²³

Grossman's interests echoed the growing skepticism of Modern Functionalism that had already been articulated by many architects. He saw craft as an attempt to 'humanize' Modernism, similar to Le Corbusier's modern vernacularism, or the regionalism of Western North America and Scandinavia. Though he never had the opportunity to study in India, the ideas behind his position were to be transmuted into his critique of postwar suburban growth.

The variety of responses of Grossman's residences and synagogues reflected the pluralism of Modern architecture of the late 1950's. His programmes were naturally constrained by external forces, but it was clearly evident that he was attempting to produce works which were antithetical to the gridiron anonymity of certain architecture of the period. His inspiration initially came from a reinvestigation of the International Style as well as the exploration of compositional elements in the earliest synagogues. However by 1959, Grossman was becoming aware of the irreconcilable duality of Modernists' doctrine of functional formalism and

123. Application For Canada Council Fellowship, National Archives of Canada, RG 63, Vol. 200.

its relation to the *Zeitgeist*, that had become apparent in Modern architecture of the postwar period.¹²⁴ Where the International Style revisions applied to his residences and attempts to infuse his synagogues with an historicism eventually meant a shift to external inspirations, the Flemington Park housing project demanded a new strategy based on his antipathy to suburban expansion. By the late 1950's these concerns had begun to dominate his architecture.

124. "We have realized that in the overwhelming majority of modern design, form follows *form* and not *function*. And even when a form results from a functional analysis, this analysis follows a pattern that leads to a discovery of the same function, whether in a factory or a museum." Matthew Nowicki, "Origins and Trends in Modern Architecture," in Joan Ockman, ed., Architecture Culture: 1943-1968, (N.Y.: Rizzoli, 1993): 150. See also, Colin Rowe, "Neo-'Classicism' and Modern Architecture 1," in The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays, (Cambridge: MIT P, 1976): 130-132.

Chapter 4: The Planned Village.

By the late 1950's, Grossman's firm was a bright star among the countless Toronto firms. The private homes and the synagogues had effectively displayed his architectural skill and established him among the most notable architects of the country. But, his private designs would be reconsidered when his firm was hired to take on one of the most ambitious projects in Toronto of the late 1950's: the design of housing for the North York high-density residential community of Flemington Park. This would be his most influential and internationally respected project.

Flemington Park was a pioneering project in Canadian housing. It revived concepts of past planning traditions, while adopting housing principles being applied in England and Europe. Grossman's role, as designer of the first phases of the housing was to create a community which was in many ways the antithesis of the surrounding suburban landscape.

By the mid 1950's there was a growing criticism of suburban sprawl by many popular sociologists and like-minded architects and planners. The creation of a counter-myth of suburbia began to develop in popular media and was fertile ground throughout the late 1950's and early 1960's. The myth of suburbia as a culture as homogeneous as the architecture of its tract housing was persistently promoted throughout

the period. Consequently, architects and planners developed various design responses to suburban expansion, many attempted to recreate the urbanistic forms of Europe. It was this antipathy to suburbia which was echoed in Irving Grossman's view of the suburbs and partially inspired the large-scale town house designs of Flemington Park.

This town house 'village' of pedestrian paths and underground parking contrasted the decentralised and deconcentrated results of much of the large suburban development companies building surrounding Toronto. It attempted to answer to the issues of concern among some prominent architects, planners and urban researchers in Canada. Most notably was their apprehension over the consequences of large suburban lots and the growing dependency on automobiles for transportation. Precursors of Flemington Park had begun to be developed in the early post-war years by other notable Canadian architects, for example, Henry Fliess, James Murray, and the planners of Don Mills. The projects of these architects and planners were relevant to the eventual acceptance of developing Flemington Park, since Grossman had contact with these men and was involved in Don Mills. It was the anti-suburban stance of the time which made Flemington Park and its antecedents possible. Grossman's parallel criticisms of the suburbs coincided with a revision of his architecture and renewed an awareness of

his British experiences, one that would be present throughout the following decades of the firm.

Expansion and Criticism of the Suburbs:

The suburbanization of postwar Toronto was not a phenomenon of its time, but rather a gradual reassertion of northward expansion that had halted two decades prior. But what was more unique was the rapidity, influx, and mass consumption which distinguished the renewed suburban trek. Economically and politically, postwar conditions were ripe for suburban expansion. Toronto's Central Business District's corporatism had outpriced urban residential construction, and there was, as Edmund Fowler states,

a decision by labour to moderate its confrontational tactics of the 1930s and go along with capital's short-term ability to produce massive amounts of consumer goods.¹²⁵

This created the condition for widespread suburban home-buying, through the uniquely North American perception of the single detached home as an investment based on the "fictitious commodity" of land value, exploited by the larger development companies.¹²⁶

By the late 1950's the suburbs of Toronto were expanding faster than most cities across the country,

125. Edmund P. Fowler. Building Cities that Work. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Univ. Pr., 1992): 140.

126. Fowler, 145. Fowler employs Karl Polanyi's description of 'Fictitious commodity' of the cyclical nature of land prices. "Land is bought and sold for prices which reflect its use, and its use reflects the prices for which it is bought and sold."

including Toronto proper.¹²⁷ The rapidity of this expansion in population consequently meant few initial utilities and little planning control. The result was a growing sprawl of housing with little local infrastructure, and a continued dependency on the central business district of Toronto, linked by various expressways.

Since the earliest postwar suburban residences were erected, there was a critical voice heard in debates by mostly upper middle-class academics and professionals. Though dissenting views were minor in comparison to the literature extolling the virtues of suburban home ownership, this class had access and the means of dissemination through media and institutions.

This negative criticism emphasised the tendency of suburban communities to be alienating and isolating, eventually losing a public heterogeneity that was essential for the long term health of a neighbourhood. This argument was consistently reinforced amongst suburban detractors, especially during the 1950's when pop sociology of the suburbs was at its apogee. Most of the social studies of suburbia were rarely quantifiably proven and usually published in the pages of mass-circulating periodicals. In

127. North York had expanded 1075 % between 1941 and 1961. By the early 1960's, the suburbs of Toronto equalled the population of Toronto. Doug Owsam, Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation. (Toronto: U of T Pr., 1996): 68.

time, a myth of suburbia in terms of a cultural reference, connoting a particular way of life typical in suburban communities, was eventually perpetuated to a mass audience.¹²⁸ Books such as William Whyte Jr.'s *The Organization Man* and John Keats' *The Crack in the Picture Window*, recounted life in the suburbs, though often narrowly assessing only middle-class suburban communities. The result was an image of suburbanites as a homogeneous, well-educated, upwardly-mobile, conformist and conservative group with few opportunities for individuation or personal expression. Some anti-suburban writers held observations that seemed to (mis)apply location as forming the basis of social ills. David Reisman remarked in 1957 that in the suburbs,

there would seem to be an aimlessness, a pervasive low-keyed unpleasure which cannot be described in terms of traditional sorrows, but on which many observers of the American scene and the American visage have commented...¹²⁹

This listlessness due to the homogeneity of the suburbs was often observed by the popular sociologists of the time. In *The Organization Man*, Whyte argued that the organizations (especially in suburbia) which individuals belonged to and avidly supported in postwar society, suppressed their individualism. The general population had become passive to

128. Fortune and Harper's had notable anti-suburban writers in the 1950's. Similar articles appeared in Maclean's.

129. David Reisman, "The Suburban Sadness." William M. Dobriner ed. The Suburban Community. (N.Y.: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1956): 377.

new ideas and expressions, creating a conservatism and conformity which would be the detriment of American society.¹³⁰ Within the neighbourhood cliques of the suburbs, Whyte observed that difference was voluntarily suppressed in favour of conformity.

The architects have tried to vary the facades of each house, and one might assume that putting up aluminum awnings, making alterations, repainting and the like, residents try hard to enlarge the differences. This is not always so; in some areas residents have apparently agreed to unify the block with a common design and color scheme for garages and such.¹³¹

Whyte's observations were rarely empirically based, and had little specific evidence, but they were popularly consumed and possibly paradoxically accepted by the very suburban dwellers he studied.

Of course, many 'traits' of suburban living were not particular to suburban living. For instance, the suburbanite was often a commuter, suffering the inconvenience and expense to live in the open spaces of the suburbs. What was often overlooked was that comparatively few urbanites lived close to their work.¹³² More importantly, the myth of suburbia's homogeneity was based on a few popular studies of American and Canadian middle and upper-middle class suburban

130. William Whyte Jr., "Introduction," The Organization Man, (N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1957).

131. Whyte, *op cit.*, 396.

132. Bennett M. Berger, Working-Class Suburb: A Study of Auto Workers in Suburbia, (Berkeley: U California Pr., 1968): 8-9.

developments outside major North American cities, for example: Levittown, N.Y.; Park Forest, Illinois; Lakewood, near Los Angeles, and Thorncrest Village in Toronto. Rarely were there studies of ex-urban communities or research on suburban development in smaller cities. By the late 1950's, the popular critics had developed a highly accepted myth of suburbia which has continued to resound in the literature well into the present and which reinforced proponents of New Town developments as a suitable alternative to tract-housing development.

Responses to Suburban Sprawl:

The liberal, urbane sociologists who were promoting the image of suburban conformity and passiveness in the pages of their magazines were echoed by the architectural community throughout North America. Many of the most notable critics proposed and supported various ideological stances on how to 'resolve' the problems of suburban architecture. These included Grossman. Consistently, the architectural community of the 1950's supported European notions of planning. Lewis Mumford had, since the 1930's, propagated a regionalist/Garden City approach to postwar growth. His views were countered by the early 1960's by the ideologically conservative views of Jane Jacobs' return to the physical and social density of urban life. For Catherine

Bauer (Wurster), a contemporary of Mumford, the answer to suburban sprawl,

the look-alike, or not-quite-so-alike houses, thrown out like apples on a carpet, repeated ad infinitum...would be to sort out this amorphous mass into neighbourhoods and zones-and lead traffic ways around them on the well-known 'garden city' scheme.¹³³

She cited the British New Town of Crawley and Harlow, Sweden's Vällingby, and the North American suburban compromise: Don Mills, North York.¹³⁴

Other architectural strategies to resolve suburban sprawl were often variants of the earlier utopian visions of Le Corbusier or the realized Ebenezer Howard/Raymond Unwin inspired designs of Clarence Stein and Henry Wright. Rather than the often disastrous public housing schemes of tower blocks, the cul-de-sac Radburn Plan was a flexible and often copied design which reappeared numerous times in response to the automobile suburbs of North America. It was their design strategies which would inspire architects and urban planners in Canada who had become concerned over the rapidly expanding suburbs of the larger cities.

Irving Grossman's Views:

133. Catherine Bauer, "First Job: Control New City Sprawl," Architectural Forum, 105:3 (Sept. 1956): 123.

134. Humphrey Carver echoed similar views on most housing throughout Toronto, "characterised by extreme monotony and dullness...endless repetition of the same types....vain attempts to give each dwelling some individuality through the application of some trivial surface ornament." Houses For Canadians, (Toronto: U of T. Pr., 1948): 68.

Grossman's opinions on the suburbs were rarely as poisonous as some of the popular anti-suburbanists, no surprise considering the bulk of his early work was dependent on North York's burgeoning construction of suburban neighbourhoods. Yet, from his early post-graduate years he saw the suburban shift in Toronto as contrary to his ideals formulated through the experiences of the LCC and his study of Le Corbusier. Irving Grossman's anti-suburban message was latent in his early writings. It was not until his firm had worked on the Flemington Park designs that he began to publicly express his opinions of the suburban, though earlier indications of his views can be found.

In "Human Patterns", his earliest published views on housing design, signs of his distaste of suburban tract housing and its lack of urban qualities are clearly evident. In part this explains his interest in the apartment housing he was designing during 1954 and 1955 with his U. of T. alumnus, Eugene Lilitzak. In describing the suburbs Grossman critically observed that,

the visual landscape we are creating is either shockingly bad, or dull and uninspiring. We have not yet found our equivalent to this colloquial architecture, and it seems that most of the time we do not care. Yet, when we do try, and resort to the 'play of styles', we reach stagnancy very quickly.¹³⁵

135. Irving Grossman, "Human Patterns," TCA, 1:4 (April, 1956): 23.

The superficialness of suburban idioms lacked a meaningfulness which Grossman saw in other Western cultural traditions. The suburban landscape was too rigid, too monotonous, it did not contain the "qualities of accidental beauty," or "a complex of pure form."¹³⁶ The architectural composition of the suburbs was a modern repetitiveness which had to be disturbed and recomposed. For Grossman, that was to be discovered outside North America, in the medieval towns of France and Italy or a Mexican village. It was, the vaguely described "unselfconscious charm" which was appealing about these communities. The subtext was of course that the individual was subsumed in modern society: "He must not feel that BELONGING to a group means being LOST within it."¹³⁷ The challenge for Grossman was to reinvest an expression of meaning for the individual within modern society. In "Human Patterns" the answer was not found in the materialist ethos of Mies' Lakeshore Drive, but rather in a cellular-organic composition akin to Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation. His answer was a visual composition of texture, solids and voids, on the surface of the apartment tower. Though the grid pattern is preserved, each of the maisonettes or apartment units would have a variety of compositions on its facade, but without being overridden by

136. *Ibid.*

137. *op cit.*, 25.

a Beaux-Arts decorative skin. This amounted to a particularly personal interpretation of Le Corbusier's symbolic meanings of the Modulor; the mathematical harmonics of standardized human proportion, though this was not outrightly acknowledged. Yet, Grossman's Corbusian tone is mixed with a British affection for a "disordered order." A planned accidentalism was exactly the expression of visual delight that was lacking in the planned suburban developments.

This anti-Miesian and anti-materialist stance was comparable to a growing pessimism of contemporary cultural critique. For instance, Leftist critic, Herbert Marcuse theorized a decline of the individual in face of the totalitarianism of technological rationality and its gradual replacement with a 'one-dimensional society' and 'one-dimensional man.'¹³⁸ For Grossman, it was subjectivism which could compose the controllable world of objects, rather than the 'one-dimensional' world of technology superseding the metaphysical.

Several years later, after the first year on the Flemington Park project, Irving Grossman's anti-suburbanism had crystallized into a greater interest in past urban typologies. His inspirations were rooted in the denser urban

138. Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society, (Boston: Beacon Pr., 1964): xix. Marcuse conceived the work in the 1950's and early 1960's. Marcuse, xi. See chap. 4

fabrics of the past, including the Victorian core of Toronto near his office on Sultan Street. For Grossman, the challenge was to introduce Toronto to an urbanism that he had experienced elsewhere, and these were mostly found in the past, not the Modernism that had produced the suburban housing. In his article, "In Search of the Lost Street" from 1960, the title suggests Grossman's growing concern over modernity's implication on communities.

He stated,

This seems to be a confession that modern architecture has been a failure so far in the field of domestic building. Perhaps it is. Perhaps the conditions that produced these superior environments have forever changed in our time, and we have not yet replaced them with equal or better ones.¹³⁹

Had this second-generation Modernist, who had been attempting to reinterpret Modernism from within for the past seven years, begun to recognize the weakness of its teleological determinism? If so, Grossman was not alone. By the late 1950's, a number of architects in Toronto had begun to develop alternative housing types in the fore of the omnipresent suburb.

Support for Density:

Prior to Grossman's final designs for the town houses

139. Irving Grossman, "In Search of the Lost Street," Canadian Art, 17:11 (Nov. 1960): 331.

of Flemington Park, this housing type was not common amidst the suburban housing boom; most home-owners were striving for the North American Dream of the single detached house, even if it meant temporarily renting an apartment. Though the suburbs could support incentives for various economic classes of home buyers, there were many who could not afford a single-detached tract house. Some architects had since the end of war, preoccupied themselves with promoting the suitability of building row houses. Henry Fliess, James Murray, the *Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation*, and early exposés published by *The Canadian Architect*, (edited by James Murray,) all helped to create greater accessibility and sources of support for the introduction of row housing or as it was euphemistically reconceived as the town house.

The challenge which faced these early promoters was the predominant bias for the single detached dwelling. Though the single detached home declined in completions throughout the 1950's and 1960's, and apartments steadily rose, the single home dwarfed its relatives. Between 1951 and 1961, an average of 69.5 % of housing completions were single detached dwellings.¹⁴⁰ The paltry 1.15 % of the market share of row housing did not successfully impress itself among

140. John Miron, Housing in Postwar Canada: Demographic Change, Household Formation, and Housing Demand, (Kingston: McGill-Queen's U Pr., 1988): 153.

home buyers and developers.¹⁴¹ The town house did fulfil a niche market over the decades, but it would never have a significant impact on the Canadian housing market.¹⁴²

The promotion of the town house was argued by proponents on two grounds. On the one hand, economic efficiency and savings of town house design was meant to appeal to investors, developers and lower income families. On the other hand, the town house was seen as a counteraction in architectural circles to the effects of what was now promoted as the 'subtopia.' The visual urbanism of the town house development was promoted for its community-forming potential, since it enables the architect to employ scenographic and picturesque qualities to create the necessary visual cohesion which was lacking in the suburban developments. Both of these arguments were employed when promoting the town house, depending on the audience.

These two views were tirelessly pointed by an early postwar proponent of town house architecture, Henry Fliess, a German-Jew refugee, who had graduated from the University of Toronto in 1946. He emphasised that the town house was the answer to the homogeneous space of suburban sprawl; an argument which was analogous with Grossman's support for

141. Ibid.

142. During the 1950's, the annual rates hovered around 2 000 units. Between 1963 and 1977, there was a rapid increase in town house construction, abruptly halting in the early 1980's. Miron, 164.

denser housing types. Fleiss was one of the earliest postwar promoters for reviving the town house. His advocations were partially based on the garden-type planning of Stein and Wright, especially the economically successful Chatham Village (1932), near Pittsburgh, with its enclosed pedestrian ways, separated garages and varied topography.¹⁴³ For Fliess, the sensitively designed town house community could counteract the "rows and rows of almost identical houses..." attempting to "disguise the essential similarity...by various [superficial] means." Essentially Fliess saw that, "new residential areas are the clear expression of mass-produced housing which tries as hard as it can to look like individual housing..."¹⁴⁴ This hopeless individual expression among the masses was because of a lack of visual concern for the "comprehensive picture of the community."¹⁴⁵ Fliess' lack of sensible exterior space, that could be resolved in the development of garden type planning, was a foreshadow of Grossman's concern for exterior visual cohesion. Both architects argued similar notions for the necessity of town house developments, though Fliess was arguing this while Grossman was still in England.

143. He likewise cited European housing developments, including Eric Sigfried Persson's Friluftsgården, Malmö, Sweden and Neubühl, Switzerland, each containing similar Unwin inspired designs. Henry Fliess, "Have A Place in Our Future Housing Plans," Canadian Builder, 3:3 (March, 1953): 34.

144. Fliess, 31.

145. Fliess, 32.

Henry Fliess' early promotion of town houses had a still stronger voice when he became an associate architect with James Murray in the early 1950's, and began developing row house designs for Don Mills. Murray published exposés of town house developments occurring in the late 1950's; whole issues were often dedicated to the subject.¹⁴⁶ Prior to the founding of *The Canadian Architect* in 1955, there had been little communication on the subject of row or town housing in the periodicals. The *Journal of the Royal Canadian Architectural Institute* (RAIC), had little interest in including row house developments since it was a type of housing which did not appeal to both the mature readership and the tone of the professional journal.¹⁴⁷ But while past indictments of row houses as slums persisted in the 1950's, the RAIC did include examples of row housing. In 1952, it published a *Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation* (CMHC) article on house design, which included detailed research on the potentials of the row house. The CMHC's arguments and designs were analogous with Fliess': attention to site planning and zoned service areas could resolve the monotony of postwar detached dwellings without incurring more costly expenditures.¹⁴⁸ It

146. For example, *TCA*, 2:2 (Feb. 1957)

147. When *The Canadian Architect* was founded in 1955, it proved that there was a need for an alternative to Eric Arthur's JRAIC predominance in architecture circles. *TCA*'s initial circulation was at 2307. [*Canadian Advertising*, 30:3 (May, 1957):191], comparable to the JRAIC's 2 684, [ibid.] But by the late 1950's, *TCA*'s circulation had slightly surpassed the JRAIC's. *TCA* could easily hold its own within a two journal market on Canadian architecture.

148. CMHC, "House Design," *JRAIC*, 29:9 (Sept., 1952):21-23.

cited similar Garden City neighbourhood designs as Fliess.¹⁴⁹ During the 1950's the CMHC was one of the most effective proponents of the row house alternative, by financially supporting many town house development schemes under the federal government's revised National Housing Act of 1954.¹⁵⁰

The CMHC's exceptional interest in denser housing schemes was typical during the presidency of Scottish-born Leftist, Stewart Bates. The CMHC of the mid-1950's was particularly interested in these alternative housing types, perhaps because recruitment of its staff was often from the London County Council and the New Town Corporations, bringing stronger interest in Garden City communities to Canadian planning.¹⁵¹ But many early postwar row housing schemes supported by CMHC involvement were rarely different from their 18th and 19th predecessors; long strips of attached homes parallel to roads were typical.¹⁵² Yet for the CMHC and other early proponents, the row house contained an expression which liberated housing from the perceived conformism of the suburban tract housing. Row housed-Radburn

149. Plans of Stein and Wright's works, British New town neighbourhoods and LCC designs, Military row housing in Picton, Ont., and various continental examples were included. Most were examples of possible low-income, low-rental public housing schemes. *op cit.*, 28-31.

150. The Housing Act of 1954 amended the maximum loan for row housing units to the same level as that for detached houses. Fliess, 31.

151. H. Peter Oberlander, Arthur L. Fallick, and George Anderson, ed. Housing a Nation: The Evolution of Canadian Housing Policy. (Ottawa: CMHC, 1992). In 1960, Peter Dobush's inquiry into residential design published a more sympathetic study for the potentials of town house designs. see "Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Design of the Residential Environment of the RAIC, Ottawa," JRAIC, 37:5 (May, 1960): 182-217.

152. For example, J.B. Partin Assoc., Langdon Ave. Housing Project, (1952, Toronto.) or J.E. Hoare, Jr.'s, Regent Park South Row Houses, (1957, Toronto.) Though Hoare's designs for the planning scheme by Ian MacLennan included various setbacks and cul-de-sacs.

neighbourhoods restored "a more humanistic approach..."¹⁵³

The row house housing type represented a compromise of identity for both the architect and its resident. It was not the monotonous and costly suburban house; it was not the isolating anti-family apartment tower. As consistently defended, the row house was a viable alternative to the two vagaries of design in the suburban landscape.

But the challenge of creating a viable middle-class demand and interest in town houses was rarely successful among private development in the 1950's; row houses were usually relegated to low-rent family housing schemes.¹⁵⁴ The hope by architects like Murray and Fliess was that there was a potential for the row house to become an alternative to the mortgaged homes of suburbia. Of exceptional success was the row house areas in Don Mills; they provided a significant basis of public acceptance for the more radical row house designs that Grossman designed in 1959.

Flemingdon Park's Predecessors:

The development of row housing was minimal in Canadian housing of the 1950's, but one innovative development that would garner worldwide attention for its planning, was

153. Eric Arthur, "Editorial," JRAIC, 29:9 (Sept. 1952): 380.

154. For example, the firm of Jackson and Ypres' inexpensive row house proposal for the Toronto Metropolitan Home Builders Assoc. Canadian Builder, 3:3 (Dec. 1953):16-17.

E.P. Taylor's 'New Town' of Don Mills.¹⁵⁵ This visionary community attempted to resolve some of the planning problems that had been occurring in the rapid building of Toronto's suburbs in the late 1940's. It was in Don Mills that some of the first privately developed town houses were built under the planning strategy of Macklin Hancock, a landscape architect, who was in the midst of studying at the Harvard School of Design when he became interested in Garden City planning, Clarence Perry's concept of the 'neighbourhood unit', and was exposed to the works of Walter Gropius and The Architects Collaborative.¹⁵⁶ Under Hancock and chief architect, Douglas Lee,¹⁵⁷ they hired area architects to design for the construction companies. George Hassig, a Swiss emigré, James Murray and Henry Fliess were involved with the earliest phases of the New Town. Later, Michael Bach, a Swedish architect, Irving Grossman and others were hired to design detached residences.¹⁵⁸ It was here that Grossman was exposed to Fliess and Murray's pioneering mixed housing designs of town houses and low-rise apartments of the first phases.

155. His initial intentions was to create an Owenite community for O'Keefe brewery, but later it was redesigned, possibly by John Layng, planner of Taylor's York Mills Plaza (1953.) John Sewell. The Shape of the City: Toronto Struggles with Modern Planning. (Toronto: U of T Pr., 1993): 81.

156. Alexander Cross, Built for Profit: Sources of Form in the Canadian Residential Built Environment, 1900-1960. (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Carleton University, 1994): 153-156.

157. He had also graduated from the Harvard Design School. Ibid.

158. Grossman designed several typical bungalows, which may have been more 'exotic' than most area designs. See Cross, 158. and [fig. 24.]

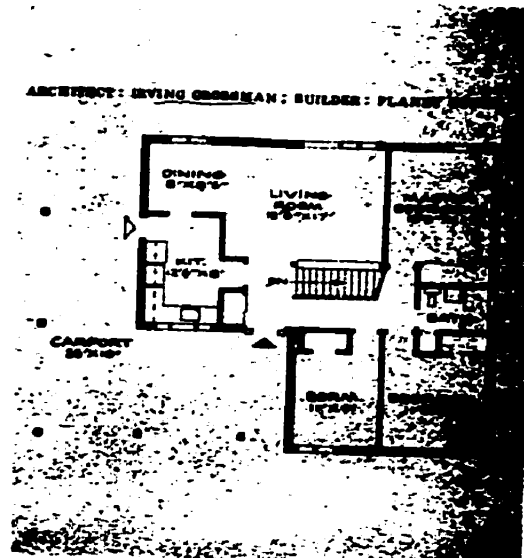


Figure 24: Bungalow Residence, Don Mills, c. L. 1950's. [Canadian House and Garden, 36:2 (Feb. 1959): 33.]

The planning of the modern New Town stemmed from North American precedents, but was also indirectly comparable with recent Scandinavian postwar projects and British New Town policy, even though Don Mills was privately developed. Various elements of the British New Towns were adopted into Don Mills. The mixed housing relationship, which was initially expressed in the Dudley Report of 1944 for London's postwar reconstruction plans, was an important facet that was emphasised at Don Mills. Fifty-five percent of Don Mills was high-density group housing.¹⁵⁹ The aspiration of Hancock was for mixed housing and tenure, consequently resulting in mixed income. Though the class variation was not achieved, (because of developers' interests,) the variety of housing within the community had never been attempted in Canadian postwar housing developments.

The mixed housing of low-rise apartments (a thirty-five foot height limit was imposed within North York), detached, semi-detached and row housing, gave the architects the opportunity to develop their interests in row housing. Fliess and Murray's Southill Village (1955) [fig.25], created a compromised row house scheme that took inspiration from Stein and Wright's communities of the past, but did not re-

159. Cross, 164.

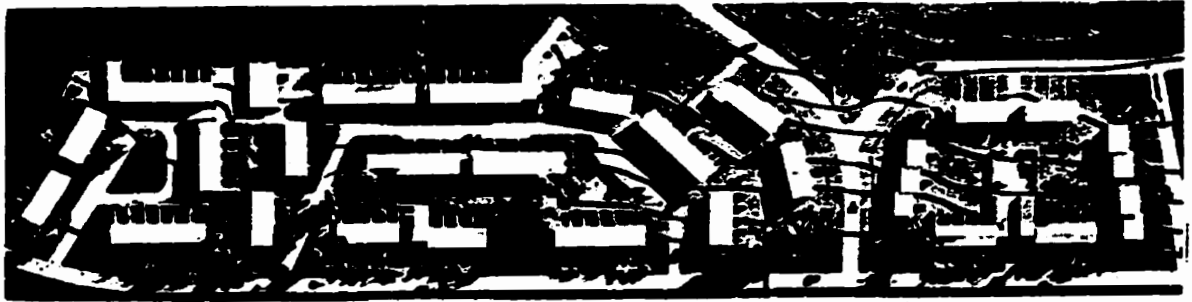


Figure 25: Fleiss and Murray, Southhill Village, Don Mills, North York, 1955 [TCA, 2:2 (Feb. 1957):23]

create the Radburnian separation so admired by Henry Fließ.¹⁶⁰ Southill Village, located in the southwest quadrant of the plan was well received and rapidly tenured. The innovative Modern housing with overtones of Scandinavian regionalism and partially employing unique split-level units, was well received.¹⁶¹ The popular acceptance of this 'village' was essential for the architects' development of the housing type.¹⁶²

In a later phase, the Ottawa firm of Belcourt and Blair designed Greenbelt Heights Village (1956)[fig.26]; it was a less picturesque housing group, but more inwardly enclosed than Southill Village. The units were all tenured apartments terraced into rows of two-storeyed, two-bedroom homes above ground floor bachelor units. The rows were of various lengths placed to separate the arterial road from the units. The more functional emphasis of the row houses did not disguise its debt to the European village squares.¹⁶³ Though unlike most European public areas, the shared facilities surrounded by the buildings contained a rudimentary produced 'place', which was a rare emphasis among early Canadian

160. The footpaths, an essential component at Chatham Village, were not possible with the site. Sara Bowser, "Row Housing, Don Mills, Ont." *TCA*, 2:2 (Feb. 1957):26.

161. These may have been the first split level row housing in North America. Bowser, 25.

162. The perception of row housing as associated with over-crowding and slums was beginning to wane, but not without the holdouts of protective detached home-owners. "when [Southill Village] was about to be built...the residents in detached villas around raised howls of protest....(They were somewhat embarrassed when a subsequent survey showed the new residents of the terraced homes have an average annual income of a thousand dollars higher than their own.)" W.S. Goulding, "Terrace Houses in Toronto," *JRAIC*, 34:10 (Oct. 1957):374.

163. James Murray, "Row Housing, Don Mills, Ont." *TCA*, 3:7 (July, 1958): 34.

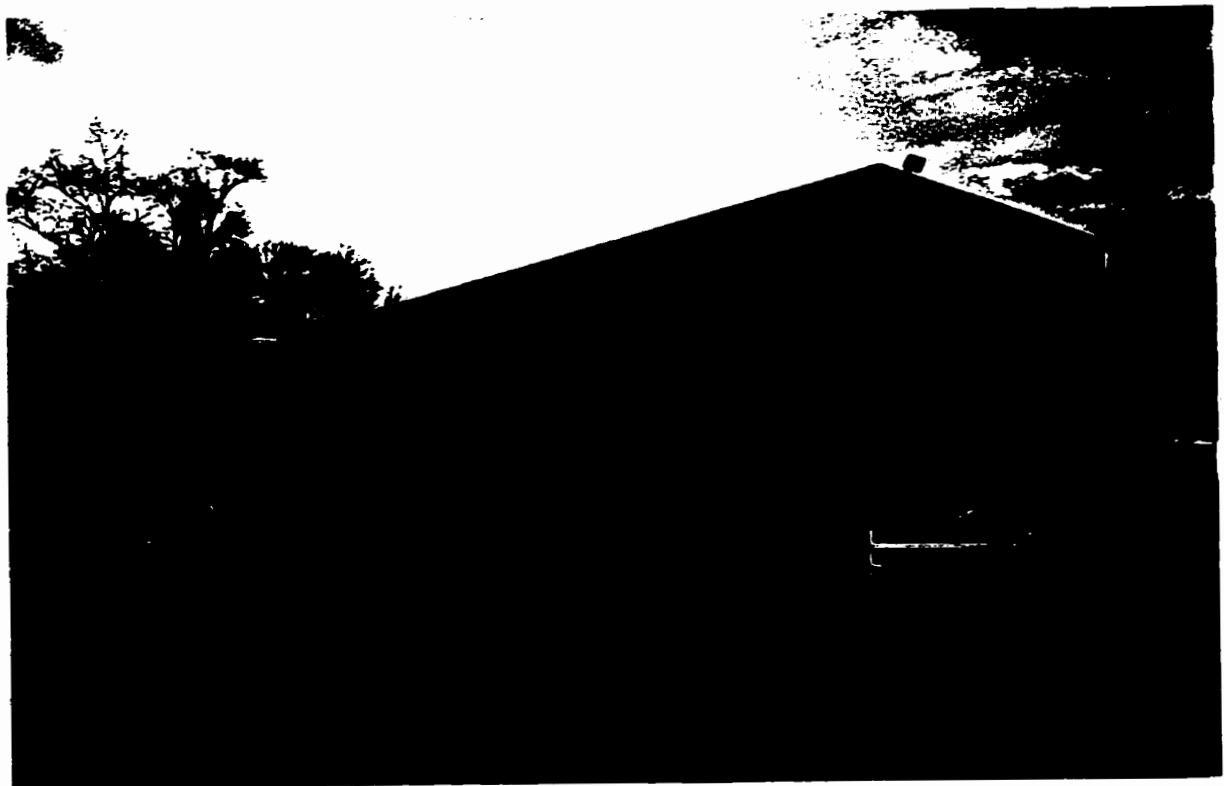
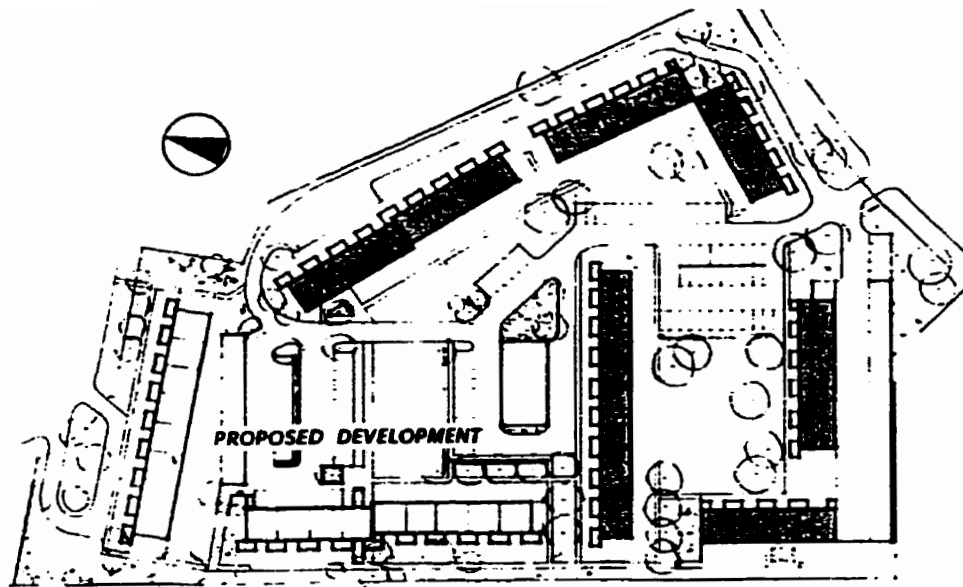


Figure 26: Belcourt and Blair, Greenbelt Heights Village, Don Mills, North York, 1955 [ICA, 3:7 (July 1958): 34]

postwar housing.

The intentions and promotions of the row house type during the 1950's by architects and planners confronting the dystopic image of suburbia were the architectural statements that countered the myth of the suburbs. The expansive, monotonous landscape of the tract housing was often derided by architects searching for the integration of their aspirations to create dense urbanistic solutions to housing the rapidly expanding city. North York's New Town of Don Mills was an essential starting point for these interests that Fliess and others were attempting to develop. Their concern for the social planning of mixed development designs was to be a foundation for the eventual development of the higher-density community south of Don Mills.

For Grossman, the experience of working among these architects along with his own postwar English experience laid the ground for the elaboration of his 'carefully careless' cluster Modernism that became ingrained in architectural and planning circles by the early 1960's. In his early residences and synagogues he had attempted to introduce a revisionist Modernism through topological and historical references. The catalyst for elaborating the themes of his earlier buildings was the anti-suburbanism which had developed among intellectual elites. The popular acceptance of the myth of suburbia was therefore the

'crisis' condition for introducing a variety of town house designs in the late 1950's. It meant that Grossman was offered the opportunity to return and reinterpret the dichotomous English housing debates of early years, while asserting his neo-avant-gardist pursuit of confronting modernity's alienating effects.

Chapter 5: Flemington Park, The Suburban Village Realized

The Flemington Park development in North York was the transmutation of Irving Grossman's disillusionment with Modernism's response to the monotonous, decentralized suburbanism of North America. This had been an undercurrent in his earliest residential and memorial works for particular sites, but by late 1959, he confronted contemporary urban planning by reviving his impressions of London's postwar rebuilding, catalyzed by the growing anti-suburbanism of architects and planners in North America. The outcome was a conventionalist programme at Flemington Park which attempted to produce 'place' among the perceived 'placelessness' of the suburban landscape. This internationally-recognized phase of the project, included Modernism's distanced planning control, yet attempted to produce an alternative, albeit misinformed and idealistic, suburban housing development.

The complex sources of Flemington Park included Grossman's interpretation of the postwar English preoccupation with the picturesque 'Townscape', as well as alluding to an early Team X interest in sociological and archeological investigations. Furthermore, a Sittesque anti-suburban concern about the proliferation of private car ownership and its presumed destruction of the concept of

'community,' also inspired Flemingdon Park's varied town house clusters and pedestrian malls. These had been developed from research of historical civic spaces and housing types in Toronto and elsewhere. The town houses were antipathetic to the suburban ideal and more daring than the postwar town house designs at Don Mills. Flemingdon Park eventually became mired in problems of ownership and a misguided planning process. This has diminished Grossman's 'suburban village' into what is today a marginal low-income housing development. But the original intentions embodied an heroic attempt at introducing an antithetical form of housing to Toronto's rapidly sprawling metropolis.

The Conception of Flemingdon Park:

Grossman's nascent participation in the development was preceded by years of creating a tangible plan by several owners of the North York site. In the postwar years, E.P. Taylor amalgamated the marginal plateau farmlands between the two branches of the Don River. Its comparably late development was due to these site constraints and difficulty in extending municipal services.¹⁶⁴ In 1955, McClintock Ltd., a Toronto development company, bought the site and coined the Flemingdon Park name; their intention was to create an industrial estate intersected by the future Don Valley

¹⁶⁴ Macklin L. Hancock, "Flemingdon Park, A New Urban Community," in L. O. Gertler ed., Planning the Canadian Environment, (Montreal: Harvest House, 1966): 207.

Parkway and retaining the plateau for a small low-density residential community.¹⁶⁵ By 1958, 350 acres of the site was bought by Toronto Industrial Leaseholds Ltd., under the direction of Webb and Knapp (Canada) Ltd., and hired Macklin Hancock's Project Planning Assoc. to design the initial residential layout.¹⁶⁶ The new developers recognized that because of reduced demand for industrial land, due to soaring land costs, the project focused on a more strategically beneficial high-density residential community.¹⁶⁷ Under Project Planning Ltd., the site was subdivided into approximately 140 acres for residential, 180 acres for industrial and commercial, and 100 acres for parks and a greenbelt, [fig.27].¹⁶⁸ The initial proposal was for a community of 20 000 residences, (later it was reduced to 15 000) attempting to develop a densely cohesive independent community, and allaying Metro's concern for enlarging the triangular form of the city.¹⁶⁹

165. North York Township, Metro Council and the Ontario Municipal Board were supportive of the plan and solidified building of the Don Valley Parkway. Hancock, 208.

166. Webb and Knapp's New York parent company, chaired by William Zeckendorf, was involved in several Canadian development projects at the time, including other housing projects in Toronto.

167. Flemingdon Park was relatively close to the centre of Metro and the flat plateau was ideal for much needed rental accommodation. In May of 1959, Metro Council approved the circumferential re-routing of the Don Valley Parkway along the Valley floor, avoiding the bisection of the residential area. Hancock, 208-209. (In 1959 a further 117 acres was acquired along the newly built Eglinton Crosstown Road, which was zoned for an industrial estate.) Flemingdon Park: A Webb and Knapp Community Project. (Toronto: Webb and Knapp, n.d.): [2].

168. In late 1959, a further 117 acres across Eglinton Ave. was acquired to develop a CBC 'Radio and Television City' which included apartment towers and a motel. In the summer of 1960, a further 75 acres was acquired north of the residential area, along Eglinton Ave. Ibid.

169. "In analyzing exact plans for site land use in relation to the overall concept for Metro's development, it appeared desirable to achieve the more rectangular profile of London's development rather than the triangular profile of the usual North American cities." Hancock, 209.

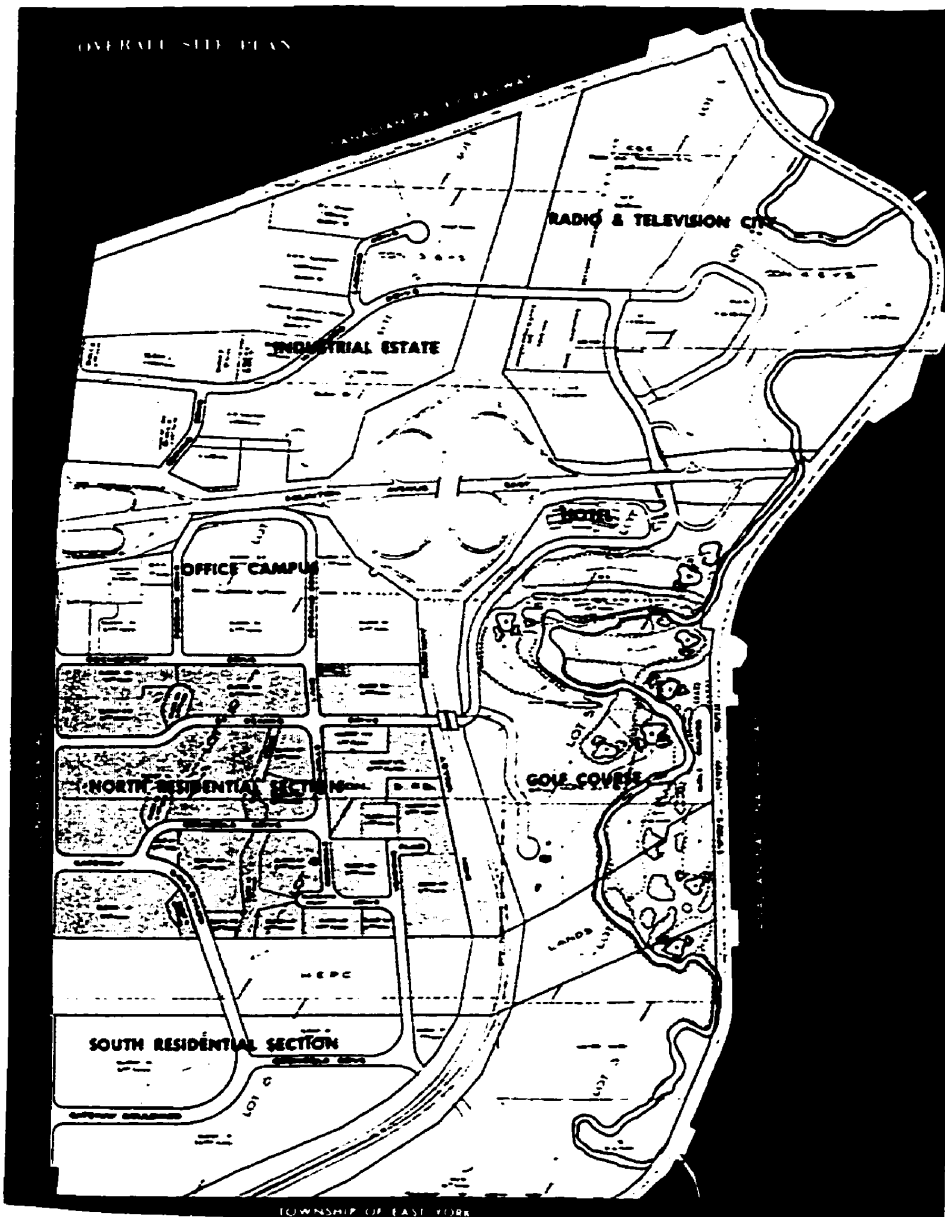


Figure 27: Site and Zoning Plan for Flemington Park, North York, 1959-1964. [JRAIC, 12:0 (April 1967):53.]

There had been few precedents in North America for a mixed housing and mixed-income community on the scale of Flemingdon Park. Naturally, the rarity of the development meant apprehension among North York's township council.¹⁷⁰ To allay their concerns, various professionals involved visited similar projects in England, Sweden and Denmark.¹⁷¹ Hancock advised the group that the LCC's Roehampton developments and Stockholm's Vällingby residential quarter had similar form and planning, but the group also visited numerous contemporary residential developments, including the British New Towns of Harlow, Basildon, and Crawley, LCC's Golden Lane, Arne Jacobsen's Soholm, Clampenborg, and Bellahøj. Further discussions with municipal politicians and internationally notable planners, such as Dr. Thomas Sharp, Sir William Holford, and Sven Markelius, affected the eventual agreement to build Flemingdon Park in July of 1959.¹⁷²

Prior to the Ontario Municipal Board's ratification of the draft plan, Hancock's team with input from Webb & Knapp's Webin Communities housing division, developed an early spatial layout proposal. Webin's head, S.M. Andrews,

170. Various aldermen including the Reeve of North York, were skeptical and concerned that such high-density housing was feasible. One Councillor suspected there would be more social problems due to the density. "New Plan Suggests Apartment City," *Don Mills Mirror*, Jan. 29, 1959, 1. and Hancock, 210.

171. They included members of North York Council, Metro.'s planning chairman and commissioner, and the general manager of Webb and Knapp's design company, Webin Communities, S.M. Andrews.

172. Hancock, 210-211.

(an Ottawa native who had worked for the architectural firm of Belcourt and Blair) with Webin staff architect, S.D.F. Resznetnik, prepared a design based on Hancock's density and zoning requirements. This included various public and private services for the mixed housing community of row houses, slab blocks of apartments and maisonettes, and point block towers [fig.28]. The layout, unlike Grossman's later re-designs, were rectangular buildings scattered throughout the site without any clear pattern of circulation in relation to the streets and similar to other town house precedents.¹⁷³

The Transformed Row House:

In the autumn of 1959, Grossman's firm was hired because of his acquaintance with Alec Rubin, head of Toronto Industrial Leaseholds Ltd. Rubin admitted to Grossman's lack of large-scale planning experience, but was convinced that he could introduce a more innovative layout than the initial proposal.¹⁷⁴ During late 1959, Grossman and his staff designed the offset, curving, wedge shaped town house plans, with underground parking garages and internal pedestrian ways that marked its fame.¹⁷⁵

173. Parking areas were scattered around the buildings, creating a lack of greenspace.

174. "Rubin...was a bright and aggressive one with open minds looking for new ideas...and able to put these into effect. Howard Jones, "Flemingdon Park Revisited," *ICA*, 12:3 (April 1967):47. Interview with Roy Brown, Oct. 1997.

175. It is unclear if Webin's other projects in Toronto influenced the wedge plan of the town houses. "When the architectural firm of Klein and Sears, working on other Webin projects, developed the principle of wedged-shape forms

(continued...)



Figure 28: Leo Reszetsnik, Preliminary Housing Plan, Flemingdon Park, North York, 1956. [TCA, ID:3 (April 1967):61.]

This was only possible if Hancock's original layout of strict zoning, that had been applied in Don Mills, was significantly altered. To achieve acceptance for the higher density plan it meant Grossman needed CMHC mortgage support. He went to Ottawa to successfully convince his old university classmate, new CMHC president, Ian MacLennan, to accept a reduced separation width of 30 feet, rather than the typical 75 feet between row houses; this allowed for an increase of density from 16-18 units/acre to 22-24 units/acre.¹⁷⁶ Grossman's firm was then able to re-design for denser and more varied housing types within the original master plan, even though it was later apparent that the artificial boundaries of the master plan lead to a stratification between housing and communal facilities. Indeed, Grossman later remarked that the development would have been more successful if the housing and master plan had been conceived together.¹⁷⁷ After a series of concessionary delays because of the unorthodox plans submitted, the first phase of residential construction for 500 units was built along the east end of the 'North Residential Section,' between late 1960 and 1961. It contained a variety of town

175.(...continued)

that create a curving form when placed together, a further range of formal and spatial possibilities was uncovered." Irving Grossman, "Housing at Flemingdon Park, Ont.," *ICA*, 6:5 (May 1961): 47.

176.Interview with Roy Brown, Oct. 1997.

177.Jones, 48-49.

houses intermixed with apartments, and an eight-storey slab block; this section set the spatial and formal theme for the later phases. [Figs.29,30]¹⁷⁸

The initial sense upon entering the area is reminiscent of the planners' source of inspiration, British and Northern European New Towns. But unlike the sparser density of the British New Towns, Flemingdon Park's 100 p.p.a. was congruent to the 'Soft' side of the LCC's mixed development schemes.¹⁷⁹ At the end of the entrance road, the eight-storey concrete slab block encloses the town house units in behind. [Fig.31] Similar to Corbusian precedents, the exposed reinforced concrete structure is composed of ground level, two-storey setback maisonettes, with six levels of apartments. The penthouse, with its sculptural upturned roof, was designed as a recreation lounge with sun deck for the tenants. Obviously similar to LCC/Corbusian models, but with less overt material manipulation, its exposed concrete framing, cantilevered roof entrance, and cellular organization suggests the influence of London precedents.

Southward, the visual variation of the town houses are distinctly different from the slab block or the regularity

178. The most northern section of the first phase was originally to be more town houses with the possibility of two point blocks [fig.29]; it was later built as an arched 9 storey slab block. [fig.30] The last town houses to be built were more linear compositions compared to the curvature of the earliest phase. [fig.30]

179. e.g. The Alton East's 100 p.p.a mixed development, as opposed to Roehampton Lane's 200 p.p.a. Corbusian maisonette blocks. Lionel Esher, A Broken Wave. (London: Lane. 1961):105-102.

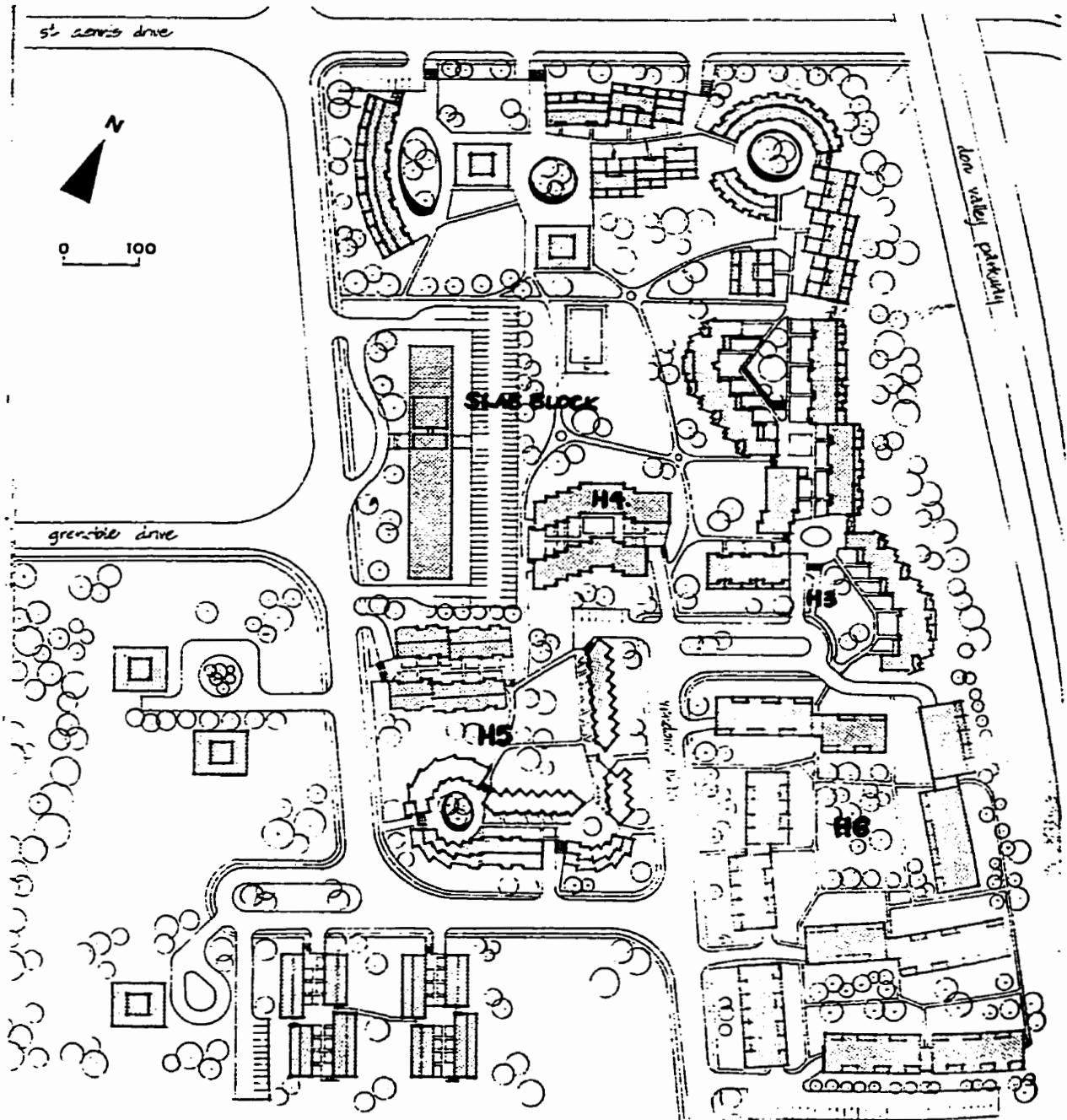


Figure 29: Irving Grossman. Preliminary Plan. Flemingdon Park, North York, 1959. [ICA 6:5 (May 1961): 46.]

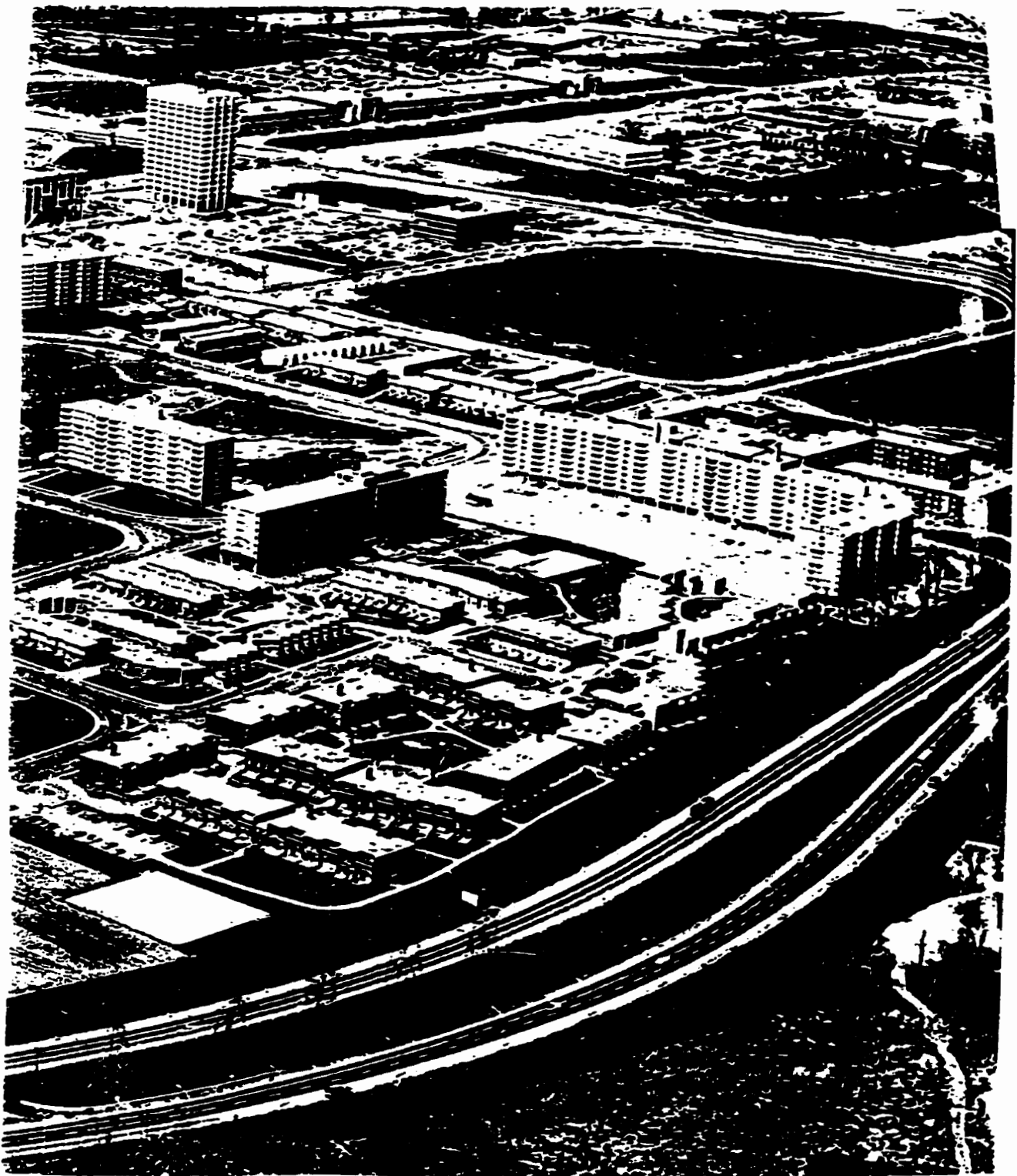


Figure 30: Aerial Photo. Flemingdon Park, North York, 1959. [TCA, 12:3 (April 1967):42.]

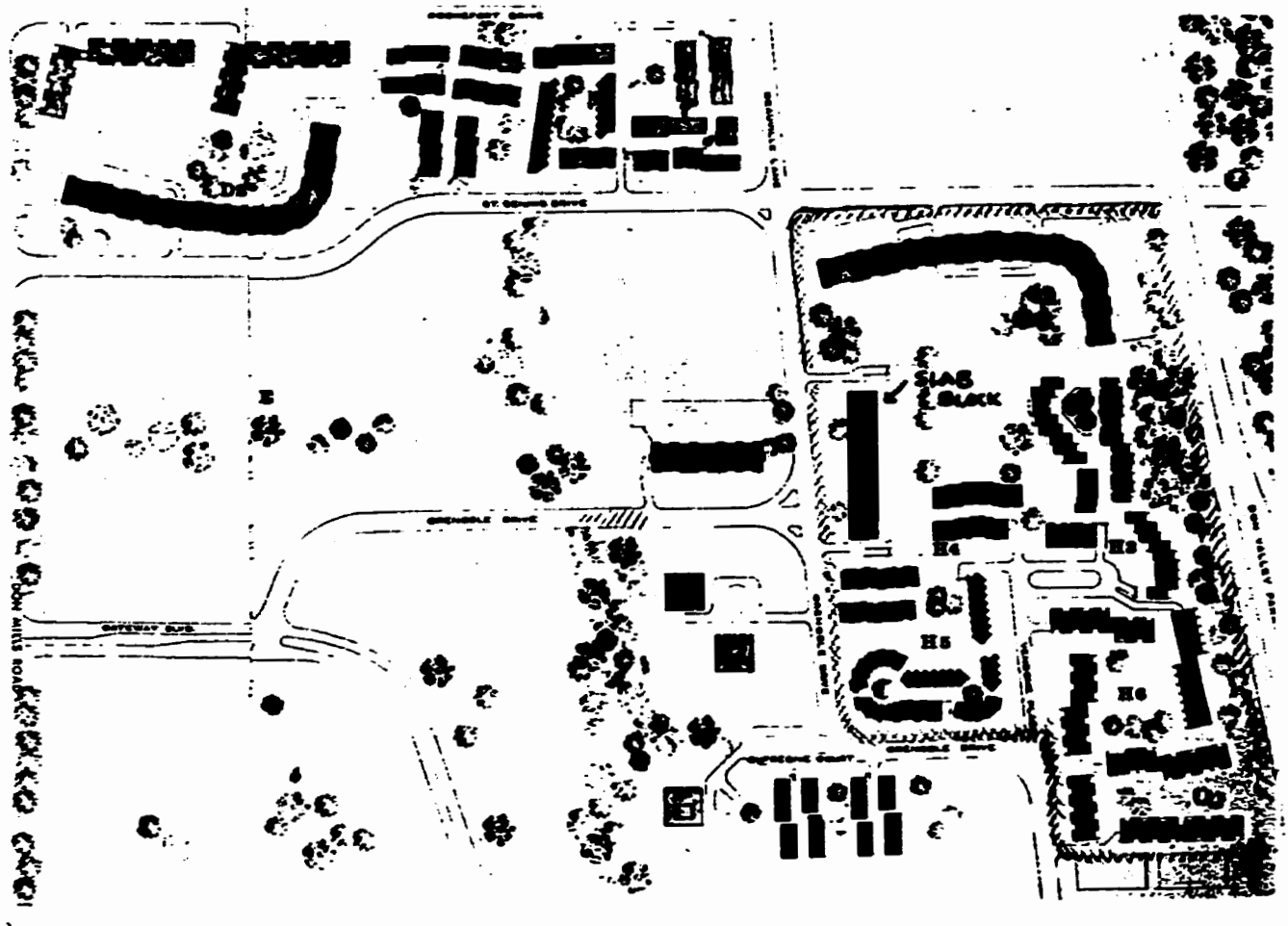
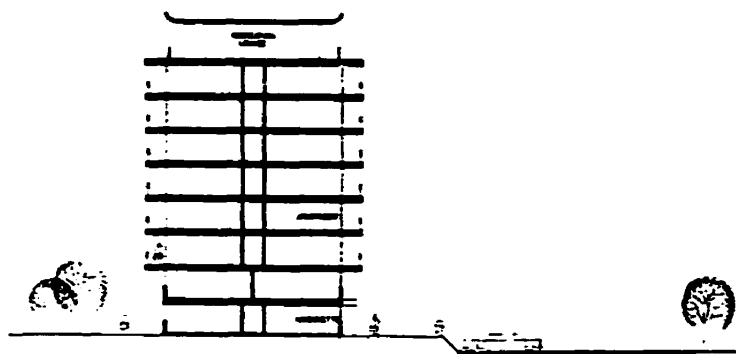


Figure 30: Key Plan, Flemington Park, North York, 1959. [Webb and Knapp, 1960, JRAIC, 12:3 (April 1967):54.]



Section

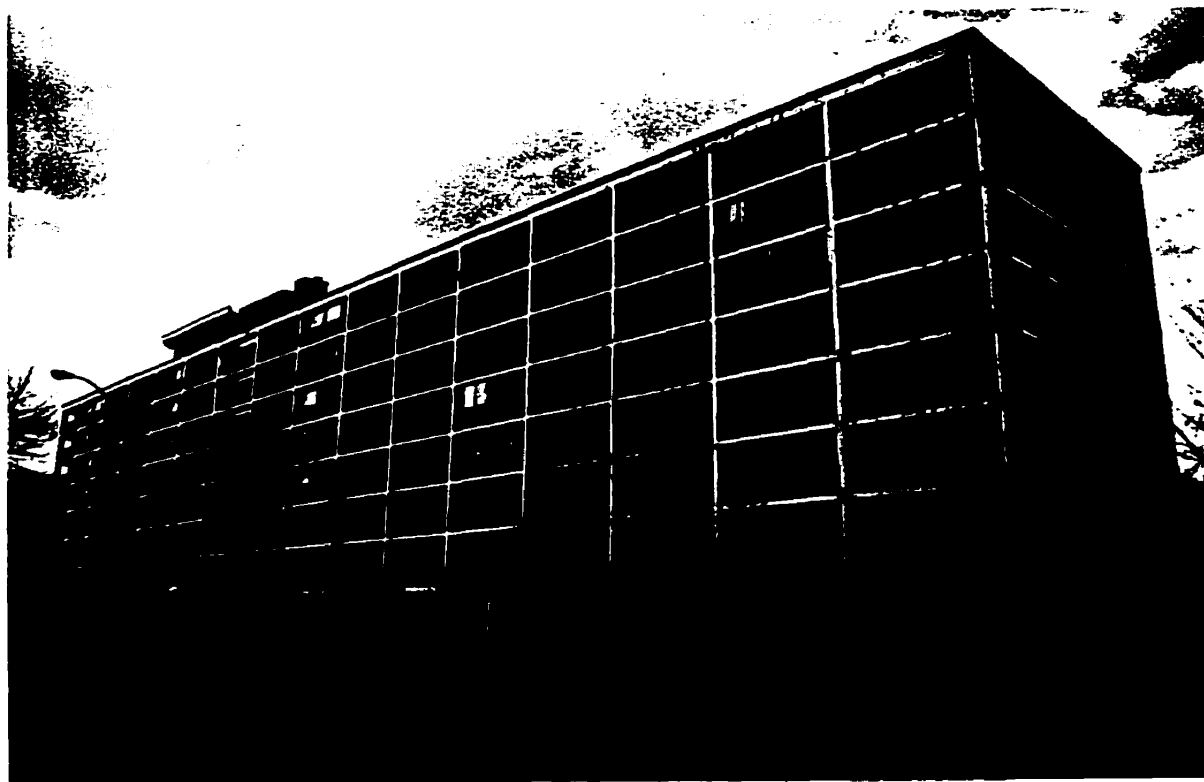
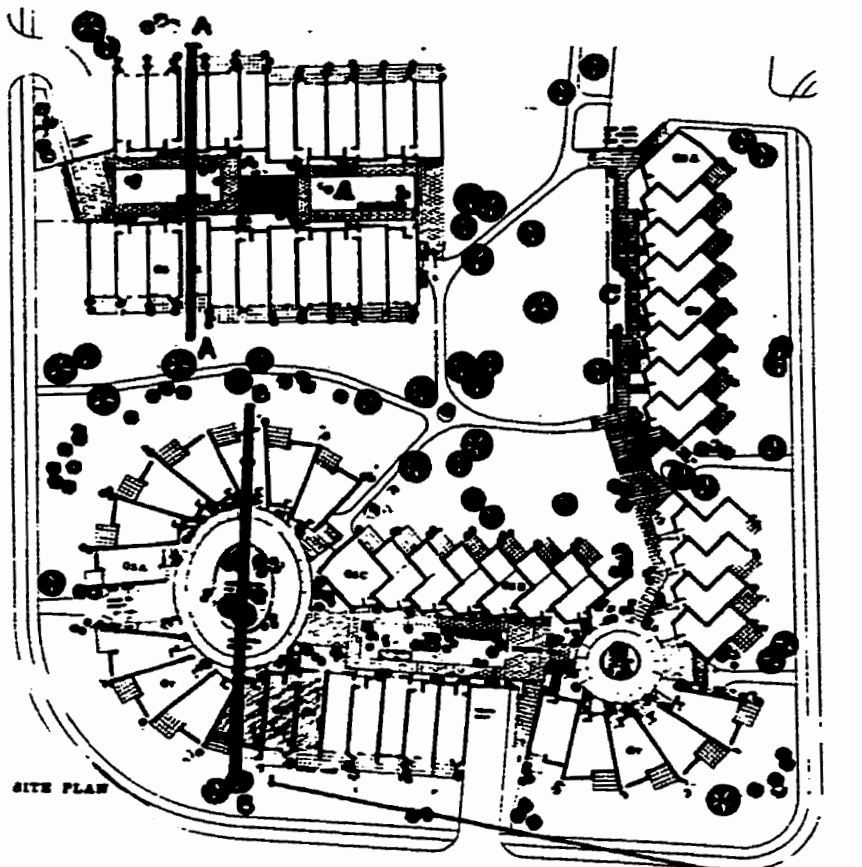


Figure 31: Irving Grossman, Slab block, Flemington Park, North York, 1959. [JRAIC, 12:3 (April 1967): 62.]

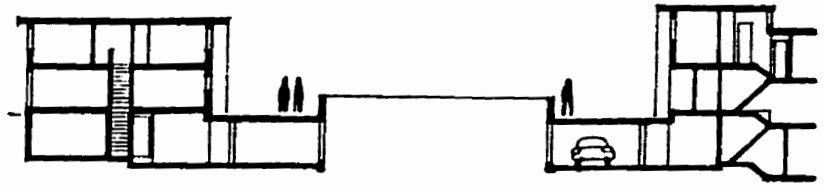
of British row housing. The town houses were designed to increase pedestrian space within each complex by locating the parking in underground lots below the town houses; consequently all of the houses are raised above the parking garages by entrance staircases.¹⁸⁰ Each town house complex has different articulations of exterior space and interior plan. Section "H5" [fig.30,32] contains two clusters. The linear, inward facing series of varied set-back split-level town houses are raised over the parking garage and a wide entrance staircase. In contrast, to the south is the most organic complex; an introverted, elliptical series of town house units wrap around two courtyards overlooking sunken gardens above the parking garages. The bold "neo-Baroque" curving variations of staggered town houses is particularly effective in separating the interior pedestrian mall from the street, even though the housing plans are dependent on the parking garage foundation dimensions and radii. Grossman had intended to repeat this popularly-profiled elliptical courtyard motif in a northern section, but this was later altered due to budget constraints [fig.29].

Behind section "H5" are two other town house complexes that differ slightly from their curved neighbour. The most southern, ("H6") are a series of six separate apartment-

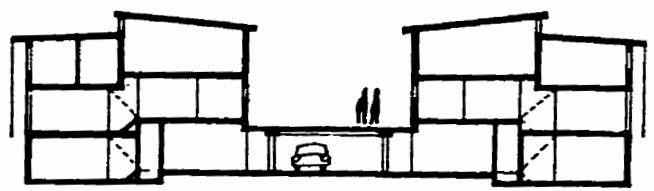
¹⁸⁰The raised walkways and courtyard had been employed two years earlier by Jerome Markson at Stanrock Terrace (1957, Elliot Lake, Ont.)



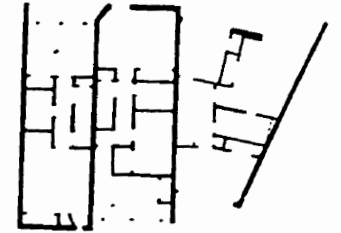
SITE PLAN



Section B-B



Section A-A



SECOND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



Detail Plan of G1, G2, G7.

Figure 32: H5 Section, Flemingdon Park, North York, 1959. [JRAIC, 38:10 (Oct. 1961): 56.]



FIGURE 32: H5 Section, Flamingdon Park, North York, 1959.



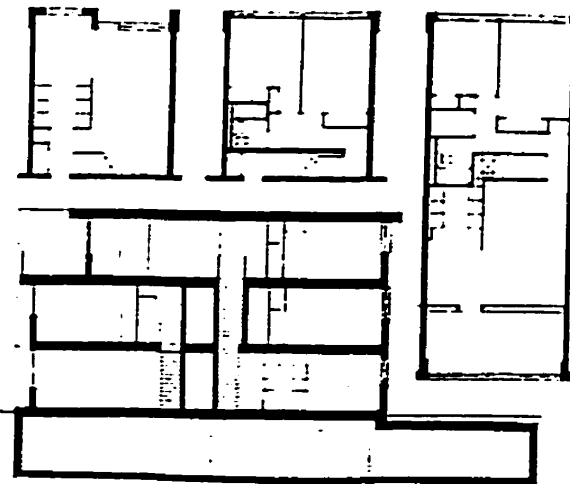
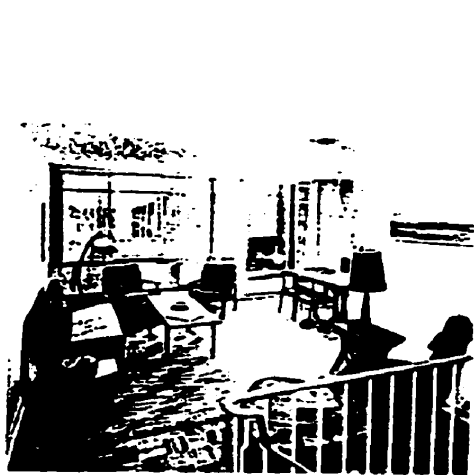
Figure 32: H5 Section. Flemington Park. North York. 1959.

maisonette units with an upper floor through-apartment and underground parking [Fig.33]. But rather than the close-knit pedestrian malls of the town houses, these have an enclosed greenspace. Northwards, sections "H3" and "H4" have the greatest mixture of dwelling types: two-storey town houses with three and four-storey terraced row houses [Fig.34.]¹⁸¹ The pedestrian mall extends northward, interrupted with raised gardens and sunken internal yards. A conventionalist application is apparent in these distantly Georgian-styled terraces.

Essentially, Grossman had four architectural intentions in designing the town house blocks. Firstly, the car was banished to garages underneath each unit, allowing for convenience and the elimination of the 'asphalt wasteland' that plagued other high-density construction.¹⁸² Secondly, the pedestrian walks meant that the town houses focused inwardly to garden-styled 'mewses,' freeing the town houses from the dictates of the street. Thirdly, the units were designed in relation to each other and manipulated with individual variations, creating a variety of layouts and internal spaces. And fourthly, the town house unit's

181.H3 was zoned as apartments, but to preserve the density without resorting to corridor apartments, the terraced offset levels were employed. The density could have been increased, but was reduced because of the set-back from the Don Valley Parkway. See section. [fig. 34]

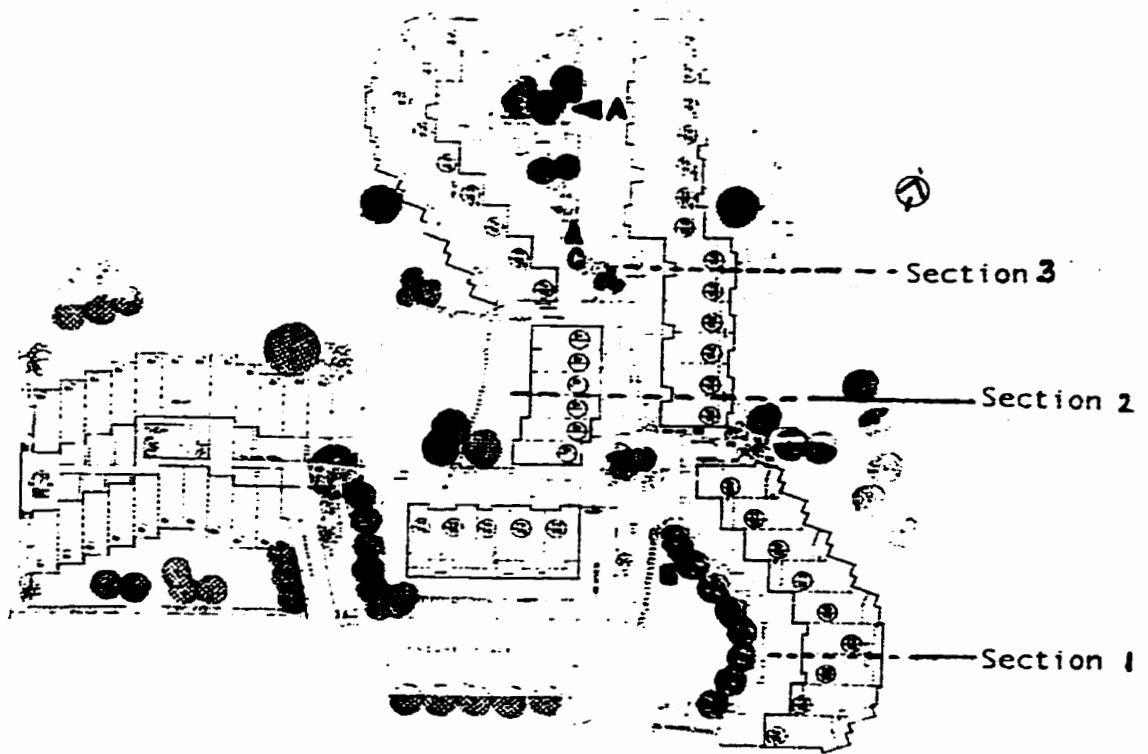
182.Grossman's idea for underground parking, which was costlier than parking lots, came from movies about submarines. For a row house of 550 sq. ft., 330 sq. ft. would be needed for parking. Irving Grossman, "Housing at Flemingdon Park, Ont." TCA, 6:5 (May, 1961):47.



Left:
Ground Floor
Centre:
First Floor
Right:
Top Floor
Through Apartment

Plan, Section

Figure 33: H6 Section. Flemington Park, North York, 1959. [JRAIC, 38:10 (Oct. 1961): 61.]



View A

Figure 34: H3 and H4 Section, Flemingdon Park, North York, 1959. [JRAIC, 38:10 (Oct. 1961): 63-64.]

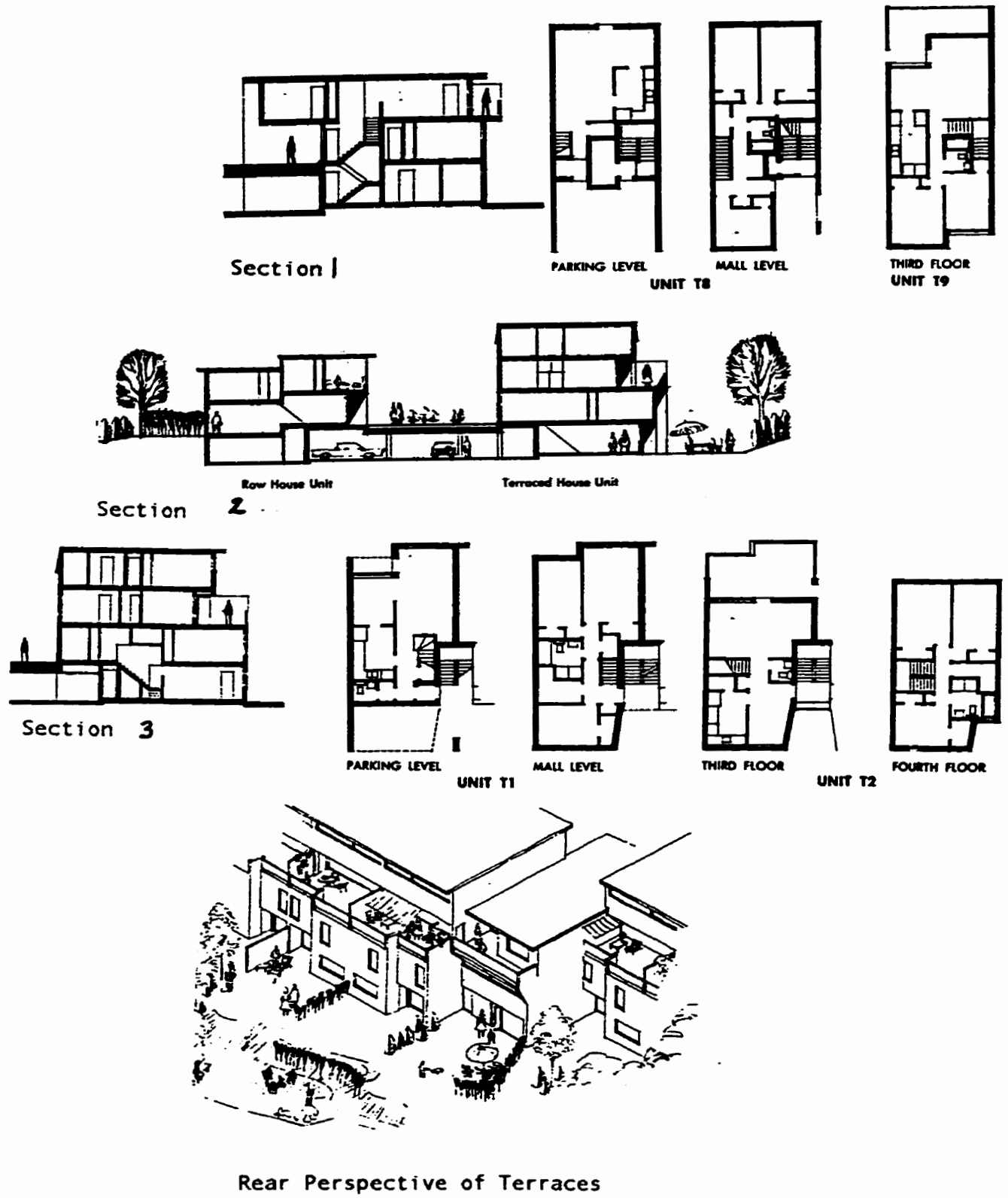


Figure 34: H3 and H4 Section, Flemingdon Park, North York, 1959. [JRAIC, 38:10 (Oct. 1961): 63-64.]



View C

Figure 34: H3 and H4 Section, Flemington Park, North York, 1959.

variation of staggered patterns meant increased units per acre while still retaining the privacy lacking in similar densities of three-storey apartment buildings.¹⁸³ These intentions were to create a placid picturesque 'village' which would be the antithesis of other suburban neighbourhoods.

This layout summarized Grossman's internationally influential "Flemingdon Park Concept", and determined the rest of the earliest housing clusters. But, unlike the first phase's exceptional designs, the "Concept" began to weaken in the later phases. Instead of developing more town houses integrated with apartment blocks and underground parking, an extremity of densities had already appeared in two gargantuan nine-storey slab blocks that divided, rather than attached, the intended pedestrian malls [fig.30,34.]¹⁸⁴

When Grossman's firm and Hancock's planning team had completed the first phase in 1964 and gone on to do other housing projects, Flemingdon Park's intended plan began to breakdown. It was evident that by 1964, when the Webb and Knapp development empire began to disintegrate and a growing glut of conventional apartment housing appeared in the Toronto market, the original integrated plan began to

183. Conventional row housing could support 12 units per acre; the town houses of Flemingdon Park could support 18-25 units per acre without sacrificing internal space. Ibid.

184. The later D3 block had a higher density than earlier sections, but had less of the dynamic setting. Financial pragmatism had undervalued the aesthetic intentions of Grossman's initial ideas.

falter. A group of four different developers, each having separate planning intentions, bought the completed and undeveloped areas. Consequently, the phase one town houses became isolated from commercial, recreational and social facilities. They were surrounded by business and apartment tower blocks built by the development company, Olympia and York, along Eglinton Road.¹⁸⁵ Eventually in 1966, the town houses were bought by the Ontario Housing Corporation. In under a decade, the original integrated suburban village ideal had faded; it had become a marginal publicly-owned tenant housing development, lacking the needed upkeep and intended mixed income population. Ultimately, the pragmatic intentions of the developers diluted Grossman and Hancock's original planning intentions.

Yet the earliest scheme introduced to international housing an unprecedented town house form, rooted in European models and responded to growing apprehensions of suburban sprawl due to the explosion of private automobile ownership. Flemingdon Park embodied Grossman's search for a resolution of the dialectic between modernity's consumptive decadence versus Late Modernism's search for a relevant architectural response. Rather than embodying the currency of 1950's neo-

¹⁸⁵For example, the original plan included a golf course accessed by an underpass to the other side of the Don Valley. Initially it was accessible to the residents for a moderate fee, but was sold off in the early years after completion and became too expensive for local residents. Hans Eite, "Flemingdon: The Rise and Fall of an Essay in Better Living," TCA 12:3 (April 1967): 64.

purist architecture, his conventionalist approach allowed for an infusion of past typologies, influenced by his experiences in London and his avant-garde sentiment after his return to Toronto.

Place through Production:

The intended outcome of Grossman's unorthodox system of pedestrian malls and underground garages was essentially a confrontation and mitigation of the perceived dehumanizing effect of modernity that was architecturally reflected in suburbia. Flemingdon Park's residential blocks attempted to connote a spatial-place theory of density and intimacy to the plan, without accepting the *Existenzminimum* that had become the norm of higher density apartment complexes. This was a more substantially asserted critique of modernity and aspects of Modernism than found in his residences and synagogues. The "Flemingdon Park Concept," was acknowledged at the time as a radical turn in housing and while it was also shrouded in the then fashionable rhetoric of concern for 'place', ultimately these concerns were not conveyed because Grossman never left behind the conceptualisation of the Modern aesthetic. That is to say, his architectural application of British 'Townscape' theory prevented Grossman from escaping the very problem in Modern architecture he saw as unsuccessful. Through 'Townscape' theory, Grossman hoped

to find a phenomenological concept of 'dwelling'.

The deliberate "...accidental excitement that would arise out of the placement of simple, sensitively-shaped house forms..."¹⁸⁶ was partially formulated by returning to past housing types and public spaces of both Europe and his native Toronto. Similar to the Smithson's preservation of working-class neighbourhoods in their Golden Lane scheme or housing proposals by other firms of the late 1950's,¹⁸⁷ Grossman's archeological re-examination of Victorian neighbourhoods of the 'Annex' in downtown Toronto included measuring the dimensions of the exterior spaces.¹⁸⁸ He likewise returned to his earlier European travels by studying Georgian squares of London, the side streets of Paris and the Latin piazza and cortile.¹⁸⁹ He concluded that where there was little need to invalidate the domestic interior, but contemporary North American architecture had neglected exterior residential spaces. Grossman's subtext was the detrimental conditions of 'open' suburban space, inferring that it lacked positive social activity.

The design solution was to (re-)create enclosed or 'defining' exterior spaces, suggesting that "the life and

186. Jones, 47.

187. For example, HKPA's Low Kensington/'The Town House' Project, (1955-1956.) See *AR*, 114:715 (July 1956): 53. Prior to HKPA's formation, the associates had designed Roehampton Lane, (Aiton West). Glendinning and Methesius, 105.

188. Irving Grossman, "In Search of the Lost Street," *Canadian Art*, 17:11 (Nov. 1960):331.

189. Ibid. Grossman owned several documents of British ordinance surveys of London. He had also travelled in 1960 to study first-hand, Boston's Beacon Hill and Philadelphia's Society Hill. Interview with Roy Brown, Oct 1997.

love which such proximity of buildings evokes...a total expression of humanity, buildings and space."¹⁹⁰ This visual composition of enclosure was Grossman's intellectual weapon for his anti-suburbanism.

Underlying Influences: Camillo Sitte and 'Townscape' Theory

To understand the limitations of Flemingdon Park, it is necessary to look briefly at two underlying influences central to Grossman's ideas: One, the writings of the Austrian architect, Camillo Sitte, whose published material had similar concerns as Grossman's, and two, his interpretation of British 'Townscape' theory.

In many ways Grossman's approach at Flemingdon Park was similar to a latter-day Camillo Sitte and his 20th century followers. Though Grossman never acknowledged Sitte's influential, *Der Städtebau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen* of 1889, the polemics are unmistakably similar. Grossman's criticisms of suburban openness clearly echoed Sitte's distaste for the Hausmannization of Paris or Vienna's Ringstrasse:

Modern streets, like modern plazas are too open. There are too many breaches made by intersecting lateral streets. This divides the line of buildings into a series of isolated blocks, and destroys the enclosed character of the street

190. Grossman, "Lost Street," 332.

area.¹⁹¹

Sitte was more concerned with the analysis of the Monumental that was later interpreted by CIAM members. Grossman instead emphasised an intimate scale. He presented a parallel conclusion when he observed that rather than designing 'human' scaled streets:

we have little more than wide traffic arteries which are dotted with separated points of interest-the houses. But no street in terms of space. And I suggest that this is one of the fundamental weaknesses of all our new developments. To deal with the formal problems of house design, without first integrating them completely (not partially) with its spatial aspect, can only produce partial solutions. Form and space are each mirrors of the other, and must be solved simultaneously.¹⁹²

But the Flemington Park plan separates the relationship between traffic arteries and residences. The town houses are interdependent clusters linked by the pedestrian walkways rather than integrating with the street. Grossman's anti-suburban assertions of a 'mirrored' space-form relationship appear to be inconclusive.

Yet Grossman's critique of contemporary functional planning echoed Sitte's 'dehumanization' of the urban landscape. Each countered this by an assertion of the emotional psychology of the individual, returning an

191. Camillo Sitte, *The Art of Building Cities: City Building According to its Artistic Fundamentals*, trans. Charles T. Stewart, (N.Y.: Reinhold, 1945): 55.

192. Grossman, "Lost Street," 333.

identity denied by the Cartesian legacy. Grossman's anti-mechanistic rhetoric was therefore as vociferous as Sitte's: "The artisans are dead and the machine has not produced a reasonable substitute," remarked Grossman.¹⁹³ Even the 1950's ornamental details were a "game of clichés...with asphalt surrounding every building."¹⁹⁴ He considered that this condition was due to the inflexibility of Functionalism's dogmatic assertions, apparent in the often-cited Miesian housing project, Lafayette Park in Detroit.¹⁹⁵ Essentially, Grossman was confronting the 'mind' space of Rational Functionalism by presenting a Modern architecture which responded to sense-experienced space.

The visual consequences of this disciplined approach can often satisfy the intellect, but at the same time, leave the eye and emotions starved for more stimulus-for exuberance and vitality.¹⁹⁶

Yet Grossman's emotive emphasis did not present the contrary position of an irrationalism, anarchy, or the arbitrary. The architect's role was to adopt the extinct craftsman's trade to counter Modernism's space-time technology and its flight to the future. But this reactionary position did not dissuade him from rational planning; "...it depends...on his

193.Ibid. Flemington Park's town houses' were built using traditional load-bearing masonry walls.

194.Ibid.

195.Grossman was later invited to submit a proposal for the high-density redevelopment of Eimwood Park, Detroit. See, R. P. Dober and R.C. Stauffer, "The New Row House: Row Housing-Image and Reality," Progressive Architecture 45:8 (Aug. 1964): 133.

196.Grossman, "Lost Street," 334.

ability to understand the difference between true variation and gimmick-between consistency and confusion."¹⁹⁷ Grossman was attempting to reintroduce a Humanism to Rationalism through a gestalt wholeness of composition. But if a Rational Functionalism had produced for Grossman the desolate architecture of suburbia, and the response was merely weak facadism or 'bric-à-brac' anarchy, where had Grossman developed this architecturally controllable visual-emotional stimulation?

The anti-suburban rhetoric of the late 1950's had exploded by the early 1960's into numerous ideological counteractive stances amongst North American architects, planners and various other professions: Lewis Mumford, Jane Jacobs, Kevin Lynch, Paul Goodman, Christopher Alexander and Robert Venturi, to cite only a few, had weighed into a Modern hermeneutics of individual communication. Flemingdon Park reveals aspects of these contemporary theorists, but there is a more intimate connection with the 'Townscape' theories that Grossman had observed in London of the early 1950's, though circumvented in his writings on Flemingdon Park.

Throughout postwar Europe, where suburbanism and automobile ownership had developed on a less widespread

197. Ibid.

scale than in North America, the impetus of critique was provided by the functional postwar housing reconstruction necessary during the recessionary period. In England, where devastation of the War blended with a desperate psychological defence against the Empire's demise, many architects developed a Modern Romanticism from the English landscape picturesque tradition and then applied it to all new architectural 'scapes.' This condition was at first supported by English importation of Sweden's un-Modern, "New Empiricism." By 1949, it had become a semi-formal theoretical term called 'Townscape', when Hugh de Cronin Hastings, an editor of the *Architectural Review*, wrote under his nom-de-plume, Ivor de Wolfe, "Townscape: A Plea for an English Visual Philosophy." The article was supported with hypothetical examples by *Architectural Review's* arts editor, Gordon Cullen.

In this convoluted article, de Wolfe suggests a radical planning inspired by the "bric-à-brac" eclecticism of the English home and their "natural sensibility...to the relations between differences."¹⁹⁸ But the anarchic composition of the English interior was merely "the precedent" for the civic townscape:

198.Ivor de Wolfe, [Hugh de Cronin Hastings,] "Townscape: A Plea for an English Visual Philosophy." *AR*, 106:636 (Dec. 1949): 360-361.

From such assortments the radical planner has to produce his practical surrealist picture. If it is good it will have what the good interior scene has, an overall character-conformity even- yet founded, not as with rational Liberal theory on the effort to achieve congruity through harmony but on the effort to achieve a new kind of organization through the cultivation of significant differences.¹⁹⁹

This "radical visual philosophy" of significant differentiation was intended to step outside the schism between Corbusian urbanism and Wrightian-Organic functionalism. It hoped to introduce a third movement, "nourishing itself upon the embodied, the differentiated, the phenomenal world as opposed to the noumenal world of the German romantic."²⁰⁰ De Wolfe's 'Townscape' principle was a visual planning method inspired by Sir Uvedale Price's anti-beauty Sharawaggi of the late 18th century and English artists who had "shown an inclination throughout the styles and centuries to treat life objectively and empirically..."²⁰¹

'Townscape' theory essentially proposed a "field of vision" based upon a law of objective perception of composition to stimulate emotions. It was a "mixture of compositional and psychological effects."²⁰² It privileged

199.op cit. 361.

200.op cit. 362.

201.Ibid.

202.R. Maxwell, "The Failure of Townscape," in Sweet Disorder and the Carefully Careless: Theory and Criticism in Architecture. (N.Y.: Princeton Architectural Pr., 1993): 126. [Originally published in Architectural Design, 46 (Sept. 1976) as "An Eye for an I: Failure of the Townscape Tradition."]

visual perception over other sense phenomena and so tended to view architectural form as something expressed through sight associations rather than through the mind or body; a kind of understanding through gestalt.²⁰³ At the same time it sought a set of universal laws which could be applied generally to the design. This "disembodied eye," supposedly freed from cultural signification was to produce the stimulations that Gordon Cullen represented in his polemical visual re-compositions of 'prairie planning.'²⁰⁴ Thus a strictly coded language for "the civic designer could create the drama by the juxtaposition of forms, using his understanding of their regular effects on the eye."²⁰⁵ Yet predetermined visual differentiation, which was intended to produce the "practical surrealist picture," denied both explicit and hidden cultural signification. 'Townscape' theory's misinterpretation of visual associations as being distinct from visual objectification would ultimately fail to disassociate it from Functionalism. It would produce a banal architecture that would eventually collapse into an

203. "In viewing the physical environment with its roads, buildings, vegetation, paving and so on, there are, similarly, two ways of looking...the associational and the objective. That is to say the front door can be 'home' or a rectangle of colour. As far as the urban scene goes it is nearly always the former, hardly the latter. There is no Art of the ensemble, and no terminology to isolate and communicate our feelings." Gordon Cullen, "Townscape Casebook," AR, 106:636 (Dec. 1949): 363.

204. Cullen's casebook examples categorized visual perception: 'eye as fencer', 'eye as agraphobe', 'eye as articulator', 'eye as matchmaker', etc. op cit. 363-374.

205. Maxwell, 127.

insipid Romanticism.²⁰⁶

Grossman employed the 'Townscape' theory to counteract the suburban emphasis of pragmatic-Functionalism. He defended the "Flemingdon Park Concept" by a similar 'Townscape' rhetoric of abstract visual compositions producing psychological responses. His disjunction between 'openness' and 'enclosure' was likewise bound to fail, since it applied the same visual-psychological objectification that determined the suburban environment. To produce the,

...accidental excitement that would arise out of the placement of simple, sensitively-shaped house forms juxtaposed, perhaps at random, ultimately connected into some disciplined system of circulation and services...²⁰⁷

failed to fulfil a credible anti-suburban stance. The overt manipulation of the town house plans to create an anti-alienating and more humane architecture was evident in its rapid marginalisation after the initial phase, aside from the economic tragedies. Grossman, like the 'Townscapists', applied a very similar visual rationalism that had created the 'placelessness' of the suburbs. Flemingdon Park may have produced a negotiated development between architect and developer's intentions, but Grossman's topological visuality would not support an effective architectural rhetoric of

206. For example, numerous town house communities throughout Eastern North America in the 1960s were promoted as Georgian/Colonial Revivals.

207. Jones, 47.

anti-suburbanism.

The Importance of Flemington Park:

Flemington Park's intention to provide a better solution to the suburbs which was "emotionally meaningful to the public at large and still valid as honest architecture,"²⁰⁸ is an important reflection of the colonialized Canadian architect interpreting an imported theory to challenge an inherent cultural condition.

When Grossman was in England, the response to postwar reconstruction diverged into two camps: the 'Soft' faction, sympathetic to 'Townscape' architecture, and the 'Hards', who were attempting to re-interpret Modern avant-gardist principles. Grossman adopted elements from both ideologies when he returned to Toronto. But above all, Flemington Park revealed the complexity of his London influences.

Grossman applied a 'Townscape' theory at Flemington Park that was evident in several LCC schemes of the early 1950's; but whereas 'Townscape' was rapidly satirised in London,²⁰⁹ in Toronto it was interpreted as a radical form of non-suburban housing. It meant that Grossman's process of discovery of past urban civic types to introduce a Humanistic and phenomenological meaning to design were described as similar to the avant-garde actions of the neo-

208. Jones, 46.

209. Ockman, 114.

existentialist architects and artists of London. But these intentions were far from what Grossman produced at Flemington Park. If he had a clearer understanding of the critical motivations of the Smithson's or their contemporaries, he could have proposed a high-density community which possibly considered the natural geologic conditions or design a more closely-based vernacular tradition. Instead, he produced an artificial place in his suburban village by adopting 'mewses' and courtyards from outside sources, and applied them to what was essentially an agrarian site surrounded by rapid suburban development.

But Grossman's confrontation with modernity had significant meaning in Canadian architecture of the time. Ironically, his attempt to create 'place' among the 'placelessness' of automobile-ridden suburbia, was defended by him as a mode of individual freedom. 'Place,' as created by the introversion of the housing or the concealment of the automobiles, was intended to produce the emotionally positive residential environment. Yet this was oddly opposed to the more obvious personal freedom associated with the flexibility of suburban space. Indeed, dislocation, rootlessness, anonymity or lack of community were considered negative architectural consequences by Grossman. An aversion to spatial 'openness' was (and still is) an exigency of Canadian architecture.

In terms of Grossman's career, Flemingdon Park was a culmination of his dialogue with modernity. His later housing projects, (which he focused on for most of his career after Flemingdon Park) were essentially various interpretations of the topological elements intended to produce the visually stimulated emotions associated with Flemingdon Park. While he had failed to produce the ideal suburban village he had planned in late 1959, it was a significant housing project. Like many of his contemporaries, Grossman was searching for a resolution to the inadequate functionalist currency of contemporary Canadian architecture. Though his colonialized condition prevented him from developing a more autonomous architecture, distinct from his London experiences, Flemingdon Park's significance lay in its attempt to reinterpret Modernism from within. It may not have produced the critical signification of his neo-Existentialist contemporaries or later Structuralist developments, but it was significant in introducing a hesitant critical response to the mainstream of Canadian Modernism.

Conclusion:

From the time Grossman returned to Toronto in 1953, he searched for an alternative Modern architecture for Toronto. By the early 1960's, when the first phase of Flemingdon Park had been completed, he had produced for himself a satisfactory architectural product in Flemingdon Park. Indeed, professional awards and international recognition of the project in the early 1960's suggests that Grossman had been successful at creating an alternative housing form for the suburbs. This thesis has presented the various influences and arguments that lie behind that achievement, but the question remains, was Grossman actually successful at presenting a true alternative to the architectural legacy he wanted to avoid?

Grossman's aspiration was to inject Modernism's functional objectivity with a personal experiential value. This was ultimately ineffectual because Grossman's visual topology was too abstract to have a relevant relationship to individual intentions. The 'Flemingdon Park Concept' was, like the residences and synagogues, a modification rather than a radical break from Modernism's impersonal psychological objectification. Grossman's underlying inspiration from British 'Townscape' theory was intended by him to be more radical than it actually was. This was

because he did not recognize the actual architectural effect of the Modern 'disembodied eye,' that is visual perceptions categorized as predetermined psychological effects. He assumed that the "visual excitements" of Flemingdon Park's town house arrangements were a satisfactory ground for distinguishing his architecture from Functionalism. He approached Flemingdon Park with a generalized understanding of psychological perception that was too weak to successfully counter a logical formalism or a reductive functionalism.

It appears that Grossman was intending to create an architecture based on a understanding of the way visual perception of objects or forms in the world could cause specific psychological responses, (for example, an enclosed space meant a sense of well-being or meaning of place,) rather than developing a schema of functional components. But he did not recognize that his intended psychological responses were as abstractly derived as a Functional determinism. Flemingdon Park may have considered associational values, that is emotional responses, more than the material emphasis of the surrounding suburbs, but Grossman mistook 'Townscape' theory as being able to counter suburban planning. He did not recognize that both approaches had a similar Rational conception.

On the other hand, Grossman's methodology presents a

more convincing disengagement from the methods of Functionalism, and as distinct from Flemington Park's empirical basis. His design approach included a quasi-phenomenological method, or at least his research for the project focused on the search for specific archetypes, such as streets, pathways, plazas or enclosures. He hoped to use these instead of applying a mathematical model. If Grossman thought suburban neighbourhoods were detrimental to a satisfying human existence in the world, he needed to try to step outside scientific methodology and approach his design through an awareness of 'things.' He was searching for an understanding of associated values of experience with form and space, instead of purely material or formal values. Though Grossman was most likely not aware of phenomenological philosophy, the development of Flemington Park from archetypal sources suggests an eidetic reduction, or a suspension of judgement which allows for a consciousness of other perceptions or intentionalities.²¹⁰ This allows for an empathy with the whole range of other human experience which seems to be present at Flemington Park. Grossman's awareness of how residents are affected by

210. This relates to at least generally to the phenomenological methods proposed at the turn of the century by Edmund Husserl. He proposed a formal ontology in search of apodictic evidence, based upon a noetic analysis of intentionalities (i.e. intuition) in things, as opposed to the material ontology of science and its psychologism. Husserlian phenomenology proposed a new transcendental idealism constituted in an ego that can imagine other egos, rather than a solipsism. Later phenomenologists, (Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, et al.) emphasised a hermeneutics of existence through phenomenological methods. See J.J. Kockelmans, Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology. (West Lafayette: Indiana U Pr., 1994): Introduction.

the town house enclosures or the separation from their cars, reflects an existential emphasis that was not the priority of suburban planning. It is here that Grossman comes closest to the existential themes developing in London during the 1950's. In another sense, Flemingdon Park presents an awareness of a behavioural geography, or an appreciation of how the outer world affects our being. Grossman's architecture was too abstracted due to his visually-based empirical psychologism to be completely successful. In the final analysis, his methodology does reveal an assertive effort to break from the scientific naturalism present in mainstream Modernism.

Thus, Grossman's architecture was not divorced from the Modernist paradigm, but was attempting to infuse it with an alternative architectural awareness. While he may not have been successful at introducing an alternative Modernism, Grossman's career during the 1950's is valuable as a representation of the actual diversity in Canadian architecture of the time. In relation to more general architectural currents in North America at the time, Grossman's Flemingdon Park 'village' represented an early concrete form of academic and theoretical emphasis of sustaining 'community' through patterns of organization on a

human-scale, (such as pedestrian networks.)²¹¹

Grossman's early hesitant critical stance in Canadian architecture developed out of his immersion in London's avant-garde scene. The effect it had on him when he returned to Toronto and began to develop as a practicing architect, allowed him to explore various revisionist positions which confronted the Functional and Rational tenets of Modernism. In hindsight, his architectural production did not truly present an alternative Modernism, but it did reveal a growing skepticism of Modernisms' intentions, even in face of rapid economic expansion in Canada. Grossman's architecture can therefore be described as representing a premature critique of Modernism, one that looked forward to the eventual fragmentation and break-up of the Modernist paradigm.

211. For example, Serge Chermayeff and Christopher Alexander's Community and Privacy: Towards a New Architecture of Humanism, (N.Y.:Anchor Books, 1963), or Kevin Lynch's The Image of the City, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Pr., 1960).

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Headings:

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Abbreviations:

AR: Architectural Review

CB: Canadian Builder.

JRAIC: The Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of
Canada.

TCA: The Canadian Architect.

NAC: The National Archives of Canada.

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