

# Foreword

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Lawrence Halprin was one of the most accomplished and productive landscape architects of the 20th century. He also wrote prolifically and persuasively about his own work. Ironically, his literary output may have occluded critical perspectives on his many and remarkable accomplishments as a designer. Between his autobiography, his notebooks and sketchbooks, the first-person accounts of his creative process in the publications *Taking Part* and *The RSVP Cycles*, and monographs on projects such as Sea Ranch in California and the FDR Memorial in Washington DC, Halprin seemed to command the discourse around his work. At the same time, his writings raised as many questions as they resolved: Halprin often spoke of his design process in intuitive terms and of relationships with nature in ways that stressed the universal, innate, and empathic—all of which could be maddeningly vague. It is time for an independent and critically engaged discussion of Halprin's work.

This volume assembles essays by 13 authors, who provide close examinations both of significant design projects and of important topics in Halprin scholarship. The issue cannot hope to encompass every disciplinary perspective or address every facet of Halprin's achievements. Instead, it brings together three principal groups of commentators: contemporaries or near-contemporaries of Halprin's, many of whom worked with him; senior historians, who take the long view on Halprin's work; and emerging scholars who interrogate Halprin's work and methods from a critical distance. The issue is especially rich in first-person narratives by people who worked with Halprin: Pete Walker, who recalls his early years in Halprin's San Francisco office; Shlomo Aronson, who worked with him in Israel; Iain Robertson, who oversaw the replanting of Freeway Park in Seattle; and Laurie Olin and John Parsons, both of whom worked with him on the FDR Memorial in Washington DC. Those taking

more historical perspectives include Marc Treib, who provides a context for Halprin's early work in California; Kenneth Helphand, who puts a cultural and geographical frame around his work in Israel; Reuben Rainey, who offers a critical tour of the FDR Memorial; and Randy Hester, who looks back at some of Halprin's values and methods. Emerging critical perspectives are offered by Alison Bick Hirsch, who evaluates the Take Part process as it played out in Cleveland; Kate John-Alder, who explores Halprin's notions of ecological design using Sea Ranch as a case study; Ann Komara, who offers a critique of Skyline Park in Denver; and Judith Wasserman, who explicates the creative synergies between Halprin and his wife, the dancer Anna Halprin.

Several recurring themes emerge. The first is a synthetic view of Halprin as a public and urban artist. Whether revising the Jerusalem Plan or repairing the damage caused by interstate highway construction in Seattle, Halprin's work can be seen in the context of political and cultural activism that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, especially efforts at urban revitalization through new kinds of public space and the rise of public art. Marc Treib provides the setting for Halprin's work as a public and urban artist by exploring his roots in California modernism, especially the material and formal innovations first tested in the garden and later adapted to the public space. Ann Komara and Iain Robertson reveal how Halprin went on to bridge the worlds of urban renewal, art, and engineering. Komara looks at Skyline Park in Denver, which was intended to manage storm water and aid in the revival of the city's downtown, while organized around signature fountains that were expressions of a collaborative process, involving project designer Junji Shirai, sculptor Herb Goldman of Manhattan Beach, California, and fountain consultant Richard "Dick" Chaix. Robertson offers an account of his replanting of Freeway Park in Seattle. This project,

originally a collaboration with Angela Danadjieva Tzvetin, was built to reconnect parts of the city sundered by an interstate. Robertson's narrative describes his rationales for thinning and replacing plants, which had grown so thick that they had obscured both the original sculptural impact of the park and the clarity of the circulation plan creating, consequently, negative safety associations that threatened the public value and popular appreciation of the park. He and Komara both suggest that a lack of understanding of design intentions as well as management issues have led to significant challenges to Halprin's legacy. Freeway Park has fared better than Skyline: the latter was substantially redesigned in 2003.

A second theme addresses Halprin's role in affirming the importance of cultural memory in landscapes, with particular reference to the FDR Memorial and projects in Israel. The personal and political merge in Halprin's Israeli work: As both Aronson and Helphand reveal, family connections to Zionism and the nascent Israeli state grew into a design commitment, with Halprin participating in major public planning initiatives for Jerusalem and creating some of the city's most significant public spaces. Halprin's engagement with public memory in the United States is revealed through close readings of the FDR Memorial. John Parsons, former regional director of the National Capital Region of the National Park Service, recounts the "slow and painstaking" process of artistic collaboration and public and political commentary through which the Memorial came into being, while Reuben Rainey offers an analysis and critique of the design. Both authors locate the Memorial's strengths in Halprin's commitment to creating an educational and processional—even cinematic—narrative, a commitment that never wavered despite years of financial and logistical difficulties. Parsons also attributes some of the Memorial's success to Halprin's responsiveness to input; especially telling in this regard is his account of the "jam sessions" that led to the design of the Memorial's numerous sculptures. Rainey notes some "ambiguities" in the design that might be traced to Halprin's engagement with Jungian psychology and his reliance on "archetypal" images that emerge from the unconscious, which Halprin believed to have a "universal" quality. This emphasis on the primordial and the cross-cultural is bound to strike some readers as dated in an era when cultural and social

differences are more the subject of academic discourse than universals.

Halprin's deployment of the forms and materials of nature—a third recurring theme in the issue—is likely to get a more sympathetic reading. Rainey writes of Halprin's determination to reinforce sensory experience through "experiential equivalents" to nature. These were created especially through the replication of natural phenomena—waterfalls or steam canyons, for instance—and the evocation of distinct ecosystems, microclimates, and plant communities. Sensory experience in nature was at the heart of the "experiments in environment" and choreography that were the expression of Halprin's collaborative work with his wife Anna—the subject of Judith Wasserman's essay for this volume. Kate John-Alder reveals how the attention to sensory experience played out at Sea Ranch. John-Alder recovers an all-but-forgotten history of the involvement of the cultural geographer Richard Reynolds in the planning of Sea Ranch; Reynolds engaged in "bioclimatic site analysis" that drew on ideas of bioclimatic regionalism found in Victor Olgyay's 1963 book *Design with Climate*. Halprin's notions of ecological design were much more than an elaboration of bioclimatic ideas; as John-Alder reveals in her analysis of Sea Ranch, they drew both from close attention to the physical particulars of a site—often beautifully rendered in his drawings—and from theories as diverse as Gestalt psychology and systems theory, both of which examined the relationships among organisms and their environments.

What many readers might find surprising is how closely several of the authors examine Halprin's modes of conceptualization, notably their focus on intuitive leaps, and his working methods, with their roots in avant-gardism and their reliance on models of community participation. We are sometimes said to be in a post-theoretical age, yet there is great interest here in Halprin's design theories. Randy Hester takes the broadest view, interrogating Halprin's notions of scoring and commitment to participatory design. Hester observes that others put these methods to more activist and political ends; he wonders if Halprin was truly committed to communitarian and democratic ideas, or if he was engaging in a sophisticated and subtle form of manipulation—of patrons, stakeholders, and the public. Laurie Olin raises similar questions based on his participation in the Taking Part process that was organized to add a representation of the President in

a wheelchair to the FDR Memorial. Was Halprin's process directive or democratic? Paradoxically, perhaps, Olin suggests that it was both. Halprin "choreographed our experience and directed our responses." But Olin reports that his methods also generated enthusiasm, buy-in, and consensus. Alison Hirsch likewise weighs in on *Taking Part*, using a planning project in Cleveland in the early 1970s as a case study; she observes a deep ambiguity between facilitation and manipulation. His methods, she reports, grew out of the experiments in environment, but with a more instructional intent; they were directed less at achieving social justice and more at unlocking collaborative creative potential. Raising some of the same issues as Rainey and John-Alder, she also notes the universalism implicit in his interest in Jungian and Gestalt psychology; she argues that Halprin saw people as bound together by archetypal needs, rather than as differentiated into multiple publics and distinct constituencies.

This publication has been several years in the making. The editors of *Landscape Journal* originated the project shortly after Halprin's death. They made the initial contacts with authors and framed the issue conceptually at the outset. The project received a major boost from a one-day colloquium at Dumbarton Oaks in December 2010. There, authors presented their work-in-progress to each other and to a group of invited guests, and received substantial commentary from the group and from the issue's guest editors, Judith Wasserman, and me. The quality of the presentations was already exceptionally good, and the colloquium provided an impetus to the authors to revise and complete their texts. A few essays were subsequently added to round out the collection. The result is a critical look by the current generation of scholars at Halprin's role in post-World War II landscape architecture and its place in an optimistic and progressive, if choreographed, narrative on American life, urbanity, and art. Halprin achieved remarkable stature as an artist and a practitioner, but he also led the way in solidifying landscape architecture's engagement with both environmental and social goals. He helped create a convergence of design, ecology, and land art, from the scale of the project to the scale of the city and the region, while promoting public engagement with both the processes and outcomes of design. The full measure of his achievements is yet to be taken; we hope this issue of *Landscape Journal* is a substantial contribution to the effort.

