

Urban Barnraising: Collective Rituals to Promote *Communitas*

Alison B. Hirsch

ABSTRACT This paper introduces the concept of “Neighborhood Commons” developed by landscape architect Karl Linn (1923–2005) beginning in 1960 in declining areas of North Philadelphia and then subsequently in Washington DC, New York, Baltimore, Chicago, and other U.S. cities. After introducing Linn and situating his “Neighborhood Commons” in the socio-political context of American cities at this time, the paper presents the process of developing these commons as a collective ritual that parallels, according to Linn, rural “barnraising.” The use of ritual action for community development will be contextualized within cultural anthropologist Victor Turner’s contemporaneous theories on the ritual process as a means of achieving *communitas* (see Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 1969). Finally, the paper proposes what implications such a method of working may have on designing shared spaces in the city today.

KEYWORDS Karl Linn, landscape architecture, community development, participatory design, ritual, Victor Turner, Philadelphia

INTRODUCTION

Karl Linn (1923–2005) is not a widely-known landscape architect, most likely because he was predominantly focused on community development and participatory design and left little in the way of iconic physical designs or a signature material inheritance. He introduced “Neighborhood Commons” in declining areas of North Philadelphia in 1960 and then subsequently in similar districts of Washington D.C., New York, Baltimore, Chicago, and other U.S. cities, yet most of these places (if not all) have long since disappeared. This paper begins by introducing Linn and situating his concept for “Neighborhood Commons” in the socio-political circumstances of American cities at this time, then frames the participatory process of developing these commons as a collective ritual that parallels, according to Linn, “barnraising” traditions of 18th- and 19th-century rural America. The use of such ritual action for community development is then contextualized within cultural anthropologist Victor Turner’s contemporaneous theories on the ritual process as a means of achieving *communitas* (Turner 1969). The current argument is not that Linn must be remembered for his design sensibility or even the specificities of the places he helped shape. Rather, his unique life experience and professional path contributed to the development of creative working methods that could positively inform contemporary practice.

ABOUT KARL LINN

Linn was born in 1923 in a small village in northeastern Germany and spent his early childhood living amidst the fruit tree orchards his mother had established as a horticultural training center, which additionally provided “horticultural therapy” services.¹ His was also the only Jewish family in the village and thus fled longstanding racial discrimination and then Nazi

persecution in 1934. Settling in Palestine, Linn—whose father was an early Zionist—soon became involved in the kibbutz movement, to which he applied his familial and later academic agricultural training in order to transform parts of the desert into productive groves of citrus, as well as subsistence farms.² Combining Zionism (or nationalism) with Socialism, where materials things were part of the “commons” (even clothing), *kibbutzim*, and their egalitarianism, sense of shared purpose and close reliance on the land, inspired Linn (Linn 2007, 9). However, Linn ultimately rejected Zionism, recognizing what he believed to be its hypocrisy as an exclusionary and repressive ideology (Linn 2005, 20, 26).

Having experienced traumas of repression, persecution, and displacement himself, Linn decided to study psychoanalysis in Switzerland and then moved to the United States in 1948 to practice child psychoanalysis and study the body-oriented therapy of Wilhelm Reich, one of the most radical figures in the history of psychiatry (Reich’s most comprehensive theory proposed society’s neuroses resided in the lack of “orgastic potency”; interestingly enough, in one instance, Linn altered this proposal a bit, claiming “fanatic movements mushroom easily in the vacuum of rituals”).³

Yet, despite training in psychoanalysis, Linn, with a background in agriculture and gardening, ultimately entered in the early 1950s what he called the “healing” profession of landscape architecture (Linn 2005, 42). In his oral history Linn explains his persisting aspirations as a landscape architect:

The theoretical underpinning of my work, what I aspire to, is the disarming of the structures of our designed physical environment by creating spaces that are inspiring and relaxing and put people more at ease. I hope that the disarming of environmental structures contributes to the disarmament of character structures, namely personality structures, and social structures. One can see that there are isomorphic relationships, similarities, in the development of character structures, social structures, and environmental structures. People cooped up in huge complexes of regimented apartment buildings are more apt to accept the regimentation of the social structures of armies (Linn 2005, 77).

This statement, clearly reflective of his childhood exposure to violent herd mentality, is related to Reich’s theories on character structure and muscular armoring that Reich defines as “the sum total of muscular attitudes (chronic muscular spasms), which an individual develops as a block against the breakthrough of emotions and organ sensations, particularly anxiety, rage and sexual excitation” (Reich 1960, 10). Reich’s development of “character analysis,” as a means to liberate “biophysical emotions” (Reich 1960, 11), influenced Linn’s spatial design practice. How place-making could contribute to this liberation remained one of his primary objectives. Thus, while his term “healing,” used to describe the profession of landscape architecture, implies a level of passivity and mere service rather than directive action, Linn thought of landscape architecture as a means to continue some of his therapeutic work and he directly applied aspects of his psychoanalytical training to his design approach.

Relying on his background in horticulture and agriculture, Linn sought no formal professional education in landscape architecture except for a summer “crash course” in ecology taught by Stanley White at Harvard. His introductory professional work in landscape design was a brief job with a landscape contractor and then a position in the landscape department of the well-known New York City florist Wadley & Smythe for which he designed, constructed, and maintained gardens throughout the city. With his experience in agriculture and on the kibbutz, the labor of construction and maintenance appealed to Linn, who started his own design-build firm in 1952. After he received NY State licensure (and professional regulations limited the contracting aspect of his business), Linn incorporated his design practice: Karl Linn Landscape Architect (Linn 2005, 45–52).

Like most landscape architects of this time, Linn made his living in the 1950s in the burgeoning suburbs, creating what he retrospectively called “landscapes of affluence” and “isolation,” particularly for women and children who had little access to collective space. This was compounded by the loss of extended family networks and the kind of multigenerational support he recognized in pre-industrial American settlement and on the kibbutz (Linn 2005, 56–60).⁴ Thus, though Linn had a thriving practice that included private, corporate, and institutional clientele, he soon

Figure 1
 “Slum clearance” in North Philadelphia c. 1960 (Karl Linn Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley).



abandoned it to explore how landscape architecture could serve a broader social cause.⁵

NEIGHBORHOOD COMMONS IN 1960s URBAN AMERICA

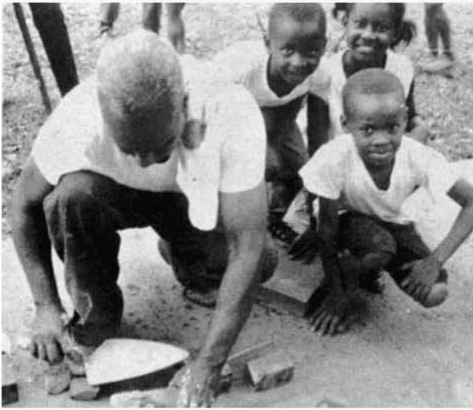
The opportunity Linn seized that would give him the chance to conduct this exploration was an invitation by Ian McHarg to join the faculty of Landscape Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania in 1959.⁶ It was at Penn that Linn developed his concept of the “Neighborhood Commons” in response to the physical conditions of ghettoized environments and the disruptive effects of urban renewal programs on poor and predominantly black residents.

Massive slum clearance campaigns were underway in the 1950s, made possible through Title I of the American Housing Act of 1949. In the name of urban renewal, vast swaths of cities were razed, severing roots that had grounded residents in their physical environment. In their place, new unfamiliar landscapes rapidly appeared, altering the skyline and the way people occupied and inhabited urban space. Linn and his students worked in parts of Philadelphia that had not yet been “renewed” and would largely never be—though they were in varying states of clearance (Figure 1).

One revealing document that provides insight into Linn’s commons and their context is the *Workshop on Open Space* report (Lawson 1969), summarizing the ASLA-sponsored event Linn instigated and co-organized. The workshop was generated out of an 18-month survey Linn conducted of his own

neighborhood commons, evaluating their successes and failures according to citizen reflections and use, as well as of other vest-pocket parks and playgrounds recently constructed in northeastern cities. The survey (undertaken with photographer Nanine Clay) was funded by a grant from the van Ameringen Foundation, which focuses on improving mental health in poor communities, with Linn additionally contributing a portion of this grant toward the culminating workshop.

Linn’s retrospective trip occurred as the tumultuous decade of race riots, protests, and counter-culture expression was coming to a close, forcefully revealing a pervasive insistence on increased participation and representation in public decision-making. Appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson to investigate the causes of the 1967 race riots, the Kerner Commission (or U.S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders) identified in its 1968 report poor recreational facilities—naming “parks, playgrounds, athletic fields, gymnasiums and pools” (United States National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 1968, 147)—as the fifth most significant grievance. This provided justification for federal (HUD) and ASLA support for the workshop. At Linn’s urging, the ASLA Foundation paid concerned neighborhood residents and community leaders from various east coast cities (invited by Linn) to attend the workshop and participate in dialog with the professional designers and planners, students and educators, and representatives from federal, state, and municipal agencies, as well as private nonprofit



A Neighborhood Commons is Mr. Drake bringing bricks and building a barbecue pit.



A Neighborhood Commons is lugging railroad ties.



A Neighborhood Commons is 20 carpenters building one table.

Figure 2
Detail of clippings from the *Mid-City Communicator*, a newsletter of the Mid-City Community Congress in St. Louis, MO (dated July 21, 1967) (Linn 2007, 109). Note that the commons is defined by the acts that make them manifest.

organizations also present (Linn 2007, 112–114; see Karl Linn Collection, Box 28). Linn’s emphasis that citizens had the right to both design and construct their own spaces with the designer in the role of facilitator and technician comes through clearly in the report and distinguishes him from other designers working in the same urban context, such as Lawrence Halprin and Paul Friedberg (to be taken up in the Conclusion).

Collective findings of the workshop (listed in Linn’s 2007 book) included: “Most small-scale inner city recreation facilities failed because neighborhood residents, the ultimate users of these open spaces, were not sufficiently engaged in their design and construction” and “The process is more important than the constructed project. Neighborhood commons need to have full participation by all potential users, especially teenagers” (Linn 2007, 114) (the sentiment of this latter statement—process over product—is additionally significant to the Conclusion below).

Most simply, neighborhood commons were to be “ennobling places of meeting where young and old may gather to engage in spontaneous and staged celebrations of public life” (Linn 2007, 206) and they were to be *built with and by residents of the area*. Linn used such tactics of “neighborhood renewal” to remediate the damaging social effects of “urban renewal” clearance and displacements in long-neglected areas of declining American cities. In “Reclaiming the Commons,” an article Linn wrote in 1999 for *New Village*, the journal issued by Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility” (ADPSR, which Linn co-founded in 1981), he clarified his use of the term *commons*, tracing it to pre-industrial societies throughout the world (and clearly building from his kibbutz experience):

In the days before mercantilism and industrialization, before private property rights were instituted, local people held the land in common and knew how to harvest, manage, and sustain the natural resources of forests, fields, and fishing grounds . . . Industrialization, with its focus on the production of cash crops for markets, displaced self-sufficient local economies, which were organized around communal management of the commons . . . (Linn 1999, 42).

While Linn spent a period identifying strongly with Trotskyism, he never proclaimed himself a Marxist (Linn 2005, 27–35). Yet he passionately criticized the alienation created by industrial capitalism, where labor becomes commodified and divorced from the fruits of production. Building a “neighborhood commons” became an opportunity for citizens to participate in the collective act of productive labor (Figure 2). According to anthropologist Melford Spiro (1963), who is included in the preparatory material for Linn’s “Community and Confrontation Seminar” at MIT (Karl Linn Collection, Box 32), the idea of the kibbutz was based entirely on the “moral value of labor” (specifically on the land) as a “uniquely creative act, as well as an ultimate value.” About Kiryat Yedidim, the pseudonym for the kibbutz on which Spiro did his fieldwork, he explained, “labor was not merely a means for the satisfaction of human needs; rather labor itself was viewed as a need—probably man’s most important need—the satisfaction of which became an end in itself” (Spiro 1963, 11–12). This certainly persisted in Linn’s consciousness when developing his theories of community development. The ideals of collective labor for the production and management of common assets drove Linn’s establishment of neighborhood commons in major cities nationwide.

Benefitting from a 1959 Philadelphia ordinance that made it possible for the city to acquire tax delinquent properties and lease them to community organizations, Linn’s “Commons” were built on vacant lots that were tangible reminders of municipal neglect. With local residents, Linn and his University of Pennsylvania students transformed these lots into gathering places meant for “extended family living, based not on blood relationships but on mutual aid and intergenerational support that would generate the growth of neighborhood community” (Linn 2005, 174). For the pilot project, Melon Neighborhood Commons in North Philadelphia (dedicated in 1961), Linn and his students initially generated a community resource inventory to find out what skills people had, what tools they owned, and how people in that neighborhood used or appropriated open space. Based on the availability of resources, they tried to articulate a design that the people could implement using salvaged material from urban renewal demolitions in these areas (Figures 3–7).⁷



Figure 3
Melon Commons, North Philadelphia, 1961 (Karl Linn Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley).

Figure 4
Tree planting at Melon Commons, 1960 (Karl Linn Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley).

Figure 5
Cement mixing at Melon Commons, 1960 (Karl Linn Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley).



Figure 6
Rescuing salvage, in this case marble steps, for Melon Commons, 1960 (Karl Linn Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley).

Figure 7
Melon Commons, 1961 with “walking pole” in foreground (Karl Linn Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley).

Integrating residents of the area in the work was most essential and Linn even claimed to have recruited a local teenage gang to act as “scavengers” of discarded building materials (Linn 2005, 84–89) (Figure 8). Again summoning his background in psychotherapy, Linn adamantly claimed, “People are alienated from their physical environment if they are unable to leave their personal imprints on their immediate surroundings. Relegating human beings to the role of passive spectators of their environment threatens their mental equilibrium . . .” (Linn 1969, 65). Later he asks, “Can the environmental industry, as it tools up to create housing and cities on an unprecedented scale, produce not only shelter but community by engaging people in the moulding of their own environment?”⁸ Evocative of the sacred act of rebuilding the Shinto shrines at Ise, Japan, Linn believed the collective process of building strengthened human ties and endowed place with value and meaning.

Linn likened the construction of the commons to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century North American practice of barnraising—the act of building a barn with the voluntary aid and synchronized effort of the community. Stemming from his early life experiences, and with the encouragement of his mentor, social scientist Lawrence K. Frank (Linn 2005, 37), Linn consistently referenced America’s rural past (particularly the extended family living which provided a collective support network). This reference provided a means of translating his kibbutz (and commune; see note 4) experience to resonate in the historical context of the U.S. In 1970, Linn elaborates, “No longer is the core family an effective social unit, but neither have we succeeded as yet in establishing modern ‘homesteads’ composed of voluntary associations. A neighborhood block offers such promise.”⁹

Linn’s commons were originally intended for those that were most “territorially bound,” including mothers, children, and the elderly. By extending the domestic realm into the visible stage of the city, the spaces were intended to provide community anchors that were active around the clock. Yet Linn reflects on his exclusionary neglect of the black male as perpetuating their increasing societal isolation. By the end of the 1960s, he began to conceptualize the commons as a more inclusive space that would additionally engage black male citizens (many unemployed and in need of spaces for collectivity and organization), as



Figure 8
Teenage “scavengers” at Melon Commons, 1960 (Karl Linn Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley).

well as provide platforms for political gathering and expression. He thus criticized Melon Commons as a missed opportunity to become a true “neighborhood forum” or space for wider exchange and public statement, exclaiming in 1970, “Today . . . soap boxes have become at least as important as sand boxes.” In distinguishing the commons from adventure playgrounds and vest-pocket parks that were being built in slum-designated areas of other cities, Linn claimed the latter were too specialized and thus did not provide “a place where people of all ages and sexes meet face-to-face, a place where people encounter one another through their *primary* social relationships and not through the labels of their specializations.”¹⁰ He also recognized the growth of the Black Power movement and the increasing irrelevance of the white volunteer coming in as outsiders to “improve” slum conditions (Linn 1968a, 382; Linn 1968b, 22; Linn 2005, 113).¹¹ Thus, he started setting up infrastructures—community design centers and non-profit organizations—to enable or facilitate “self-help” initiatives. In the August 1968 issue of *Architectural Design*, themed “Architecture of Democracy,” Linn reflects on his eight-year experience building commons:

Today we know that in order to innovate effectively in a public domain one also needs to have a workshop, a ‘sanctuary for failures.’ Rather than focusing on the creation of finished products, we are much more intent on inspiring the establishment of neighborhood workshops, that is ‘process institutions’ which ensure the growing

participation of the community in the development of the environment (Linn 1968a, 382).

THE RITUAL PROCESS

This emphasis on process indicates that, to Linn, the ritual of “urban barnraising,” was less about the physical outcome than the collective act of communal effort, or, more precisely, how such a collective act generated meaningful physical places (rather than the imposition of arbitrary formal products). This parallels the simultaneous writings of anthropologist Victor Turner (1969) (particularly his work on “the ritual process”). Rituals imply performative and collective action in which “the transmitter, receiver, and message become fused in the participant” (Rappaport 1992, 255). Counter-culture, (or what Linn called “new culture”) activists trusted physical engagement over discursive rhetoric, relying on the persuasive power of action over words. Turner theorized about the ritual process and its relationship to the counter-culture of the 1960s. In his book *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969), Turner elaborated on French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep’s phases of ritual action originally published in *Les rites de passage* (1909) (Van Gennep 1960). During ritual, a person exists in ambiguous (or “liminal”) territory between one state and the next. Turner celebrated this ambiguous yet liberating “anti-structure” as a release from the restraints of scripted social structure (norms, hierarchies, class distinctions, etc.) and as a temporary immersion in a



Figure 9

People's Convention in the South Bronx. Linn volunteered to design and oversee the development of a campsite and meeting grounds for the People's Convention—a coalition of environmental, peace, and social justice organizations “disillusioned with the broken promises of the Democratic Party” to take place while the Democratic National Convention was to meet in New York City (August 1980). The group transformed the site, a vast expanse of vacant buildings and debris-filled lots on Charlotte Street in the South Bronx, into a massive meeting grounds that “encouraged the expression of diverse views, while ‘barnraising the campsite nurtured a sense of solidarity and tolerance’” (Linn 1990, n.pag.) (Karl Linn Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley).

creative “*communitas*.” Turner explains, “*Communitas* breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality . . . it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency” (Turner 1969, 128). In other words, he believed the solidarity and equality of *communitas* freed ritual comrades from the imposed social order, thus finding themselves bound together, as an undifferentiated authentic whole, by their common experience of being human.¹²

While Linn does not directly reference Turner's work, they rely on common sources and share fundamental beliefs about the power of communal action. The transformative *process* of creating neighborhood commons became Linn's primary practice of community development. Just as Turner, in *The Ritual Process* (1969), quotes Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, so also did Linn also insert the same quotation into his MIT syllabus on Neighborhood Commons: “Community *is* where community *happens*.”¹³ By integrating neighbors into the creative process, people are forced to negotiate and confront difference rather than remain isolated from one another (just as sociologist Richard Sennett claims in *The Fall of Public Man*, “people grow only by processes of encountering the unknown”) (Sennett 1977, 295). Since Linn's students were largely middle class and white (Linn 2005, 83), undergoing this ritual process with black residents in lower income areas provided a heightened opportunity for “growth” or expanded human understanding.

RITUAL IN THE 1960s

The performative dimension of the 1960s—in art, politics, and public space—set the catalytic foundation for a comprehensive and multifaceted study of ritual that expanded on Turner's pursuits. New forms of collective performance were seen increasingly as agents of social change.¹⁴ For instance, Thomas Hoving, short-term New York City Parks Commissioner in the 1960s, instituted a set of mass participatory events as a new urban ritual to inspire people to reclaim Central Park, which had become a source of fear rather than joy. These “Happenings” were catalyzed by artist Phyllis Yampolsky, with whom, along with performance artist Allan Kaprow, Linn was in active dialog in the 1960s (Metropolitan Museum of Art 2009, n.pag.; Linn 2005, 103).¹⁵ Linn likewise not only organized similar events—what Turner calls “existential or spontaneous *communitas*” (Turner 1969, 132)—but designed what Linn called “stage sets” for such ephemeral events to occur (and constructed them with involved parties) (Figure 9).¹⁶ In a proposal for an MIT course he called “Social Theater of Daily Life,” Linn begins,

Old customs and traditions have disintegrated through the accelerated change of this technological age. Not only have people lost this sense of security once provided by familiar rituals but they have acquired new anxieties unique to this age . . . [In this course] we can stage memorable events and invent and experiment with ceremonies that are custom-tailored to our contemporary

Figure 10

Planting as collective act of mourning during the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Event at MIT, 1968 (Karl Linn Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley).



existence. If successful and re-enacted over periods of time, we can evolve ‘New Traditions’ survival imperatives for the evolution of our civilization (Karl Linn Collection, Box 30).

In one particularly notable example, at MIT (where he taught from 1968 to 1972), Linn and a few of his master’s students organized the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Commons, also called a “memorial *event*” in the sense that it was a temporary physical environment that became fully manifest through ritual action (see Linn 2007, 135–144). Built cooperatively just after King’s assassination, hundreds of volunteers from the university community transformed the forecourt and lawn of Kresge Hall into a commons for constructive dialog and public mourning. The physical “staging” included: platforms with microphones for public statement; booths for sending letters to politicians; exhibits on racial violence, racism, and other ongoing social ills; black paper sheets eliciting comments from participants; and tables and chairs for “spontaneous group formation” (Linn 2007, 137).¹⁷ Most significantly, the design or “staging” provided red geraniums and trowels for visiting participants to plant as a ceremonial means of collective grieving, undergoing a ritual process in which differences were to be cast aside while immersed in a *spontaneous communitas* (Figure 10). Demonstrating his desire to “evolve ‘New Traditions’” through the initiation of invented rituals (see earlier quotation), in his oral history Linn states retrospectively about this event, “If MIT had planted beds of red geraniums each year

thereafter, they ultimately would have earned the right for a permanent plaque. If they’d bought a plaque right off the bat, they wouldn’t have earned it. Meaningful environments evolve out of residues of celebration” (Linn 2005, 131). Thus Linn was not just a designer of physical spaces but a choreographer of collective forms of performance—a role explored in his teachings at MIT through on he called “environmental theater” or “social theater” (again, paralleling Turner, who increasingly began emphasizing the links between ritual and theater; see Turner 1982). Immediately after the MLK event, Linn reflected, “Bending to embed a plant in the earth, each of us knew that these blood red flowers had been transformed into personal and collective symbols for our grief and our rededication to life.”¹⁸ This equalizing event or “anti-structure” thus catalyzed trans-demographic dialog and collective action outside scripted norms of behavior.

CONCLUSION

As noted earlier, “the ritual of ‘urban barnraising,’ was less about the physical outcome than the collective act of communal effort,” meaning Linn emphasized process over product. While Linn was interested in the value, functionality, and significance of the built places themselves, he consistently emphasized the importance of the process to the realization of such meaningful products. This was in contrast to the more common Design (capitalization intentional) emphasis on form and visual appearance. Linn criticized what he saw as the “imitation” of published projects “with little or no communication among designers, builders and user”

and “without understanding the problems and pitfalls of these professionally-celebrated designs” (Linn 2007, 113). Perhaps a better way of describing Linn’s approach is: a commitment to *process-generated form*. Linn revels in the limen—the ambiguous territory between one state and the next (process), when social hierarchies and distinctions (dependent on class, race, ethnicity, etc.) are released and participants are temporarily but meaningfully immersed in a creative *communitas* through collective labor.

Landscape architect and activist Randy Hester, who has devoted his career to theorizing, advocating, and implementing participatory design practices, wrote an essay in *Landscape Architecture Magazine* in 1983 titled “Process can be Style” (Hester 1983). While Hester’s use of the term “style” seems a bit simplistic (but appropriate for a professional magazine rather than an academic journal), he distinguishes between “participatory aesthetics” and the “modern and conservation styles.” In the essay, Hester insists that participatory design—while emphasizing process rather than fetishizing form—is not formless, but has “characteristic and identifiable forms that follow a different set of visual rules from the modern style” (Hester 1983, 54). Those forms, according to Hester, are “personal,” “comfortably home-made,” “seem to lack visual organization,” and are “loaded with idiosyncratic symbolism most meaningful to the participants.” Finally, he explains, “Participatory projects may appear to lack a unifying plan, but most often the designer has created a subtle master plan that anticipates and aids the incremental development which usually follows. Work follows a plan that is flexible and open-ended, rather than fixed” (Hester 1983, 53–54). Thus form, itself, becomes process in the sense that it evolves through time and accumulates layers of occupation (as any landscape should). Physical outcomes are therefore significant to Linn and others practicing participatory design as places of accrued meaning. Yet these physical outcomes are completely reliant on the method or process (or ritual) through which they were initially generated (as well as those rituals that shape their evolution).

Hester insists that this “new aesthetic for human habitation” (Hester 1983, 53) frames the user as “artist” and the designer as “facilitator,” a characterization that Linn strongly endorsed. To better understand this unique stance within the profession at the time (1960s),

a revealing comparison might be drawn between Linn and landscape architects M. Paul Friedberg and Lawrence Halprin, the three of whom had significant professional contact because of their common urban and social concerns (see this comparison in detail in Hirsch 2014). While most landscape architects continued to work in the burgeoning suburbs into the 1960s, these three designers uniquely worked in the country’s densely settled metropolitan areas at the peak of urban “crisis” and “renewal.” Recognizing the depletion of public life by the instatement of sterile urban renewal schemes, each of these designers deployed particular participatory strategies to restore opportunities for choice, chance, and diverse forms of encounter in the city. For those familiar with Paul Friedberg, who worked with communities to create vest-pocket parks on vacant lots in New York City, and Halprin, who developed the Take Part community workshop process, it is clear they insisted on much more authorial roles than Linn and their built work reflects this by signature formal vocabularies that reflect none of the characteristics of Hester’s “participatory aesthetics.” As noted (note 10), Linn directly criticizes Friedberg’s vest-pocket park designs as ignorant of community needs on a number of occasions, including his “Planning for Suicide” lecture to the University of Washington in 1969 (Karl Linn Collection, Box 99).¹⁹

In another article Hester provides a useful table of participatory methodologies deployed by planners and landscape architects historically and today (Hester 2012). He identifies Linn’s method as “Community Building,” and situates it alongside Halprin’s “Collective Creativity” (which, unlike Linn, “provides [a] forum for visionary large-scale change,” implying that Linn’s approach is incremental and highly localized). Hester additionally associates Linn’s work with Paul Davidoff’s advocacy planning (1960s–), John Friedmann’s “Transactive” approach (1970s), Hester and Marcia McNally’s “Community Development” (1960s), Lawrence Susskind’s “Conflict Mediation” (1980s), and John Liu’s work with social pattern (Hester 2012, 140–141). Except for Halprin, these designers and planners act within the service dimension of the design and planning professions, emphasizing social and environmental justice more than the design of refined civic landscapes.

The *Workshop on Open Space* report (Lawson 1969, 18–21), includes a section on the unresolved

dialog amongst participants on the role of the designer, using language defining a spectrum from “artist” to “facilitator.” These questions persist. Today numerous publications and efforts have emerged within the design professions celebrating the appropriation of the city again as a stage for performance and collective ritual—emphasizing “insurgent space” (using anthropologist James Holston’s term; Holston 1998), “loose space” (Franck 2006) and space appropriated and shaped outside the “institutionalized notion of urbanism” (Hou 2010). Again, the role of Design is absent from this renewed fascination. The ideas evoked by Linn and persistent today thus challenge us to ask whether designers might participate in the process of negotiation and Design space that both challenges the public to think beyond their zones of comfort and forces institutions to transfer power to local citizens.

It makes little sense for designers to act exclusively as facilitators guiding residents in the construction of their own public spaces, since it is up to the designer to assertively challenge others to think beyond the familiar (and “encounter the unknown”; see Sennett 1977). Yet by the 1960s urban residents had come to distrust architectural and planning professionals in their sweeping clearance and redevelopment schemes. In his “Neighborhood Commons” MIT course document, Linn states, “professionalized environments have contributed to people’s alienation.”²⁰ While we might suggest optimistically that this distrust has dissipated somewhat, Linn’s working method can be mined today particularly for understanding the strengthened ties created through ritual action and collective labor or effort. His method becomes especially relevant at a time when an urgent insistence on participatory democracy has again resurfaced. While some of Linn’s language (of facilitation and healing) might imply “mere service,” his work was more assertive. The “uniquely creative act” (see Spiro) of constructing his neighborhood commons challenged institutional structures and reinstated public space in the urban renewal city.

Linn believed temporary “staging” of choreographed means of participation and collective engagement could evolve into a more permanent physical framework if these “new rituals” proved resilient. Of course, designers rarely have time to wait and see how incremental change is absorbed and adapted by the citizens it affects. Yet this idea—of staging events to

generate stewards and cross-demographic dialog—most certainly becomes a productive design tool. It not only ensures fewer obstacles to implementation and long-term management of the places we propose, but also provokes wider dialog about the physical environment and its value and meaning in urban life. While offering such a stage for people to engage with one another and work toward the common goal of enriching the physical environment is not entirely foreign to community design practice today, it is certainly worth further investigation and wider integration into public projects. One might also question how Linn’s incremental approach could contribute furthermore to “visionary large-scale change,” as Hester describes Halprin’s work. Of course, this inevitably leads to the question of who is to be involved and how to be as inclusive as possible in the urban design process. To Sennett, again from *The Fall of Public Man*, “Community [has] become a weapon against society” (Sennett 1977, 339), indicating its inevitable exclusivity. Perhaps the idea of “community” no longer bears relevance to our contemporary condition “in which difference, otherness, fragmentation, splintering, multiplicity, heterogeneity, diversity, (and) plurality prevail” (Sandercock 2003, 1) and in which social ties are often virtual rather than local. However, many of us still live in cities amongst diverse neighbors. Finding shared projects through which to briefly work toward common goals may, indeed, fleetingly release us from rigid social structures and bind us in a sense of common humanity.

NOTES

1. In his oral history, Linn explains his mother’s achievements as a master gardener and proprietor of the approximately fifteen acre farm and orchard she transformed into the accredited horticultural training center, called the Immenhof (Linn 2005, 4–5).
2. Linn attended the Kadoorie Agricultural High School near Mount Tabor (Linn 2005, 23). Yitzhak Rabin was in the class ahead of him. Subsequently, with a number of his classmates, Linn was involved in the founding of Ma’agan Michael (Linn 2005, 25), one of the largest kibbutzim in Israel.
3. Quotation is from notes related to the preparation of Linn’s “Environmental Theater” course at MIT (Box 32, Karl Linn Collection). Reich was a formative influence on Linn, despite his teacher’s ultimate demise (he was jailed for the distribution of his controversial orgone energy accumulator and died in prison in 1957). Linn was largely influenced by

- Reich's body-oriented (bioenergetic) approach to therapy which served as an instructive precursor to Gestalt Therapy. Reich's work influenced Fritz Perls and Paul Goodman. With Ralph Hefferline, Perls and Goodman co-authored *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality* in 1951. (Perls was also integral to the development of the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, Ca.)
4. The kibbutz, in particular, rejected the nuclear family institution as the basic unit of society, deeming it a capitalist construct (the family as economic unit) and, instead, transferred all roles and activities traditionally conducted by the family to the collective realm where they were "implemented within communal frameworks" (Chyutin and Chyutin 2007, 57). Linn actually lived on a commune while teaching at MIT in the late 1960s (Linn 2007, 125) and taught a course there, called "Emerging Lifestyles and their Habitats," focused on cooperative forms of living (see Box 32, Karl Linn Collection). See also Sennett (1977, 20) who likewise attributes the strengthening of the nuclear family as one of the "tyrannies of intimacy," contributing to the "fall of public man."
 5. Linn's private work included the lush interior planting design of the Seagram Building's Four Seasons Restaurant (see Box 7 in the Karl Linn Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley). See also Linn's reflections on the project in his unpublished manuscript *Landscapes Revisited: Did my Clients' Dreams Come True?* (Box 94, Karl Linn Collection) and various press clippings on the project (Box 80, Karl Linn Collection).
 6. In his autobiography, McHarg (1996, 138) writes of Linn's impact on the landscape architecture department at Penn: "Karl Linn might well be the most stimulating and original of all the teachers of landscape architecture during the history of the Penn landscape architecture program . . ." In a July 25, 1996 letter to McHarg, Linn offers a number of corrections to McHarg's piece on his life and contribution to the field ("Professional and Student Critiques" folder, Box 82, Karl Linn Collection).
 7. It is important to note that the Friends Neighborhood Guild, a Quaker settlement house and outreach organization in the area, had already initiated the building of a community playground on this twelve lot vacancy. They partnered with the West Poplar Civic League, a community organization formed at this time and aimed at bettering what is the West Poplar neighborhood through self-help efforts. The two organizations accepted Linn's offer to design the grounds with his students. See Goodman 2014. According to Goodman 2014, 507, clearing and leveling the site and the initial construction was done in the summer of 1961 by high school and college-age workers from the Friends Work Camp. The construction was completed by Linn, his students and neighborhood residents with skilled laborers for more technical tasks. Michael Laurie, later chair of the landscape architecture department at UC Berkeley, was one of the students who worked on Melon Commons (Linn 2005, 118).
 8. From Karl Linn "Neighborhood Commons: Toward a Human Ecology" MIT course description, 1970 ("Course Descriptions" folder, Box 31, Karl Linn Collection).
 9. Ibid.
 10. All quotations in this paragraph from Karl Linn "Neighborhood Commons: Toward a Human Ecology" MIT course description, 1970 ("Course Descriptions" folder, Box 31, Karl Linn Collection). Underlining in the original. Linn became increasingly more critical of vest-pocket parks and "adventure playgrounds," such as those built by Richard Dattner and M. Paul Friedberg (see Linn, "Landscape Architects in the Service of Community" in the *ASLA Bulletin*, undated clipping, c. 1969-70 in Box 86, Karl Linn Collection; see also criticism directed at Paul Friedberg's vest-pocket park project in Bedford-Stuyvesant in Linn's lecture "Planning for Suicide" given at Washington University in St. Louis in 1969, Box 99, Karl Linn Collection).
 11. See Hirsch (2014) for Linn's openness to addressing racial issues. Jews and African Americans have an especially complex history as early allies in the fight for civil rights until tensions, heightened particularly during the 1960s race riots when, in many northern cities, Jews accused African Americans of vandalizing and looting their businesses and African Americans accused Jews of discrimination as shopkeepers and landlords (see Philadelphia's Columbia Street Riot of 1964, for instance; Schroeder 2014, "Jewish-African American Relations"). See Linn (2005, 86) for his recognition of this dynamic: "There were a lot of corner stores that were owned by Jews who charged an arm and a leg for their merchandise. Being a Jew, I was embarrassed about it. Many of these stores were targets of arson."
 12. Turner uses the Latin term *communitas* rather than *community* "to distinguish this modality of social relationship from an 'area of common living'" (Turner 1969, 96).
 13. Karl Linn "Neighborhood Commons: Toward a Human Ecology" MIT course description, 1970 ("Course Descriptions" folder, Box 31, Karl Linn Collection). Turner (1969, 127) and Linn both extract Martin Buber's quotation from *Between Man and Man* (1961), "Community . . . is the being no longer side by side but *with* one another of a multitude of persons. And this multitude, though it always moves towards one goal, yet experiences everywhere a turning to, a dynamic facing of, the other, a flowing from *I* to *Thou*. Community is where community happens."
 14. Ritual Studies emerged in the 1970s, largely relying on Turner as a catalyst, and proliferated into a complex interdisciplinary platform with expansive literature. I am currently working through much of this literature for a forthcoming book, *Ritual, Performance, Practice: Designing the Landscape of Sociocultural Action*.
 15. In a written piece by Linn called "Barnraising in the City," he praises Hoving's transformation of the image of New York

City parks “from empty dangerous spaces to green stages.” He continues, “Hoving Happenings have since then generated cultural events and affairs across the country, marking the beginning of a society proud of its cultural pluralism rather than of its homogeneity” (“Analysis of Neighborhood Commons” folder, Box 82, Karl Linn Collection).

16. See Linn 2005, 77 for his views on “mass participatory events”: “Staging mass participatory democratic events as celebrations of community should overshadow the misleading appeal and glorification of militarism.” See “Temporary Commons for Special Occasions” section of Linn 2007, 132–185. Turner (1969, 136) again references Martin Buber whose theories on *das Zwischenmenschliche* address “spontaneous communitas” created by such events as “Happenings.”
17. “MLK Mourning Event, 1968” preparatory document for MIT event (Box 31, Karl Linn Collection).
18. *Ibid.*
19. As I state (Hirsch 2014, 183), Friedberg even claims that citizens should not be integrated into the process of design itself, since this could only lead to “mediocrity, where the end product resembles a little of everything but lacks its own identity” (Friedberg 1970, 148).
20. From Linn’s “Neighborhood Commons: Toward a Human Ecology” MIT course description, 1970 (Box 31, Karl Linn Collection).

REFERENCES

- Buber, Martin. 1961. *Between Man and Man*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Chyutin, Michael and Bracha Chyutin. 2007. *Architecture and Utopia: The Israeli Experiment*. Aldershot, England/Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Franck, Karen. 2006. *Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life*. New York: Routledge.
- Friedberg, M. Paul. 1970. *Play and Interplay: A Manifesto for New Design in the Urban Recreational Environment*. London, UK: The Macmillan Co., Collier-Macmillan Ltd.
- Goodman, Anna Gloria. 2014. A History of Community Design/Build in the United States in Four Moments. *102nd ACSA Annual Meeting Proceedings, Globalizing Architecture/Flows and Disruptions*, ed. John Stuart and Mabel Wilson, 503–512. Washington, D.C.: ACSA Press.
- Hester, Randy. 1983. Process can be Style: Participation and Conservation in Landscape Architecture. *Landscape Architecture* 73: 49–55.
- Hester, Randy. 2012. Scoring collective creativity and legitimizing participatory design. *Landscape Journal* 31 (1–2): 135–143.
- Hirsch, Alison B. 2014. From ‘Open Space’ to ‘Public Space’: Activist landscape architects of the 1960s. *Landscape Journal* 33 (2): 173–194.
- Holston, James. 1998. Spaces of insurgent citizenship. In *Cities and Citizenship*, ed. James Holston, 155–174. Durham, NC: Duke University.
- Hou, Jeffrey, ed. 2010. *Insurgent Public Space: Guerilla Urbanism and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities*. New York: Routledge.
- Karl Linn Collection, Environmental Design Archives. Berkeley: University of California.
- Lawson, Simpson F. 1969. *Workshop on Open Space*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- Linn, Karl. 1968a. Neighbourhood commons. *Architectural Design* (August): 379–382.
- Linn, Karl. 1968b. Black energy. *Landscape Architecture* 59 (1): 22.
- Linn, Karl. 1969. Neighbourhood commons. *Ekistics*, 27 (158): 65–66.
- Linn, Karl. 1990. Urban Barnraising: Building community through environmental restoration. *Earth Island Journal* (Spring): n.pag.
- Linn, Karl. 1999. Reclaiming the sacred commons. *New Village* 1: 42–49.
- Linn, Karl. 2005. *Landscape Architect in Service of Peace, Social Justice, Commons, and Community*. An interview with Lisa Rubens. Berkeley, CA: University of California, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library.
- Linn, Karl. 2007. *Building Commons and Community*. Oakland, CA: New Village Press.
- McHarg, Ian. 1996. *A Quest for Life: An Autobiography*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Metropolitan Museum of Art. 2009. *Thomas Hoving, January 15, 1931–December 10, 2009*. <http://www.tomhoving.com/images/Tom%20Hoving%20Mem%20Book.pdf> [July 25, 2014].
- Perls, Frederick, Paul Goodman and Ralph Hefferline. 1951. *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*. New York: Julian Press.
- Rappaport, Roy. 1992. Ritual. In *Folklore, Cultural Performance and Popular Entertainments*, ed. R. Bauman, 249–260. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Reich, Wilhelm. 1960. *Selected Writings: An Introduction to Ergonomy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Cuhady.
- Sandercock, Leonie. 2003. *Cosmopolis II: Mongrel Cities in the 21st Century*. London/New York: Continuum.
- Schroeder, Amira Rose. Jewish-African American Relations. *Civil Rights in a Northern City: Philadelphia*. <http://northerncity.library.temple.edu/people-and-places/jewish-african-american-relations> [July 25, 2014].
- Sennett, Richard. 1977. *The Fall of Public Man*. New York: Knopf.
- Spiro, Melford. 1963. *Kibbutz: Venture in Utopia*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Turner, Victor. 1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co.

Turner, Victor. 1982. *From Ritual to Theater: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications.

United States National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. 1968. *The Kerner Report: The 1968 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*. New York: Bantam Books.

Van Gennep, Arnold. 1960. *The Rites of Passage*. London: Routledge.

AUTHOR Alison B. Hirsch, MLA, M.S. (Historic Preservation), Ph.D. (Architecture) is Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Southern California and co-founder and partner of foreground design agency, a transdisciplinary practice working across the fields of landscape architecture, architecture, urbanism, and the visual arts. She is author of *City Choreographer: Lawrence Halprin in Urban Renewal America* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014) and co-editor of *The Landscape Imagination* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2014). Her research focuses on the spatial politics of landscape architecture and landscape's intersections with performance, choreography, and corporeality.