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Touchstones

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Preface

Public monuments are collective artifacts which are capable of informing us of the values and beliefs of the people who conceived, made, and installed them. *Touchstones* is an attempt to apply a methodology and discipline of object analysis to extract this information from selected monuments in New Haven.

My choice of objects was dictated by three general purposes. First, in familiarizing students with a methodology that introduces and develops new and precise analytical skills, I begin with small, simpler monuments dedicated to specific events and individuals. Second, this selection seeks to create a physical path of discovery in proximity to the school and then extends further into; center of town. Through this spatial mapping, an image of the city as a pattern of interconnected and characteristic places will emerge. Third, having established conceptual and spatial structures for this study, I have sought to initiate an understanding of the city as a temporal structure of events, in the past as well as in the more obvious present. As a corollary to these objectives, students will use this extracted information to design monuments of their own. This design project is described at the close of this essay.

Briefly stated, the methodology of object analysis includes three separate procedures: description, deduction, and speculation. One of these procedures is emphasized at different monuments, thereby clarifying the distinctions inherent in each of them. However, it must be understood that this methodology is an integrative as well as a differentiating mechanism. Because of this, overlaps and correspondences are sometimes unavoidable. Also, by limiting certain ways of interaction at each monument, a greater number of monuments can be observed. This variety will be useful in creating alternatives for the design project which follows.

Before I proceed to the study of specific monuments, a strategic point should be noted. In order to convey the quality of monuments as events, the site visits have been arranged to correspond with the occurrence of certain holidays. This coincidence allows them to be experienced as ritual "pilgrimages" which reinforce and revitalize the thoughts and feelings that these monuments evoke. This strategy also serves to ritualize the learning of the discipline of object analysis as a patterned and structured procedure.

Finally, it is to be understood that, in addition to the verbal descriptions and exchanges that take place during these "pilgrimages", students will photograph, sketch, and write their responses at each of the monuments. Collectively, they will maintain a cumulative spatial map of the parts of the city they have discovered and

develop a timeline schematic diagram of dates, names, and events which they derive from the monuments.

Beginnings: Description as the Path toward the Object

The first site visit occurs during the week prior to “Columbus” or “Discovery Day.” (This ambiguity associated with naming is also manifest in the naming of the place in which the first monument stands.)

As we depart from the northwest door of the Conte Arts Magnet School, we can see through the linear columns of the portico a wall of green trees and other plantings. This greenspace is our destination. Stepping down from the concrete slab, our view opens to a street lined with large houses made of a variety of materials and utilizing an equal diversity of styles. On our right, there is a large, spired, white church.

Crossing the street, we observe that the trees and lawn are enclosed in a black fence. The curved shapes of this fence suggests that it might be composed of either iron or wood. Only by touching it do we learn that it is indeed made of iron. This fence runs in a mirrored, cycloid pattern between squarish stone posts and surrounds the entire park, except where it opens to provide entry. Passing through one of these openings, on the black macadam path, we can see that the trees are very tall and straight. Some of these trees have trunks which rise to fifteen or eighteen feet before their cylindrical masses are interrupted by a limb. There are two deductions that can be made from these descriptive facts. First, these trees are very old. Second, their clean and straight lines suggest human cultivation. As we turn and look at the continuous band of short, broadcrowned trees planted along the perimeter of the park inside the fence, we observe further evidence of this possibility. We proceed further into this grove of graceful columns and notice that the path is lined with concrete and painted wooden benches. When we arrive at the center of the park, we observe eight radiating lines (paths) at equal angles to each other. The feeling of convergence is strong here. Although it is difficult to see from this point, we can confirm that the entire park is surrounded by the facades of still more houses and other buildings.

We make our way along the path toward a colorful patch of flowers. As we near it, we can see that the plantings are arranged in what one student clearly identifies as a triangle. Another student observes that this plot is enclosed in a thick, iron chain that is suspended between a series of one-foot iron posts. He has acquired this measurement with the aid of the tape measure that we have brought along. He uses this instrument to measure the dimensions of the triangular garden and to determine the distance between the posts. This quantification is an essential and primary means of describing the monument. Knowledge of these facts will be used to further describe the monument based on more subjective procedures. They will be used to determine the scale of the objects within this area. This physical element of scale characterizes our relationship to the monument as well.

After we have concluded these areal measurements, another student begins to measure the stone obelisk which rises in the center of this small geometric array of objects. This stone is precisely cut and polished. One student begins to read from the rectangular plaque, which she has found attached to the southernmost face of the obelisk. She tells us that the marker was placed there to commemorate the deeds of the revolutionary war general, David Wooster. She adds that the park is named after him and that we are in a historic district, noted for its fine residential architecture. Furthermore, we learn that the park has been here since the 1320's. Another student measures the plaque as I inform them that these words are a form of iconographic information and that the obelisk is a form that originated in Egypt and has often been used in monuments.

Just as I am completing this statement, a call is heard from another part of the park. One boy has discovered another monument. We cross the green lawn and see a tall, sixfoot, iron fence: surrounding another area of floral plantings. Behind this fence is a six foot, pyramidal block of roughcut, rectangular stones. Standing on the top of this stone pyramid is a larger thanlifesize, bronzecast, clothed, human figure. He holds in his hand a sphere and he gestures with the other. I instruct one of the students to begin measuring the area enclosed by the fence by pacing the perimeter. This approximate form of measurement is often sufficient to establish adequate description of large objects.

During this process she reads an inscription she has noticed on the stone base: “1492—Cristoforo Columbo—1892.” I have previously heard this park referred to as Columbus Park. After sharing this with them, we discuss this ambiguity of nomenclature and compare it with that of the upcoming holiday, which is also doubly named. They now break up into two groups to complete the measurement of the two monuments. Having completed this phase of the process, they carry out a variety of recording procedures, making a map of the monuments, photographing, and drawing them.

When this is completed, we gather together again to continue describing the Columbus statue, paying close attention to the color of the metal, the distribution of lights and darks, and the contrasting textures of metal and stone. I direct a series of questions to focus their attention on the patterns created by the placement of stones and their joints. The conflicting lines of the surrounding fence, which rises to the height of the stone pyramid, are observed for the juxtaposed pattern they create. A discussion of the figure of Columbus ensues and I point out the accuracy of detail, in his clothing, appropriate to his pose and gesture.

With the completion of these observations, the introduction to descriptive procedures has been accomplished. We may now proceed to more subjective interactions.

Dreaming New Haven I: Subjective Procedures

These subjective transactions will be explored in a comparative way in a return visit to Wooster Park during the week prior to Veteran’s Day. On this “pilgrimage” a third monument which lies in the park will first be precisely described. A comparative deductive investigation expands upon the methodology. This procedure begins a process of deriving meanings from these artifacts.

This third monument lies at the northeast entrance to the park, diagonally across from the Wooster marker. In order to arrive at it more easily we take another path to the park. As we enter the park through a break in the fence, we see a large boulder to the right of the path. A student hurries to the boulder and sits on it. Another student, remembering the methods we used at the other monuments begins to measure it. The boulder is three feet long, two feet wide and two feet high, measured at its extremities. A few students lean their arms and elbows on the boulder, surrounding the student who is seated upon it. The student who was measuring the stone has discovered a plaque attached to the boulder. He begins to read from this plaque. We learn that this boulder was placed here to honor some men who sacrificed their lives in World War II. I ask the leaning students how they feel, now that they know they are sitting on a monument. “Well, at least we can sit on this one.” one replies. The other one adds, “There is no fence around this one so its easier to get to.” I question the others, asking how they might suspect that it is a monument if one hadn’t noticed the plaque? “Because its a boulder and there are no other ones in this park,” one offers.

I suggest that we should think about the monuments we visited the last time we were here. I point out that they all look different. The first monument was geometric; the second one was figurative, although it stood on a geometric base. The one we have now discovered is a minimally altered natural object. A series of questions leads to the identification of a similarity in choice of materials. They all utilize nature in some way. The first two with flowers, while this monument, being natural, connects with the natural environment of the park. Perhaps, this is why it also does not have a fence around it.

Further questioning establishes the possibility of using different expressive forms in making monuments. These forms can and do have meanings. If we look closely at the purpose of each of the monuments, who and what they are for, we can begin to understand how these expressive forms work. One student remarks that Columbus took a large risk when he sailed into a then unknown and uncharted ocean. Someone else contributes the fact that David Wooster was a general and must have possessed qualities of leadership. Finally, another student says that these men who are remembered here by this boulder made a sacrifice.

There is quiet now for a few minutes. I break the silence posing the possibility that these three expressive forms have been used to convey three separate qualities. The geometric has been used to express leadership, "And sacrifice, too. Wooster was in the army," emerges from one of the boys. One of the girls now adds, "The figurative was used to show discovery and risk." Finally, I conclude that the natural was used here to express sacrifice. It is important to indicate that these qualities are not inherent in these expressive forms. Perhaps, one can juxtapose the qualities and these forms to create a monument that expresses discovery through a geometric mode, or leadership with a natural object, or sacrifice through a figurative statue.

While the students are expressing their agreement, I think about wanting to convey something other than these differences. After a brief pause, I ask, "How are these monuments the same?" "There all made out of rocks," one student offers. "And they will all last a long time," says another. "Permanent," I substitute, suggesting that this is an important aspect of all monuments.

We return now to the other two monuments to follow up on the ideas we discussed about the relationship of the monuments to the remainder of the park. Here we find the obvious separation of the monuments by the use of fences and a border of flowers. We must also look at how the manmade objects relate to the parts that these fences have cut out, and to the floral arrangements within this area. In the Wooster marker the scale of the obelisk is in harmony with the entire ensemble, taking advantage only by its vertical projection. It cooperates with the plants and the enclosure to blend in an array that characterizes all three elements as the monument. On the other hand, the Columbus statue rises high above the fence, the base, and, most emphatically, above the flowers. It dominates the area cut out by the fence. Together with the large base and the closeness of the fence to its bottom it reduces the plantings to appear more like wreaths placed around the base, rather than an organic and equal element in the monument.

Having made this comparison, we begin our return to the school. I overhear the students' comments: "This place is like a cemetery." "I think it's more like a museum." "Maybe parks are just good places to put monuments," I interject.

I speculate further that this entire park is a monument. Physically, there are similarities with the monuments we have studied. There is a fence around it; there are plantings; and there are even manmade objects, like the benches and the water fountain. Maybe, there is even some similarity of purpose. This park can be received as a living monument to past events and to the memories of people. It also meets present needs of people. Citizens come here to relax, enjoy, and share a tamed nature. This greens pace, this living void within the surrounding mass of buildings may be compared to the challenge of the vast expanse of sea of Columbus'

time, or associated with feelings of separation from one's country, or akin to the uncertainty which accompanies the establishing new political traditions. Or even, an oasis from the grief and anxiety attached to the sacrifice required to maintain these traditions. We leave this park having experienced its separation, recognizing this sacrifice of valuable urban land to our wellbeing. We have been renewed by our study of the past and finally with our connection to nature. I have been dreaming. New Haven.

War Memorials: Why Memorials

With these speculative remarks, I have concluded an introduction to a methodology which can be used to examine other monuments. What follows is an application of these procedures; to other characteristic places. These different places and monuments suggest new themes and new ideas to be explored. As in the above analysis, description will be a main element of our investigations. However, space limits my inclusion of these descriptions for the remainder of the monuments.

The next monument and site that I have chosen provides an excellent opportunity to continue with some of the ideas introduced in the previous section, specifically, the use of an expressive form to convey a variety of messages. It also allows for the introduction of architecture as a means of monument making. Together they will work to extend our image of the city as a network of characteristic places.

I will also abandon the use of the quasidialogue form that I used in the previous sections. It was my intention to convey the process as one of person-to-person interactions, as well as person-object transactions.

The visit to the New Haven Green is the only one which does not adhere to the temporal strategy of holiday/monument correspondence. Situated at the center of the green is a flagpole and monument to the veterans of World War I. In contrast to the memorial at Wooster Square, it is of white, precisely cut, unpolished stone, forming a two-tiered octagonal base for the flagpole mounted at its center. A three-foot bronze fence surrounds this ensemble. There is a bronze plaque mounted on each side of the uppermost octagon. These plaques cover the most part of the vertical surface of this tier. One of the plaques bears information revealing the purpose and donor of the monument. The other seven plaques list the names of the New Haven citizens who died in service during the war. The monument was erected by the city of New Haven. This may be contrasted to the donors of the Wooster Veterans' Monument, which was placed in its location by friends of the soldiers. The physical contrast to the Wooster Square monument is primarily in its expressive form. Here we find the geometric mode used to commemorate sacrifice. Something can be said about its intentions, since the monument was placed here as a highly public act of the government.

The inclusion of the flag is an example of an archetypal or symbolic gesture. The use of symbols will be more exclusively the subject of the final site visit; one may refer to that section for further clarification and definition of the term.

In comparison to the monuments in Wooster Square, the relationship of this flagpole-monument can be a useful illustration of how the placing of monuments determines the character of a place. The paths of the green converge at this centrally placed artifact. In Wooster Park the monuments were dispersed along the path, while the center, where the paths converged remained empty. One can conclude that this is merely a function of size, but, nevertheless, it determines the kinesthetic relationship of man to monument. This central vertical projection in the vast, horizontally of the green invites, if not demands, passage through this point, followed by

a dispersal of visitors to the extremities of the green. In Wooster Park the monuments are encountered more casually as one moves along the paths. (An exception to this may be the Columbus monument which dominates the south entrance to the park. This is congruent with its representational mode, which requires observation from a stationary position rather than catalyzing movement.) The lack of trees in the central area provides for greater visibility of the monument. It also makes the viewing of it a more public act, whereas the Wooster—monuments can be viewed more privately and intimately.

The introduction of architecture into the investigation of public monuments is problematic, not so much as to the validity of this inclusion, but in reference to their complexity. Therefore, before a discussion of the buildings on the green, this problem must be addressed. First, public buildings are large and difficult to describe. Second, a difficulty arises from their utilitarian nature. This is not to assert that their form necessarily implies this function, but that their meanings are multidimensional. Compounding this issue of meaning and functionality, is their continuing and changing use. When one considers the literary, historical, and archeological application of revival styles, their meanings become almost inexhaustible. The art of building expands to metalinguistic or mythological dimensions. In contrast to monuments, which are specific and represent parts, partially kept, architecture, especially in public buildings, contain totalities, totally conceived.

It is precisely here where the methodology may serve a most useful purpose by confining our search to a description of materials and aiding our view of the building as object. The task of description still remains complex, so a further limitation of viewing particular elements of buildings, such as doorways, windows, or stairways, will be applied to the buildings discussed in this essay. In the deductive phase of the procedure, the issues are related to invitation, accessibility, and ceremoniality. What should be kept in mind is that these elements are to be considered for the possibility of monumentalization of the function these elements are meant to serve, as well as the values and beliefs in relation to that function. What becomes monumental in this investigation of materials and elements is the art of building itself. One may better understand this if one recalls the association of specific expressive modes of monumentmaking, (geometric, figurative, and natural,) with particular qualities and how they can be juxtaposed.

A few examples from the area of the New Haven Green will, perhaps, make this clear. I have chosen the Public Library, the Old Courthouse, and the Old City Hall. In recalling past styles of architectural excellence, they express a great value for the purposes they serve.

The balustrade surrounding the library is not unlike the fences we have discovered around other monuments. The use of stone and brick throughout the building suggest that the building houses items and persons that are valuable and are to be permanently preserved. The broad stairway together with the balustrade makes the entry to the building a ceremonial act of elevation. The choice of Greek Classical engaged columns adds to this sense of importance. The choice of brick walls adds an allusion to more vernacular building traditions. One can deduce from this description of elements, materials, and historical styles that this is in fact a monument to books. Its emphasis on entry also defines it as a monument to those who enter. It is by extension a monument for us all.

In the courthouse we find some of these similar articulations of materials and entry more emphatically defined. In the more archeological use of a Greco-Roman Classical style, we encounter a greater allusion to order and balance. One could easily deduce values of permanence and an expression of justice in these usages. The presence of figurative sculpture on the tympanum and stairs conveys the presence or housing of a human and manmade institution.

One must be careful not to make these deductions too casually or one might characterize the profusely ornamented City Hall as representative of an ostentatious and overly sentimental city government. It would be more accurate to view it as a monument to an architectural style that is rich and dynamic. The entry is polite but not quite ceremonial. The vertical emphasis supplied by the vertical tower can be indicative of the aspirations of civic excellence. In fact, the reading of it as a monument to the art of building, as suggested above, is even more appropriate now that its facade is all that remains and its public function of administration is no longer applicable.

It has not been my wish to digress and confuse the reader with an overly speculative and therefore, theoretical discussion of architecture. I have simply wished to introduce the possibility of architectural solutions to public monumentmaking. Perhaps, I could have simply chosen this last monument since its existence as a monument is so clearly transparent. It is my feeling that to have done this would have been a greater reduction than my speculative discussion hopes to alleviate.

Harvesting Basic Needs: More Monuments for the Living

The benefit of exploring our feelings and thoughts about artifacts, i.e., our deductions and speculations, lies in that these new meanings uncover and define new problems. (It is just such a problem that the Thanksgiving holiday presents.) While our image of the city has gotten larger, our sensitivity to monuments has increased. This image has emerged from broad, open natural spaces, dotted with manmade artifacts. Wooster Square Park and the New Haven Green are now characteristic places which refer to the past.

Because of the lack of an appropriate monument to correspond with Thanksgiving, the Wooster Square Historic District will become our object of analysis. Aside from my having established architecture as appropriate to the study of monuments, one may still be able to recall that from the first monument I selected that this object also allowed this inclusion. The houses of Wooster Square will be the object of our scrutiny at this time. In examining Elizabeth Brown's guide to architecture in New Haven, it becomes clear that these houses continue to be identified by the names of their owners. The survival of these buildings and their continued use as dwellings, make them monuments for living. Lacking a monument more appropriate to the traditional holiday theme of feasting and agricultural plenty, the harvesting of another basic need, shelter, can provide a thematic correspondence. These domestic monuments permit a counterpoint to the memorials in the park. They are monuments to survival and deliverance.

Symbols: The Concentration of Meaning

The final monuments to be studied during the winter solstice and holiday season are to be found again on the New Haven Green. They are temporary monuments that have traditionally appeared on the Green in the past, the Christmas evergreen and the menorah. They exhibit a conventional mode of conveying meaning. While their physical presence is temporary, as symbols they "possess a unique concreteness and permanence" of meaning. These symbols display the unique capability of evoking similar responses from people over time. A return to precise description can aid students in understanding the permanent, physical, concrete nature of these recurrent artifacts, rather than as temporary event symbols.

The presence of these monuments alters the character of the Green. They concentrate the essence of the Green as a partially empty center, receptive to the expression of human values and beliefs, and to people's most speculative thoughts. As symbols of birth, hope and light they concentrate our attention, not on the darkness and sparseness of winter, but on celebration and cyclical renewal. It is the season for children; the Green shares in this excitement. It welcomes this new feeling, and manifests it in a more secular symbol; The carousel gives substance to this renewal.

Dreaming New Haven II: Subjective Expression

During the winter months, when the weather may dictate remaining indoors, energy and information can be concentrated on a design project. There is once again no monument that is clearly appropriate to this time. This absence exposes a definite need. There is, paradoxically, a holiday that commemorates the life of Martin Luther King. A monument to him has yet to achieve permanent objective expression.

Designing a monument which provides expression of the man and his ideas may be structured many ways. The monument must achieve in its selection of site, choice of materials, and expressive form an expression of his ideals. These are manifest in his agency in the establishment of equal rights and economic opportunity for black people, in the unity of all people, and in the cause of international and universal peace. It must be a monument of the future to the future.

This project is a way of evaluating and applying the analytical and expressive skills that students have accumulated. In it they pass from observers and analysts of monuments to creators of them. From their exposure to public monuments and by extension through their speculation, students have discovered that monuments are not only devoted to men and their actions, but also to the beliefs and values that their lives characterized. They have learned of risk, leadership, discovery and sacrifice in their descriptions of sculptural monuments. They have been exposed to the possibilities of architectural solutions. They have witnessed the expression of monuments in a variety of forms. The product of a methodology now focuses on creation.

Conclusion: A Note On the Title

A touchstone was originally a hard black stone used to test the quality of precious metals by comparing the mark they left on the stone with one left by a standard alloy. This material and instrumental application has come to mean a standard or criterion. In extending this analogy by a further abstraction, I would suggest that this investigation of public monuments has sought to establish criteria for describing, understanding, and evaluating these artifacts. The standard alloy has been the methodology of object analysis employed herein. It has sought a precise material and objective base from which one can derive values and beliefs.

By rubbing ourselves against these monuments and by comparison with the discipline of the methodology, a deeper understanding of artifacts, and by extension ourselves, as potential makers of things, has been sought.

List of Monuments and Sites and Corresponding Holidays

<i>Monument</i>	<i>Site</i>	<i>Holiday</i>
Wooster Marker	Wooster Square Park	Columbus or Discovery

Columbus Statue	" " "	Day
World War II	Wooster Square Park	Veterans'
Soldiers' Memorial		Day
World War I	New Haven Green	None
Soldiers' Memorial		
Public Library	" " "	"
Courthouse	" " "	"
Old City Hall	" " "	"
Houses in	Wooster Square	Thanksgiving
Neighborhood	Historic District	
Christmas Tree	New Haven Green	Winter Solstice
Menorah	" " "	" "
Carousel	" " "	" "
Design Project	Classroom Activity	Martin Luther King Day

Suggested List of Readings for Holiday Observance

These readings are to be conducted during or after the site visits.

Discovery Day: Selections from Washington Irving's *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* , Works, Vol. III, G.P. Putnam, New York, 1857.

Veterans Day: Photographs and writings from *Eugene Smith* , Aperture Monograph.

First New Haven Green Visit: Selection from Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame of Paris* , description of the cathedral, Penguin Classic.

Thanksgiving: Selection not made to date. Possibilities: selections from *The Architecture of Country Houses*, by A.J. Downing, Dover Books, New York, 1969. A visit to the Yale University Library Manuscript Room to view Austin Drawings may be an alternative. These may need to be presented in a slide format due to limited access to drawings because of their fragility.

Winter Solstice: Selection from Doris Lessing's *Re: Colonized Planet 5* , pp. 163-170 on the Festival of the Child, Vintage Books, New York, 1981.

Martin Luther King Day: King's *I Have a Dream* , in Jaffe, Harold and Tyell, John, *The American Experience* , Harper and Row, New York, 1970.

I am also searching for a recording of this speech as well as for a source for his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance address.

Description of Design Project:

- I. Students will be asked to locate monuments in their neighborhoods and to sketch them. Students will also be shown slides of two modern monuments, the Vietnam Memorial and the Holocaust Monument in Edgewood Park. If it is possible they will be asked to visit the Holocaust Monument by themselves. We will also look at and read the article in *National Geographic* , Vol. 167, No. 5, May 1985 on the Vietnam Memorial.
- II. Students will select and photograph a site for the monument. Photographs should be taken from at least four viewing positions.
- III. Discussion of ideas and themes:
 - A. Equal Rights and Economic Opportunity for Black people;
 - B. Unity of people of all races, creeds, nationality, and color;
 - C. The cause of international peace;
 - D. Open discussion of other themes and abstractions.
- IV. Drawing and sketching ideas including the exploration of media for doing this; charcoal, pencil, pastels, and paint. If student desires it, he should be given all opportunity to design initially from threedimensional models. The choice of materials for the actual monument should be discussed and always kept in mind. All modes of expressive forms should be encouraged, i.e., geometric, natural, and figurative—solutions may be either sculptural, architectural, or landscape. A useful resource is Thomas Creighton's *The Architecture of Monuments* , which is about the design of the Roosevelt Monument competition entries. It is probably a good idea to ask students to execute two designs in different expressive modes.
- V. Critique and review of drawings.
- VI. Model making. The choice of materials should be selected with the actual materials of the monument in mind.
- VII. Photograph and draw from the model.
- VII. A composite drawing, photograph, or painting of the model and site will be made by the students. Explore collage possibilities.

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